

**THE PRACTICE OF THE
PRESENCE OF GOD THE
BEST RULE OF A HOLY LIFE**

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The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life by Brother Lawrence

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Brother Lawrence

*The Practice of the Presence of God the
best rule of a Holy Life*

*Being Conversations and Letters of
Nicolas Herman
of Lorraine
(Brother Lawrence)*

Translated from the French



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INTRODUCTION

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—2 Cor. xi. 3.

THE value of this little book is its extreme simplicity. The trouble with most of the religion of the day is its extreme complexity. "Brother Lawrence" was not troubled with any theological difficulties or doctrinal dilemmas. For him these did not exist. His one single aim was to bring about a conscious personal union between himself and God, and he took the shortest cut he could find to accomplish it. The result can best be described in his own words: "If I dare use the expression, I should choose to call this state the bosom of God, for the inexpressible sweetness which I taste and experience there."

What Brother Lawrence did all can do. No theological training nor any especial theological views are needed for the blessed "practice" he recommends. No gorgeous churches, nor stately cathedral, nor elaborate ritual, could either make or mar it. A kitchen and an altar were as one to him; and to pick up a

straw from the ground was as grand a service as to preach to multitudes. "The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

This little book, therefore, seems to me one of the most helpful I know. It fits into the lives of all human beings, let them be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, wise or simple. The woman at her wash-tub, or the stone-breaker on the road, can carry on the "practice" here taught with as much ease and as much assurance of success as the priest at his altar or the missionary in his field of work.

All must feel that anything that brings the religion of Christ within reach of overworked and poverty-stricken humanity, in the midst of its ignorance and its helplessness, is a priceless boon, and this is what Brother Lawrence does. His "practice" requires neither time, nor talents, nor training. At any moment, in the midst of any occupation, under any circumstances, the soul that wants to know God can "practise the presence" and can come to the knowledge. The Lord of hosts *is* with us, the God of Jacob *is* our refuge, let the "seemings" be what they may; and we need but to recognize this as a continual, ever-present fact, and the inexpressible sweetness to which Brother Lawrence attained will become ours.

HANNAH WHITALL SMITH.

LONDON, 1897.

PREFACE

THIS book consists of notes of several conversations had with, and letters written by, Nicholas Herman, of Lorraine, a lowly and unlearned man, who, after having been a footman and soldier, was admitted a Lay brother among the barefooted Carmelites at Paris in 1666, and was afterward known as "Brother Lawrence."

His conversion, which took place when he was about eighteen years old, was the result, under God, of the mere sight in midwinter of a dry and leafless tree, and of the reflections it stirred respecting the change the coming spring would bring. From that time he grew eminently in the knowledge and love of God, endeavoring constantly to walk "*as in His presence.*" No wilderness wanderings seem to have intervened between the Red Sea and the Jordan of his experience. A wholly consecrated man, he lived his Christian life through as a pilgrim, as a steward and not as an owner, and died at the age of eighty, leaving a name which has been as "ointment poured forth."