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AWAY FROM IT ALL, by Cedric Belfrage. *Gollancz.* 10s. 6d.

Away from it All is the notebook of an escapist, or rather of a converted escapist, an escapist being "a person who looks the facts of life in the back of the neck, or by sheer force of imagination conjures them out of existence, or runs away from them." In addition to having been an escapist, Mr. Belfrage is also a journalist (God help me, I hear him say) and will also, I hope, long before this review appears, be a best seller. He richly deserves that luck.

We have become so accustomed, nowadays, to travellers who travel rough, or in disguise or in thirty-foot boats or, sometimes, in clover, that it is highly refreshing to find a man travelling, except for a crazy bus-ride over desert between Damascus and Baghdad and a still crazier schooner ride between Auckland and the South Seas, by more or less ordinary routes to what have become, thanks to luxury cruises and I suppose to the sport of escapology in general, more or less ordinary places. Mr. Belfrage took a journey such as you or I might take, berthed in an armchair, down the travel columns of a Sunday newspaper, except that Spain is no longer calling—Spain, Palestine, Baghdad, Babylon, Bombay, Poona, Ceylon, Malaya, Bali, Sydney, New Zealand, Fiji, Tahiti, San Francisco. All extras, such as the bridge at Sydney, shades of Somerset Maugham and the breasts at Bali were, of course, thrown in. But what you and I are paying for is not this, but Mr. Belfrage, who proves himself from the very first page to be, in his own way, a first-class writer, witty, forthright, volatile, pungent, an ironist with a touch of sentiment and a damnably hard hitter. Having been paid for some years to cultivate a style in which unwed fornication=misconduct taking place, pregnancy=a certain condition, prostitutes=women of a certain class

and which, generally, had as much relation to style as to knitting socks, Mr. Belfrage rushes out into free air like a boy rushing out of school, eager to be saying what he feels and not, by all the laws of escapology, what he is supposed to feel. The result is that we get an extraordinary vivid, unconventional and at times highly amusing picture of half the world, told in a style in which prostitute does=prostitute and in which a good many other words are afforded the same elementary privilege of being themselves.

But, also, we get something else. Mr. Belfrage, having worked for newspapers, knows the racket from the inside. From him we learn that kind of news which never, for some odd reason, gets into newspapers. Not the nice news, such as murder and suburban rape and misconduct taking place and enticement and nice escapist news in general, but the news that stinks. The news that whereas oranges rotted in Palestine because there were not enough hands to gather them, they rotted in Spain because there were not enough mouths to eat them; the news that in Bombay "70 per cent. of the houses consisted of one room, and 17 per cent. of the working class were housed in one-roomed tenements with up to nine people in a room; that among people so housed the infant mortality was 577 per thousand"; that "natives were privileged in a ten- to twelve-hour day—to earn a stomach full of rice for themselves and families"; and a great deal of other news calculated, in escapist language, to undermine the moral constitution and injure the moral tone. In short, and for a change, some truth. Almost the highest honour, in fact, that I can pay Mr. Belfrage is to say that no nice newspaper would print twenty consecutive unbowdlerized pages of his book. But I will go further and say that his book is great stuff—the most salubrious travel book in years.

H. E. BATES.