

France Underground



H. E. Bates.

FAIR STOOD THE WIND FOR FRANCE. By H. E. Bates. 270 pp. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. An Atlantic Monthly Press Book. \$2.50.

By FOWLER HILL

THERE has been a plethora of stuff written, mostly for the screen, about English aviators who have been forced to land by plane or parachute in France. Invariably, no matter where one of these intrepid fellows descends, he is immediately welcomed by a committee of the underground, which meets alternate Thursday nights behind the old stone barn.

The author of this book, however, is H. E. Bates, who for the last three years has served with the RAF. What he has to say about the French people—of their mode of life in a conquered land—has a plausibility that suggests a closer view of the real facts.

John Franklin, an RAF pilot, and four of his crew sergeants are forced to land their Wellington bomber in a rural stretch of France in occupied territory. A peasant family, innocent of any visible or admitted connection with the underground, harbors them and arranges their escape to Spain.

The months Franklin stays in hiding while the family provides him with badly needed medical attention are dangerous for all concerned. But the shadow of this danger does not all at once disrupt the pattern of their lives.

The love-making, the wine-drinking and the laughter continue even while these naturally friendly people plot with their neighbors to resist the oppressors. Under everyday conditions of occupation this resistance is usually passive, but when the opportunity arrives, as it did with the landing of the bomber, resistance becomes active. In such German occupied territory the French are so ashamed of their betrayal at Vichy that some of them are eager to die in atonement to save the honor of their country.

THE escape route to Spain through unoccupied France affords a shameful contrast. On this road one has many enemies but few, if any, friends. Here the French gendarmes are worse than the Nazi soldiers in the occupied zones. The gendarmes and public officials go about serving the interests of the Nazis and no one resists them. The people on the street are hungrier and more miserable than the peasants in the occupied country. But what is worse, they are a broken people. They have lost the will to resist. They have become cowardly and thieving.

But hope is held out for them as the book ends. German troops move into the hitherto unoccupied zones. We know that German conquest here, as everywhere, will recreate the will to resist and then all of France will be united and ready to strike on Invasion Day.