

**The Darling Buds of May.** H. E. Bates.  
*Michael Joseph, 12/6*

This novelette is more readable and less whimsical than it sounds. The Larkins are a fun-loving, fruit-picking, general-dealing family. Mr. Bates can evoke their overwhelming meals as vividly as he can evoke the English countryside in high summer. Occasionally his characters show queasiness; but that is soon put right with another bumper. When a man from the Inland Revenue calls on them to investigate their tax-dodging they fill him up, make him take a holiday fruit-picking with them and marry him off to their ripest daughter. This, apart from a gymkhana followed by a lush party, is all that happens.

Mr. Bates seems uncertain whether the jolly, generous, extravagant Larkins are admirable or whether they are spivs who get away with it and thus force up the taxes that the ordinary man has to pay. Sometimes the dream of plenty turns to a persecuted taxpayer's nightmare. My favourite sentence is "Pass me the tomato ketchup. I've got a bit of iced bun to finish up."

R. G. G. P.