

THE PILOT'S WOOING

FAIR STOOD THE WIND FOR FRANCE. By H. E. BATES.
Michael Joseph. 9s. 6d.

Mr. Bates's new novel follows a frankly popular, almost too frankly popular, design. It is about the pilot of a R.A.F. bomber which crashed in occupied France in the summer of 1942 and his love affair with a French girl. There are nice things in the novel, as was only to be expected, but they are fewer and altogether less individual in stamp than might have been hoped for. Mr. Bates has always been happier with the short-story form than with the full-length novel, but the extended short story which he has given us on this occasion is disappointingly close to the magazine variety.

The tale is simplicity itself. Over the French Alps, after a night raid on an Italian target, the Wellington's air-screw breaks, and the pilot, a pleasant young man named Franklin, manages to crash-land in desolate, marshy country. He injures an arm badly in doing so; the crew of four sergeants are unhurt. At the second attempt shelter is found in a disused mill occupied by a girl, her father and grandmother. It is the girl—calm, trustful and soberly practical—who takes charge of everything. Franklin's wound has to be stitched by a doctor in the town near by, the sergeants have to go into hiding until forged papers can be procured for them. They go off in pairs after a few days, but Franklin's arm gets worse and has eventually to be amputated, and all the time he is falling more and more deeply in love with Françoise. She remains a misty figure, invincibly tranquil and perhaps to be understood as an embodiment of resurgent French faith and hope. Mr. Bates suggests now and then some sort of psychology of atonement in the attitude of the French characters towards the English, but his chief concern is with the progress of a conventional love story and, later, with the excitements of escape.

The whole thing is readable enough, sometimes more than readable. There are neat sketches of some of the minor figures in the tale, and the small landscape pictures that he manages as a rule with charming intimacy are not absent. But Mr. Bates, if one may say so, appears to have taken less trouble than usual with them. He is very fond here of descriptive similes that are merely literary or extravagant—an open eye like a black cherry, pear branches that swing like ropes of solid yellow bells, and so on. In short, although

his popular touch is probably well calculated, this is not a novel that adds to Mr. Bates's reputation.

ALSO THE HILLS

By FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES
Eyre and Spottiswoode 12s. 6d.

This story (in the main of New England farm life but resolutely topical so that it includes German spies, plots and plans and a glimpse of the Americans in Africa, as well as sin and society in Washington) is told with great fluency and a profusion of incidents which will amply satisfy the not too exacting reader. It is very long and very sentimental. There is not a character in it who cannot poetize at a moment's notice about the landscape, American ideals, motherhood, flowers and tolerance after the war, either in long speeches (listened to with great attention by others waiting for their turn) or in long letters. However, the actions of the Farman family and their friends are sometimes less sentimental than their torrential speeches, and Mrs. Keyes skilfully manages a plot that abounds in happy coincidence.

Daniel and Serena Farman, farmer and milk roundswoman, are a simple pair to have produced Jenness, Judith and Jerome, a turbulent trio perhaps named too fancifully for their own good. Jenness, too beautiful for anybody's peace of mind, is a congressman's private secretary in Washington; overfond of fine feathers, rich food and elegant apartments, she gets involved in Nazi intrigues and, on the brink of going to gaol, commits suicide. Very little regret is expressed by anyone, but on Decoration Day her family hasten to adorn her grave with flowers. Judith, a trained nurse, is harsh with her parents and ruthless with her young man, but in North Africa she atones for her bad behaviour by saving a soldier's life and blowing herself up instead with a "fancy bomb" concealed in a cluster of tangerine oranges which the soldier was about to accept from an Arab. She is not killed but loses her looks and her pride and comes home, by air, to marry a war reporter. Jerome marries and secures the Farman succession before being sent abroad to his death, after winning the Purple Heart. His wife, Alis, French and from Louisiana, hard-headed and Catholic but so tactful that she fits into New England life and improves it for everyone, is the most charming person in this long novel.