

Daily Conversation with God,

Exemplified in the
Holy Life Of Armelle Nicolas,

A poor ignorant COUNTRY MAID in France,
commonly known by the Name of The GOOD ARMELLE,
Deceased in Bretagne in the year 1671

Done out of the French By Jeanne de la Natineta

Genes. xvii. I

I am the almighty God, walk before me, and be thou Perfect

Psal. xxv. 15

Mine Eyes are ever towards the Lord.

Acts xvii. 27. 28

He is not far from every one of us.

For in him we Live, and move, and have our being

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Life of ARMELLE NICOLAS, Book II, Chap. xvii. S. 16

GOD has sent me into the world for no other end than to love him; and by his great mercy I have loved him to that degree, that I can love him no longer after the way of mortals. It is time then for me to go to him, that I may love him after the manner of the blessed.

TO THE READER

THE person, whose daily conversation is here described, was not long since a poor simple country maid, and servant to a great family in France. The whole course of her life was very instructive, and a most shining pattern of a true spiritual conversation. The particulars here related are taken out of the 18th chapter of the second period part of her

Life, giving great encouragement to a daily and uninterrupted conversation with God, and walk before him as our omnipresent Lord and Father.

If we knew nothing else of Christianity, nor any other exercise, but this, to spend one day after another in this manner, it would be sufficient. It is very remarkable that this person, who served God with unwearied prayer and watchfulness, was so ignorant that she could neither read nor write, and also a servant constantly employed in business and hard labor. By this we see that the true service of God is spiritual, universal, plain and easy, so that no person can be excused from it by any pretence whatsoever.

Some, who discovered her spiritual disposition, would have her go into a nunnery, where she might be more at leisure to serve God, which she did accordingly. But perceiving her former zeal and love for God begin to abate, she returned to her work as a servant; where-upon she enjoyed the same favor of God, as she had done before.

By this circumstance the Lord taught her and her friends effectually, that piety and religion was not confined to nunneries; and that the outward cloistering up of the body, without withdrawing the heart from the world, would never mortify, though perhaps it might color and hide the inward corruptions of the soul. And, whereas in that party she belonged to, religion is reduced to the too narrow compass of cloisters and nunneries, this might convince them, that the life of grace is of a far larger extent than to be shut up within the narrow pales of certain places; and that neither time nor place can restrain within itself the free and boundless operations of the spirit of God. A heart humbly resigned to the will of God, and walking in his fear, is the temple, wherein the Lord manifests his secrets.

It is not so much the changing of places, or names, or modes and forms, or of any thing without us, as the changing of our will and heart, that will render our service at all acceptable to God. Hence the scripture declares what sort of change is to be wrought in the soul as a translation from darkness to light (Acts xxvi. 18), from death to life, (Eph. ii.5) and from being lost to being found again (Luke xv. 32).

And hence it was, that the person these papers treat of, lost in a manner the sweet enjoyments of a spiritual life when she sought them in cloisters and nunneries; but she recovered them by going back into her former state of life. For, though it was mean and toilsome to the eye of reason, (too apt to judge of things by the art and contrivance of men) yet in that work she enjoyed richer incomes of God's favor than many others in the most retired solitude. This false rule of confining religion to certain places, was too commonly observed in that church which Armelle happened to be a member of.

What is here related of this good Armelle is a passage of her daily intercourse with God by faith and love. How she spent her time from morning to night, in her dressing and outward devotion, in the midst of her business, in eating and drinking, in daily sufferings and temptations, in the evening, and when she went to bed. In short: it shows the manner of her child-like, hearty and confident conversing with God as her only love, her father, and intimate friend; and this at all times, in all places, and upon all occasions, without using any other art and mystery, but that of faith and love.

The design of this short essay, is to excite some able pen or other, to undertake the translation of the whole account of this spiritual maid into English; it appearing already in several languages, for promoting the more substantial points of inward and unsophisticated piety and religion. This is taken from the French edition, printed with a large preface at Cologne in the year 1704, under the title: The School of the Pure Love of

God, Opened for Both the Learned and the Unlearned, in the Marvelous Life of Armelle Nicolas, &c.

The Lord give his grace to all who heartily desire it, so as to always be able to walk before him after such a pious manner as Armelle did, whereof she herself gave the following account to the author of her life.

A Christian's Daily Conversation With God

As soon as I wake As soon as I wake in the morning, she says, I throw myself into the arms of my heavenly love, as a child into the arms of his father. I rise with a design to serve and please him. And if I have time to pray, I fall upon my knees in his holy presence, and speak to him, as if I really saw him with my bodily eyes. I give myself up wholly to him, and desire him to fulfill his whole will in me, and that he would not suffer me that day to do the least thing which might be offensive to him. Then I recommend to him all the prayers, which I shall make that day. In short: I love and praise him as much and as long as my affairs permit; though very often I have hardly so much time as to say the Lord's prayer. But I do not trouble myself about that. For I have God always in my heart, as well when I am about my business, which I do in obedience to his will, as when I retire on purpose to pray to him. This he himself has taught me, that whatever I do out of love to him, is a real prayer.

