

# Froggies And Larkins

A BREATH OF FRENCH AIR. By H. E. Bates. 209 pp. Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$3.75.

By AILEEN PIPPETT

**“W**HAT larks!” says Joe Gargery to Pip in “Great Expectations,” and the heart dances to the Dickens tune. H. E. Bates’ Pop Larkin comes in to breakfast after giving swill to the pigs, finds Ma feeding baby Oscar (her seventh), and oh, the difference to me!

The Larkin family delighted many readers of “The Darling Buds of May”—and this sequel is at first disarmingly simple. The summer is rainy and cold, so the family abandons its slatternly English abode to seek sunshine and warmth across the Channel. As might be expected, they arrive at a decrepit hotel on the Breton coast in a howling gale. French cooking alarms them; the sanitary arrangements shock them; their knowledge of French is sketchy; furniture collapses under Ma’s bulk, and so on. Later, when the sun (and the bikinis) reappear the Larkins find everything “perfick.” Their hilarious month among the “Froggies” passes all too quickly.

Meanwhile, one wonders, what has been going on at home on the farm? Can Pop (or anyone) get rich by selling army surplus pickled cucumbers to French fishermen? What actually occurred in the sand dunes between Pop and Angela Snow, that brassy beauty from the previous volume? What about her sister Iris, wading fully dressed into the moonlit ocean, pursued by an amorous chef?

Of course it is foolish to take farce seriously. If I find this recital of inept gambolings and pseudo-lasciviousness deplorable, it is because I remember the time when “Fair Stood the Wind for France,” when “The Jacaranda Tree” perfumed the air, when the name of H. E. Bates stood for short stories of rural England that were alive with poignant truth. Please, Mr. Bates, please let it be fresh air next time.

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*Mrs. Pippett is an English biographer and essayist now living in the United States.*



H. E. Bates.