

From the apocalyptic idyll to the *parvenu* paradise of Mr Bates's Larkin family. Here the pleasures of fatness accompany the panache of owning a Rolls car. Pop Larkin manages to foist a white elephant of a country estate on to Jerebohm the broker and, before long, is shooting J's pheasant's and fumbling after Mrs J's plumper parts. Suing ensues, but Pop the sybaritic Michelin man conducts his own defence perfectly. Mr Bates, sketching out the old bucolic vulgarities – peanut pâté and manure, promiscuity and thick gravy, Schiaparelli bath oil and the blue-tiled outdoor swimming-pool – baffles me. If he's joking, then he's stale; if he's deep, he's too oblique.