

# Rising sap

**H. E. BATES:**  
**The Song of the Wren**  
168pp. Michael Joseph. £1.90.

Mr Bates's favourite form, the novella, is represented in this collection by three stories: "The Dam," "The Man Who Loved Squirrels," and "The Tiger Moth." "The Man Who Loved Squirrels" is the longest and most successful. It is set, though imprecisely in the 1920s, and is about one of those inarticulate, slow-to-be-aroused rustics who can't long, you think, have stopped wearing a snook and whom Mr Bates presents with such sympathy and exactness.

The explosive mixture that always lies somewhere deep down in these slow giants of his is subtly and gradually limited at. Spile Jackson is a woodlander who cuts and trims fence-poles for a living, and is taken

advantage of by two women: his crabby old mother and an unscrupulously acquisitive slut. When Spile does finally erupt into the violence he has for so long been working up to, this violence takes a form which the reader momentarily finds unexpected, yet exactly right too once he has got over the shock of it.

The other two long stories, one about a mother-daughter hatred, the other an anti-climactic tale of wartime adultery, are done with style and assurance, but haven't quite the bite of the main piece.

To open and close the muster Miss Shuttleworth appears. She is one of the products of Mr Bates's jokey vein, and promises to be a great improvement on his earlier, quite deplorable Larkins. Her conversations and potations with a visiting vicar round off the book on a note of unforced cheerfulness and good sense.