I dress myself in his presence I dress myself in his presence, and he shows me that his love supplies me with raiment. And when I go about my business, he does not forsake me, nor I him, but he converses with me, and I with him; yea, I am then as much united to him, as when I am at my prayers, set apart on purpose for spiritual recollection. O! How sweet and easy is all labor and toil in such good company! Sometimes I perceive such strength and support in my mind, that nothing is too hard for

me, and I think myself alone able to manage the affairs of the whole family. Nothing but the body is at work, the heart and myself burn with love in the sweet familiarity I entertain with God.

I eat and drink in his presence I eat and drink in his presence, as I do everything else, and it is as if I dipped every bit into the precious blood of my Savior; as if he himself gave me food on purpose to inflame my love, and to engage it all the more to himself. I leave you to judge, what effect this must have upon my soul. Indeed it is impossible for anyone to express it but God himself. As for me, my whole life would never be sufficient to give an account of it

When I am about my business in the day-time, running up and down, till my body begins to be weary, or to repine, or to desire unseasonable rest, being oppressed with anger and uneasiness; my divine love enlightens me immediately and shows me how I ought to suppress those rebellious motions of corrupt nature, and not to nourish them either by word or deed. This love keeps the door of my lips, and watches over my heart, that it may not in the least contribute to such irregular passions, which then are crushed and subdued as soon as they rise.

But if at any time, for want of care, I am surprised with these or the like faults, I cannot be at rest till I have obtained pardon and God is reconciled to me. I lie prostrate before his footstool, confessing all my faults to him, as if he did not know them already; and there I continue till he has forgiven me, renewed his friendship with me, and confirmed it more than before. For so it always happens, through his infinite mercy, that whenever I have committed a fault, it serves only to inflame my heart all the more to return to his divine love. If people persecute me, and by foul and uncharitable censures raise scandals about me, or in any other way afflict me; or if evil spirits attack me with

their crafty and cunning temptations, I immediately run to my heavenly Love, who readily stretches forth his sacred arms to receive me, showing me his heart and wounds open for my security; in which I hide myself as in a strong castle and fortress. And then I am so mightily strengthened, that if the whole army of hell itself, together with every creature, should rise up against me, I fear them no more than a fly, because I am under the protection of the most high God, his love being the hiding-place and safe-guard of my soul.

If God at any time hides his face If God at any time hides his face, as if he would go away from me, I tell him; O! It is no matter, my love, conceal yourself as much as you please, nevertheless I'll serve you; for I know you are my God. And then I stand upon my guard more than ever to be faithful to him, for fear of displeasing my Love. At the same time I perceive the greatness of my misery and poverty, I insist the more upon the merits of our Savior, and resolve to rest content, though it should please him to leave me all the days of my life in such a condition. But he never lets me continue long under these circumstances, and if may venture so to speak: he cannot forbear loving me, any more than I can live without him.

At his return he recompenses the little moment of his absence with so many caresses and endearments, that oftentimes I am not able to bear them, but I am forced to cry out: I can receive no more! Wherefore I desire him to moderate my sensation, or else to let me die under the powerful sense of his gracious presence.

Many times, to bear this the better, I leave everything and retire into a corner to ease myself by giving vent to the tears and praises due to his Majesty, wherewith my heart is overcharged. And this succeeds quite well, because it is not the mere sense of his kindness I long for, but rather HIMSELF ALONE who I desire to enjoy. Although, in the

mean time, one ought to thankfully receive these extraordinary tokens of God's mercy and love if it is his will.

I do not look upon what I have to do, But upon him, for whose sake I do it. If I am persuaded on holidays to be merry in company, I excuse myself. For nothing can be compared to the pleasures of my Love, which are so much the sweeter and greater, for my withdrawing from all company whatsoever. If they wonder, how I can stay always at home alone, I think within myself: O! If you knew the glorious company I have, you would not say that I was alone: for I am never less alone, than when I have no one with me.

After this manner I spend not only working days, but holy days too, being often as much employed in the latter as in the former. But that is no hindrance to me; for, labor and rest, hard work and easy, all things are indifferent to me, because I do not look at what I have to do, but at him, for whose sake I do it. I am so taken up with his love, that I have no time to mind myself, nor anything else but him alone.

Divine Love guards me, and fights for me But if I do anything amiss, or out of season, the same moment I feel a violent pain and sorrow for what I have done, springing from my Love; which also makes me immediately hope for pardon. And, then, thinking of it no more, I go straight forward on my way, turning aside neither to the right hand, nor to the left. Neither do I remember what is past, or to come, but only, that I may love God to the utmost of my power.

