Miss Wedgwood is notably at home in dealing with political and fiscal questions and also those relating to foreign policy. She is inclined to underestimate class interests and group solidarity, but in general her account of the development of the situation is as convincing as it is readable. She has at her command a smooth resilient prose. The problem of shifting the focus of interest between London, Scotland and Ireland is always difficult to solve, but the author presents a lucid narrative. Wales hardly enters into the picture and such comments as are made are over-generalized. The central section of the book is entitled 'The Challenge from Scotland' and full weight is given to the importance of the Scottish action in precipitating the general conflict. The account of Irish affairs shows a clear sympathy for Strafford and Ormonde. Miss Wedgwood makes a just and penetrating comment in regard to the King's sacrifice of his great minister. 'The tragedy', she writes on page 427, 'was for Charles a moral one; he never fully realized the enormity of the political mistake, or the cruelty of the personal betrayal. He had valued Strafford as a servant but never loved him as a friend, and he had not adequately understood the significance of Strafford's fate in the conflict between him and his parliament.'

It is clear that the growth of the Puritan opposition is reserved for fuller treatment in the next volume. This will need care, for the author shows little natural sympathy for that religious enthusiasm which was to prove so great a sustaining force for many of those who came to oppose their sovereign in the Civil Wars. It is noticeable that she is very sharp in her assessment of Wariston. On the other hand the approach to Anglicans and Catholics is understanding.

The whole fine narrative is a great achievement and in the end the mind returns to the delightful opening chapter and to the careful selection of small detail. An immense work has gone into this book. It is instinct with a scholarly detachment. We are given a perfect picture of the King's surroundings and the most valuable account that has yet been written of Charles I himself.

DAVID MATHEW

SOVIET RUSSIA. An Introduction. By Jacob Miller, Lecturer in Soviet Social and Economic Institutions, University of Glasgow. (Hutchinson's University Library; 8s.)

Nowadays any book on Russia is apt to excite strong emotions in the writer, the reader, or both. As befits a University Lecturer, Mr Miller apparently seeks to avoid this, but seems to do so by placing the most favourable intepretation on the system in force in the U.S.S.R. and certain consequential events. In fact, the impression is inescapable that, in thus leaning over backward, he has sometimes lost his balance.

For example, to say that 'the Russian people for the most part are not politicians', is one thing, mercifully true of countries other than the U.S.S.R.; but then to add, 'but' [the Russian people] 'use the politicians that lie to hand for doing the job that needs to be done, just as we do', is a different thing altogether, arousing astonishment, query and doubt.

Mr Miller usefully draws frequent attention to the past history of Russia, which we, with a different heritage, are apt to forget. From this he infers that Russians are accustomed to—and are perhaps even psychologically attracted to—absolute autocracy, a police-state system, the use of religion by an autocrat as a footstool to support his policies and to actions by the ruling power which, in our so-called democracies, would today provoke immediate revolution, were it conceivable that such methods should be attempted among us. He observes that whereas we have learnt how 'various parts of society' may 'go on living together, often in mutual disapproval', the Russian temperament is such that 'mutual disapproval, if it is strong enough, means that different groups do not go on living together: one or the other is condemned to death'. Mr Miller fails to draw from this assertion any conclusion.

It is a misfortune that, presumably in his love for the Russian peoples, Mr Miller has found himself obliged to employ at times language and arguments reminiscent of the 'fellow-traveller'. To dismiss, with the death of Beria, the M.V.D. as a passing phenomenon for which the Soviet rulers were hardly responsible, may temporarily please Mr Krushchev, but other inferences, such as the laudation of Stalin, may not make Mr Malenkov happy.

DESMOND MORTON

INTRODUCTORY PAPERS ON DANTE. By Dorothy L. Sayers. (Methuen; 21s.)

The first thing to say about this book is that it fairly throbs with life; and the second is that despite some inaccuracies and much exaggeration—a by-product of liveliness—it is a very good introduction to some aspects of the *Divine Comedy*, and in particular to its theological structure, and, in a lesser degree, to its function as expressing the poet's personality. Under the latter head I include Miss Sayer's stress on Dante's humour, to which she devotes a fairly convincing chapter (though her translation of the *Inferno* had put one on one's guard), and also her stress on the 'popular' character of the great poem. This point Miss Sayers delights to emphasize: 'Dante wrote for the common man and woman', and again, with more precision: 'Dante is a difficult poet, in the sense that he deals with a great subject . . . but he is not a wilfully