

ALONG THE ROAD TO FROME. By Christopher Hollis. (Harrap; 17s. 6d.)

The manner of this book could easily conceal the value of its matter. You read it with the greatest of ease (preferably in an armchair with a pipe), your imagination is pleasantly engaged, your mind is stimulated, you even laugh out loud from time to time, and then when you put it down you're blessed if you can remember what it is about. It is autobiographical, certainly; it is anecdotal—the author is an excellent story-teller. He sounds, in print if not in speech, a quiet man, whose modesty is not assumed for this occasion; genuine humility uses the first person singular as frequently as necessary without embarrassing apologies or circumlocutions. You will find half a dozen I's in any paragraph of this book but you will have to look for them before you are conscious of their presence. The urbanity of the style (though the prose rhythms are not often euphonious) suggests a life of undisturbed calm. It is only after you have taken a second look at all these things and retraced your steps from Eton along the road to Frome that you realize that the religious 'thing' was there all the time, not so much a ghostly finger in the background ready to spring out and point the moral of the story or twist the tail of a heretic, but rather like a steady pulse in the bloodstream driving life on and giving it meaning.

Mr Hollis set out to write a religious book and, despite appearances, has done so. He became a Catholic at the age of twenty-two, but you will be disappointed if you expect a story of dramatic renunciation or dazzling enlightenment. Quite simply here was a 'Society which took a part in the affairs of this world which was different in kind from any other Society and which it was reasonable to believe was of divine origin'. So, since 'Christianity can only be understood from inside', he tried to get in and found, as many do, that it is not all that easy. Eventually, get in he did, and then found that his faith continued to develop after baptism. 'And now, as I look back on them, I find the reasons why I am a Catholic today to be in many respects very different from the reasons for which I became a Catholic more than thirty years ago. I do not think there is anything surprising or shameful in that. There are those who speak of the Catholic Church as if it was a sort of door that clanged upon those who entered into it—as if there was perhaps some story to be told of how the convert came to accept the Church but as if, the Church once accepted, the story was inevitably ended, as if there could in the nature of things be no further development. There could be no greater misunderstanding.'

That is the key to Mr Hollis's book. 'The Church cannot, of its nature, be understood except from within.' Moreover, once inside, the whole of life is more brightly lighted. So, cricket, Parliament and war, as much as Eton, Oxford and Stonyhurst are all part of Mr

Hollis's being a Catholic; and what at first sight seems a loose-knit patchwork of memoirs becomes part of that seamless garment that is the Communion of Saints. 'If thy eye be single thy whole body shall be lightsome.' It is not stretching a point to suggest that this kind of 'ease in Sion' sharpens a man's vision, so that he spots the imperturbable Lord Attlee's hand trembling with emotion as he reads the news that Australia had lost eight wickets for thirty-six, as easily as he spots the truth that 'What is important about Ireland is its religion'. Such a man sits easily to the truth, and when he says harsh things his voice is not strident. Mr Hollis's attitude to Parliament, or rather to the experience of being a member of Parliament, has much in common with Belloc's but he is neither contentious nor fretful. He is convinced of the action of divine grace outside the visible Church, but he can state coolly that it 'makes me always very angry when, from time to time, I hear from Catholic lips sweeping and uncharitable denials of the existence of true Christian feeling or of the love of truth among Anglicans.'

It must be emphasized, though, that Mr Hollis is not a flat or dull writer; he is immensely lively, not only in his anecdotes but in his thought and discussion because all his senses are alert. We must not be lulled by his charm and urbanity into overlooking the hard core of this book or blinded to the faith that shines through it all.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES. By J. N. D. Kelly. (A. & C. Black; 30s.)

A study of the early development of Christian doctrine forms a part—sometimes an important part—of all theological curricula. Dr Kelly has now written a book which will certainly supersede the only English text-book which has been available for such a course, the late J. F. Bethune-Baker's *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*. His aim has been to cover much the same ground as Bethune-Baker's. His treatment reflects a gulf between the two scholars which goes deeper than the half-century or so which separates the two books. The earlier book arose in a theological climate in which it was fashionable to interpret the thought of the Fathers in terms of concepts and distinctions invented for the purposes of scholarly—and sometimes not-so-scholarly—debate. Labels such as 'modalist', 'economic trinitarian', 'binitarian'—to take what is no more than a random sample—were often almost unquestioningly accepted, and lengthy discussions devoted to answering questions about which category a particular theologian's work fell in. In Dr Kelly's book such concepts and distinctions hardly figure at all; and when they do it is very often in order that their inadequacy may appear. His discussion is always very much closer to the language and the intellectual world of the Fathers themselves; and much of his book consists of well-chosen quotations to illustrate their teaching.