

STRONG POISON, by Dorothy L. Sayers. *Gollancz.* 7s. 6d.

MRS. SAYERS has taken to heart the dictum of Alexandre Dumas, who laid it down of the relationship between the novelist and his public that, if only the writer contrives to be plausible in his opening, the reader will swallow anything thereafter. Plausibility in an author means hard work, and Mrs. Sayers is immensely painstaking. The judge's summing-up, for instance, with which she opens *Strong Poison*, her latest murder story, is convincingly authentic, as is, indeed, the whole atmosphere of the trial. It has always seemed to me that Mrs. Sayers is a very considerable artist. Her effects are brilliantly secured. She believes in her characters, and so has no difficulty in infusing her readers with her belief. Her humanity is broad and unflinching; her sense of humour is constant and delightful.

Lord Peter Wimsey, the sleuth of this, as of others of Mrs. Sayers' tales, is, of course, a preposterous character who is permitted by all kinds of State authority, such as prison officials and Scotland Yard, to behave in a preposterous way. But we do not mind about that. Mrs. Sayers puts him over simply because she reveals herself as being thoroughly at home in establishing every detail of his background. Whether she is reproducing the talk of the servants' hall, depicting a provincial villa crammed with the accumulated possessions of a senile mid-Victorian demi-mondaine, or describing a test for arsenic, her touch is sure and convincing. Mrs. Sayers' wide circle of admirers may find *Strong Poison* a trifle weak for so promising a title. But they will be carried along in the same old way. For she is definitely one of the small band of crime authors who never lets the reader down through hasty or indifferent work.

VALENTINE WILLIAMS.

ARABIA, by H. St. J. B. Philby. *Benn.* 18s.

ARABIAN PEAK AND DESERT, by Ameen Rihani. *Constable.* 15s.

BOTH these books derive in essence from the same motive—the respective authors' hopes of an Arab renaissance. Both Mr. Philby, an Englishman who for more than a dozen years has been trying, officially and unofficially, to impress upon Great Britain the real inwardness of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia (he himself turned Wahhabi but a few weeks ago), and Mr. Ameen Rihani, a Lebanese Christian who has lived most of his life in America, passionately desire the unity of the Arab race. But whereas Mr. Philby has staked all on the predominance, in any such scheme, of King Ibn Saud, now ruler of lands stretching from Persian Gulf to Red Sea, Mr. Rihani has sought light in turn from almost all the rulers of Arabia—it is, indeed, only of the Yaman, of a journey from Aden to Sana and from Sana to Hudaida, on the Red Sea, that he writes in this book.

Mr. Philby has undoubtedly put the world under an obligation for his assiduous exposition of the Wahhabis, that unyielding folk who, under the impulse of an alliance between Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, the religious seer, and the Saud family of Dariya, in Central Arabia, carved out an Empire in Arabia in the eighteenth century, overran the Hijaz and parts of Iraq in the early nineteenth century, were subdued by the Egyptian armies under Muhammad Ali and his generals in the first half of last century, were kept out of the limelight in the latter half of last century by the Rashid dynasty (familiar to readers of Doughty), and, only at the beginning of the present century, re-emerged, under the guidance of a superman, the present ruler of Hijaz and Najd, to glory and dominance in the Arabian Peninsula. It is a remarkable tale, to