

THE popularity of travel books seems, somehow, to have decreased. Just why this is, I don't know. Perhaps, now that the lean war years are vanishing, we are again able to travel almost as much as we like and therefore have no need of reading of far places. But I for one still read diaries of roaming adventurers with the same old thrill. It is, I fancy, a thrill largely of the poor old emotion, envy. "Prisoners of the Red Desert" (Dutton) is a story of petty sufferings that make a tragic whole. Its author, R. S. Gwatkin-Williams, tells of a submarine sinking in the East, prison days in the desert, escape, recapture, and ultimate rescue. A story of heroism and of personalities. It is not so good a book as "Beasts, Men and Gods" by a long, long way; but it has something of the same quality, the Defoe quality, the absolute impression of true narrative through the amassing of great detail. Captain Gwatkin-Williams, of the British Navy, is occasionally exceedingly childlike in his style. At other times, he writes with a fair amount of vividness. Knowing the present interest in cook books, I cannot refrain from giving you the following recipe quoted by the Captain:

Take as many Libyan (lily-white) snails as may be required and submerge them in water which has been brought to the boil, taking care in the meanwhile that the snails have not escaped from their shells. Boil brilliantly for two minutes, when the snails will come out of the shells of their own accord. Throw away shells and boil snails for ten minutes. If hard-boiled snail is required much less time is needed. Serve according to what garnish is available. If no plates, saucepan should be passed around.

As for Rose Wilder Lane's "Peaks of Shala" (Harper), this expert journalist here gives a strenuous, color-

ful, and vivid picture of Albania. She has an extraordinary faculty for dramatizing her slightest incident. Her travel narrative is stirring. I am convinced that there is no corner of the world so dusty that Mrs. Lane could not find romance there. Witness the following (I may say that she has returned without Lulash):

"Well", said Perolli, "Lulash would like to have an American wife. I don't mean he put it to me so crudely as that. He didn't actually put it to me at all, in fact. But I know that he will give twenty thousand kronen for you, and you can stay here and make over the whole life of Shala, if you like."

"But why me? Why not Frances, or Alex?"

"Because you are all a long way past marrying age, in Albania, and their hair is

long, so naturally these people think they are already married. But your hair is short, so they think you are a sworn virgin. In these mountains, when a girl is old enough to marry and absolutely refuses to marry the man to whom she has been promised, she may escape the marriage by swearing before the chiefs of the two tribes an oath of life-long virginity, and she cuts her hair, and takes a man's place in the tribe. Naturally, when they see you, at your age, with short hair, they think that is what you did. If you were an Albanian no one would dream of marrying you, for the man to whom your parents gave you would have to kill you to clear his honor, and all the chiefs before whom you had sworn would be bound in honor to see that your husband was killed. But America is a long way off; that man and the chiefs would hardly come so far after you, especially as your customs are so different. Besides, I think Lulash would take the chance, anyhow. He really very much wants a woman to help him with the people, and he will not marry a mountain woman."