I find rest only in the arms of divine Love The night coming on and everyone going to rest, I find rest only in the arms of divine Love. I sleep leaning on his holy breast, like a child on his mother's bosom. I say I go to sleep, but I continue to think of the love and praises of my God till I fall asleep. And then, many times in the night, this

love rouses up all my senses, so that I cannot sleep the greatest part of the night. Instead, I spend the night in the embrace of the lovely grace of God, who never forsakes me, but preserves me, and takes special care of me.

If, in the night, evil spirits torment or surprise me, (which often happens) this divine love guards me, and fights for me. Yea, it gives me grace too, to resist them courageously, as if I were awake. For they seldom continue long to assault me, unless it be in my sleep.

This is the life I have led for these twenty years This is the life I have led for these twenty years past, without perceiving the least change of that love which was poured out into my heart after my sincere conversion to him. Nay, I have observed its daily increase, though every day it seemed impossible to endure any addition to what I already enjoyed. But truly, it is an infinite love, that satisfies and nourishes me, so that every day I have a new hunger, though it seems to me that I can receive no more than what I possess already every moment.

Concerning the manner of her expressions THE author of her life says, concerning the manner of her expressions, that they were always very modest, without any noise or vehemence: her common discourses were always holy and edifying; whereas others too commonly mispend their time in useless conversation and unprofitable talk. If she was in company where they talked of indifferent or evil things, she had the faculty of giving the discussion such an attractive turn, as to bring them off that discussion to a good and useful subject.

For a long while she could bear no other conversation except about God and his holy love. I cannot imagine, she said, how a soul created for heaven can be concerned about the pollution of this world. From that time, if she happened to be in company

where the subject of the discourse was indifferent, either she did not mind it at all, entertaining herself in the mean while with God; or, as soon as she thought it proper, she diverted and changed the discourse; thinking it but lost time to spend it with the trifles of this world.

The news of this world to everyone who had a mind to be acquainted with God, she gave this advice: Be silent, and learn to keep your thoughts together in the center of your heart. For this, she said, is the beginning of our union with God, and by this means the soul forgets earthly things, and raises herself up to the contemplation of heavenly objects. We ought to lose our familiarity with the creatures if we desire to enjoy the conversation with the Creator; a moment of which affords more delight and satisfaction, than all the finest discourses in the world.

SHE declared once, that she discouraged any desire of knowing what did not concern herself. When someone asked her whether she knew a story the entire town was obsessed with, she said, No; and gave God thanks that she knew so little of the news of this world. Neither did she desire to know it. But she knew a great deal of news concerning the love and mercies of God. For this, she said, was the only thing she desired to know, and with which her heart was entirely taken up.

The inward and spiritual life of grace The real experience she had of the inward and spiritual life of grace, and of the manifold operations it was attended with, abundantly appears from the larger account of her life and conversion. To give the reader a taste thereof may suffice for the present:

One time when her mistress was afraid Armelle might become mad by excessive devotion, she forbid her all spiritual exercises, and would not let her even go to church except on the Lord's-day. Armelle, being sensible of the false step her mistress took,

smiled within herself, saying, Truly, I am not mad; for, I have found my beloved, whom I now love with all my heart. I remember a time when I was seeking only God without me, and then I was miserable indeed.

Armelle's mistress, having a sour temper and morose humor, was often ill-natured toward Armelle, but Armelle never complained. Rather, she thanked God that he was pleased to use even this a means of her fuller purification. When her spiritual director himself saw what she suffered in that house, he advised her to quit that place, to which she replied, according to her usual earnestness, Why would you have me flee from the cross which the Lord himself has entailed upon me? No, by no means, I shall never do it, except you absolutely command it. If I should undergo a thousand times as much, I shall never forsake that place, but rather stay till they turn me away by force. To this unexpected answer her spiritual director entirely acquiesced, never prompting her again to quit a place, where she had daily opportunity to practice Patience and Self-denial - virtues so much contrary to the whole bent of corrupt nature, and yet so necessary for rightly framing a Christian life and conversation.

True Misery At another time she said, If the soul be but well grounded in the favor of God, and lively affected with the operations of his grace, all the insults of the devil and of the creature, are borne with joy and comfort. But this is misery indeed, when the Lord himself withdraws from the soul, and leaves her to fend for herself. Then she thinks, that every step is a step into sin and corruption, being utterly unable to protect herself against it.

Let us be faithful In whatever company she was in, she talked of nothing more, than of being faithful to God. Nothing dropped more from her mouth, than, Let us be faithful, let us be faithful to the Lord. This word she thought fit for any time, and

suitable to every company. Now and then she would repeat it a hundred times over; and being asked by her friends, whether she had nothing else to say, she answered, "I wonder at my saying this over and over again. If I should live a thousand years, I should still tell you the same thing. For it is faithfulness, wherein the perfection of a Christian life consists.

