

SCOTLAND UNDER CHARLES I. By David Mathew. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 30s.)

This is the best book which Dr Mathew has so far given us. He presents the Scotland of Charles I in a balanced survey, region by region, in all its active complexity. Essentially it was still the semi-feudal kingdom which James VI had managed with understanding, and so ultimately with success. Dr Mathew is particularly successful in his picture of the different facets of Scottish Calvinism. At last the ordinary reader in England is provided with something which is neither parody nor panegyric; and he can watch the development of this assured and, in many ways, noble tradition with its piety, its learning and its links with Renaissance France, as it faces the Anglican monarchy and Dr Laud. He can begin to appreciate, too, the complex and subtle pattern of the family groupings among the magnates and the gentry: it all comes to life, vigorous and quite absorbingly interesting.

Dr Matthew has his own method of presenting his subjects, a method which is as remote from the dehydrated analysis of the historical technologist as it is from the plush and glitters of the popularizers. The reader is kept at full stretch. He must play his part with the author and with the subject; he is given the minimum of illustration and comment which is necessary to carry him forward; and he must be ready to follow the clues and to take the illusions. It is waste of time to attempt to read the book in a hurry. For here is an author with a profound respect for, and a quiet delight in, the complex texture of the society which he is describing. The insistence that the reader shall think as well as read, and a humour which illuminates and never crackles, are a combination for which one is profoundly grateful.

T. CHARLES EDWARDS

KING JAMES VI AND I. By David Harris Willson. (Jonathan Cape; 30s.)

A well-known and well-informed though somewhat flippant account of English history sums up England's first Scottish king succinctly: 'James I', the authors say, 'slobbered at the mouth and had favourites: he was thus a Bad King'. This, one must admit, is a facile summing-up of a man who was a king for nearly sixty years. 'It is surprising', says the blurb, 'that there has hitherto been no adequate biography of James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England.' But is it so surprising? He was not exactly a nice man, not *sympathique*. The Scottish nation has no particular reason to remember him with pride: nor was he specially memorable for England. Indeed, for some people the most interesting feature about James may well be that he was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, and father of Charles I, both victims of an English headsman's axe.