

REVIEWS

THE KING'S PEACE 1637-1641. By C. V. Wedgwood. (Collins; 25s.)

In this volume Miss Wedgwood has given us the first section of her history of the years which covered the Civil Wars and the brief Republican experiment. The series is fitly called 'The Great Rebellion' and, indeed, it has something of the scope of Clarendon. This study of the last period of peace is balanced and scholarly with that just evaluation of competing factors that marked the author's masterly survey *The Thirty Years War*. The long first chapter is entitled 'Court and Country' and contains an excellent introductory survey. Its writing has that attractive ease to which Miss Wedgwood has accustomed us. The character sketches of the leading figures are clearly the result of much consideration and research, the best being, perhaps, the remarkable analysis of the King's character. The author delineates with care the limits of his experience and knowledge. One comment is particularly revealing and wholly novel. 'The King', she writes on pages 152-3, 'was serious-minded, but he was not industrious. His gravity of manner, and the solemn character of many of his pleasures, have done much to conceal the disarmingly simple truth that he was lazy in all matters of government. His casual attitude to his council, his unwillingness to listen to disturbing information, his hunting three or four times a week, the long hours spent in pursuit or enjoyment of works of art, or in theological discussion—all tell the same tale: he was not interested in practical administration.'

In this connection Miss Wedgwood is particularly valuable on the fiscal side. She sets in due proportion the whole question of the Crown revenue and of the measures taken to strengthen it. Her account of the soap monopoly is lucid, and she makes the interesting point that by restricting the use of whale oil for soap the King injured the Arctic fishery interests of the Scots. Attention is drawn to the Earl of Stirling's mismanagement of the copper coinage as a contributory factor in the development of the Scottish troubles.

Throughout the book the character sketches are detailed and for the most part just. Attention should be drawn to those of Pym and Hamilton. The former contains all that we know or are ever likely to discover about the Parliamentary leader in his personal relations. It ties up with a clear account of the Providence Company and its role. The account of Hamilton represents a more difficult achievement. The author gives us the most convincing account of Hamilton that has yet appeared, an account all the more useful as a result of its note of hesitation. It is most difficult to penetrate the character of Charles I's commissioner in Scotland.

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 interpretation 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.