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## NEW FICTION

### Mankind Goes Under To the Newts

By H. E. Bates

**War with the Newts.** By Karel Capek.  
(Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d.)

**The Blue Bed.** By Glyn Jones. (Cape.  
7s. 6d.)

**Goodbye to the Lady.** By Ian Rankine.  
(Macmillan. 7s. 6d.)

**Cup of Gold.** By John Steinbeck. (Heine-  
mann. 7s. 6d.)

Anyone who is bored or impatient with the modern world, the ramifications of Governments, the craziness of civilisation, the clash of dictatorships and, among many other things, the modern novel, should not fail to get hold of "THE WAR WITH THE NEWTS." Mr. Capek's book is not a novel—novel though it is in theme, structure, imaginative power and achievement. It is a fantastic satire, bitterly delicious, stinging, funny, merciless, a sort of literary cat-o'-nine-tails by which Mr. Capek takes his crack at the colossal and tragic follies of modern civilisation. It is a fearless and fearful book.

The beginning of the trouble is the discovery, by an old sea captain, of a peculiar and distinct species of newt, a sort of sea salamander, in the South Seas. These newts are about the size of ten-year-old boys and are intelligent enough to open pearl-shells with their two front hands and to emit certain sounds of greeting or warning, such as "ts, ts, ts!" or of emotion such as ogod, ogod, ogod." The news of their discovery spreads rapidly, and in Europe a syndicate, inspired by the sea captain, resolves to exploit these amazing creatures. Soon it is discovered that they can not only emit sounds but repeat sounds—that, like parrots they can be taught to speak. Also, they can work; also, they can breed at an astonishing pace. And suddenly, instead of being curiosities merely, they become vast potential sources of cheap labour.

#### Select Committees

The syndicate, and in time the world in general, begins to exploit them. The prosperity of mankind increases enormously, but so, also, does the intelligence of the newts, who begin to understand the meaning of work, power, explosives, radio, and finally of politics and war. So we get a stage gorgeously set for satire: the newts, now super-intelligent, dictating terms to mankind, mankind referring the terms to "select committees," the newts responding by blowing up whole bits of America, annexing whole chunks of Italy, mankind protesting (beautiful touch) that there has been no official declaration of war, the newts finally triumphing and sweeping mankind back off the earth.

All this, the ultimate situations especially, Mr. Capek has handled with the most adroit skill and pungent mockery. His chosen style is purposely pompous, so that the book reads like some absurd collection of B.B.C. bulletins, scientific papers, encyclopædic burblings, and ministerial statements. But under this rich crust of burlesque the juice is powerfully vitriolic. Make no mistake; like Gulliver, this is, underneath, no book for sucklings. It is directed, with the sure and merciless aim of one of the foremost living European writers, against all the political, social, scientific, international, and cultural tragedy and humbug of our day. It is an immensely funny book, but it is also immensely serious. It will make you laugh. But it will also, I warn you, make you laugh, as it is meant to make you laugh, on the other side of your face.

## Poetical Wales

Mr. Glyn Jones is a new writer: arresting at once, perplexing. His stories in "THE BLUE BED" remind me of tapestries, intricately and sensuously woven; his words are deep-dyed threads, his figures remote and vague and yet not quite unreal. From the first page you perceive here an uncommon talent, prodigal but sure, sensuous but conscious, a man reveling in the luxury of words and yet having something fresh and powerful to declare. These stories are, by conventional standards, less like stories than prose poems. Mr. Jones breaks the rules: huge paragraphs, verbose and meandering pages. Writing exclusively of Wales, he never shows us Wales realistically, with clarity: only a kind of dream country, poignant, tragic, always sensuous. Yet, if you are not conscious of Wales, you are conscious of the voice of an extraordinary writer finding both himself and his way. This is a first book produced out of a first phase, and it is a richly promising achievement.

In "GOODBYE TO THE LADY" you are served with a kind of cocktail novel: a smart book, with much kick in it and many subtle flavours, not least of which is a wicked acidity, an almost Somerset Maugham-dryness, which tickles the vitals. My only doubt about its mode is the, I hope, very reasonable doubt as to how long the mental palate can go on being tickled by its subtle and dry gin-like humours without the offer of some more substantial refreshment. Mr. Rankine's Polish-born Helen is a strangely attractive woman, and in the whole of the first book we see her, cosmopolitan, unconventional, in all her foreign-looking beauty, set up in contrast to a golf-playing, English middle-class family. It is a delicious bit of contrasting portraiture. In the later books, with scenes set variously in Italy, Juan-les-Pins, and Paris, which are much more her natural spheres, her exoticism lacks that very necessary suet-pudding contrast, and she seems to me to tail off a little. Or is it, perhaps, that the salt, the gin, or whatever it is, loses its savour? However it is, I recommend Mr. Rankine's cocktail. Whether you can drink it all with the same enjoyment is another matter.

## History?

I am puzzled, sometimes, as to why novelists should take such infinite pains to reconstruct history. I am still more puzzled as to why they should take such infinite pains to sentimentalise history. If ever a historical figure needed leaving alone in all his original, cruel, bloody colours, it would seem to be Sir Henry Morgan, pirate, buccaneer, killer, the Welsh boy who ran away to sea and set the Spanish Main on fire. Of the innumerable biographies of him which exist, even the most prosaic of them read like roaring fiction. But no, we must have a novel too, and Mr. Steinbeck gives it us in "CUP OF GOLD—a life of Sir Henry Morgan, buccaneer, with occasional references to history." The unkindest cut I can take at this book is to say that the best parts of it are those occasional references to history. The kindest compliment I can pay it is to say that I hope it will fall into the hands of those who prefer their history served, like their turkeys, with trimmings.