

APPROACH TO PRAYER. By Dom Hubert van Zeller. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

Seven aphoristic essays on prayer develop more themes than the mere approach to prayer. The principle of prayer, the practice, the difficulty, the effects, the 'protections', come up for consideration. Wise counsels and enlightening reflections, in Fr van Zeller's usual antithetical style, abound on almost every page. In well-chosen words he says throughout the book that if you are not practising the virtues you do not pray well and if you are you can hardly help praying well—and there is concomitant variation between praying and living. The statement that 'there is no essential difference between moral life and prayer life' (p. 71) sums it up.

The other main theme is the all-pervading presence of God. Recognition of this is 'the beginning of prayer, the first condition of sanctification. All that comes after is yielding to precisely this.' (p. 67.)

It is interesting to see that he thinks that 'natural mysticism can get no nearer to God than the recognition of his power as Creator' (p. 33). Is 'natural mysticism' not a contradiction in terms? On page 62 one might suggest that the sentence 'The soul has become too experienced' might be improved by the addition of 'in going through the acts' or some similar phrase.

It is a book to read slowly and supplies many points for meditation, but it is so well written that one inevitably goes on to the next chapter, leaving the piquant, disturbing, challenging, stimulating discoveries to a second reading. In this it may be contrasted with the author's *Praying While You Work*, of which a delightful pocket edition has been brought out by Burns and Oates.

G. M. CORR, O.S.M.

MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS. By Sister M. Bertrand Degnan. (Brown and Nolan Ltd, Dublin; 25s.)

A biography is usually of interest either for the personality of the person concerned or for the work done by that person. The life-story of Catherine McAuley is one which may appeal to all who have heard Christ's words, 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat; . . . thirsty and you gave me to drink', for it is the story of one whose life was guided by those very words. At the beginning of the nineteenth century she and a band of ladies founded in Dublin an institution to perform those corporal works of mercy commended by God. The institution in time became the Congregation of Mercy and this book is written by one of Sr Mary Catherine's daughters in religion. It is written with true filial devotion, after the authoress had spent many years collecting material for it, in a presentable manner, and through it the personality and character of Sr Mary Catherine McAuley is clearly revealed.

MICHAEL PLATTS, O.P.