On the constraining power of the divine love she said the following, Whenever I happened to adhere a little too much to my natural inclinations, (apt to steal in upon the mind under the specious pretence of necessity) I was immediately reprov'd by the love of God. This divine love is like a careful tutor who takes all the pains imaginable for advancing his pupil in the way of learning he is engaged in, For this reason he keeps his eye constantly fixed on his pupil, both to correct his failings, though never so small, and to prevent him being led away by any thing that might divert him from his chief employment. Thus, she said, did the Lord deal with me. He kept me closely confined to a holy awe and wariness, so when I happened by one oversight or another to withdraw, as it were, from his eye, he in that very moment pursued after me, and recalled me to my duty. But all this was done with so much love and tenderness, that it must be a heart of brass not to be softened by such endearing marks of love and kindness.

Him whom I loved more than my own soul Of disorderly love to friends and relations which now and then even well disposed souls are too much guilty of, she gives the following account: One time, she said, my parents came to see me; and, when I met with them, I found myself transported with vain joys and pleasures that me somewhat cold in my impressions of the love of God. Indeed, it seemed as if the Lord himself did in some manner withdraw from me, to let me have, as it were, more liberty. But no

sooner were my parents gone and I had come to myself, that I felt a burden and affliction on my spirit that was grievous to be borne. For, I could not immediately find him whom I loved more than my own soul. However, as soon as I came home, I felt again a noble return of the divine love, and it was, as if the Lord had waited for me on purpose, to communicate himself to me.

After this, she confessed that from that time she found herself entirely free from irregular adherence to her parents, whom she was too fond of before; being now entirely taken up with the concern to promote the more spiritual part of her friends and fellow creatures: Thus, she said, the love of God made everything - even my very faults and imperfections - redound to my greater spiritual good and welfare.

They say, tomorrow, tomorrow... But that tomorrow never comes. It was mentioned before, how earnest she was in urging everyone to be faithful to the Lord with what he had received. This faithfulness, which she recommended to others, was strikingly exemplified in her whole life and conversation. But it most visibly appeared in her unwearied readiness and quickness toward anything that tended to promote the glory of God in her station. As soon as she was convinced of the will of God, she earnestly and diligently responded.

She often wondered at some peoples procrastination in the service of God, and said, it was a cunning strategy of the devil to make people put off from one day to another design that advanced the glory of God and the good of our fellow creatures. For, she said, it often happens, that the grace offered to a man in one hour to support him in some difficult enterprise, is not necessarily offered at another time. And besides this, how uncertain is our life! Indeed, if we were sure to live longer, yet we should not linger on that account, nor defer from one day to the next the good opportunity offered today.

A man who procrastinates in the service of God must have little love in his heart. For, wherever love is raised to any considerable degree, the soul cannot rest, while there remains anything to be done required by one's beloved. This procrastinating temper, she said, was a great impediment in the way to perfection. Many souls knew the will of God, but adverse as they were to struggle against the corrupt propensities of their dull and lazy temper, they made slow progress in the work of religion. They say, tomorrow, tomorrow it shall be done in good earnest. But tomorrow never comes. The consequence of which is, that the longer they deny and explain away these bad habits, the less able they are to resist them at all. Finally, the Lord leaves them to their own will, since they choose not to faithfully improve what they had once received.

I was fully convinced That anything really good was from God THE virtue of humility was as remarkable in this holy maid as any of the rest; and it was grounded on a true and solid foundation too. She confesses that the infinite love of God kept her so undefiled as to vanity or pride that she did not know what pride and haughtiness were. I was astonished, she said, when my father confessor told me to watch against pride, for I thought as long as I was in control of my own faculties, I could not possibly be proud. I was so fully convinced that anything really good was from God, that if all angels and men had offered to persuade me to the contrary, I should never have believed them. And this fortified me against all manner of pride and presumption; my own conscience never charging me with the least guilt of that vice. Nor could I imagine how it was possible that men should attempt so heinous a thing as this. And this was the reason that she never would quit that manner of life she was bred to, though mean and contemptible in the eyes of the world.

Her outward employment did not cool or weaken Her sense of the love of God Even her spiritual friends would now and then persistently entreat her to resign her place, (which was that of a servant) and this for seemingly good reason also, viz., that she might have more time to give herself up to a contemplative life, and thus enjoy the favors and gracious infusions of the Lord more abundantly. And, indeed, there was abundant opportunity for her to avail herself of such a quiet retirement, as some had in mind for her. But she could never be prevailed with to comply. She had too high an esteem for her low condition. She said, she should never do such a thing, except she was visibly convinced of the will of God. For though her station was but mean, yet she was more pleased with it than with all the prayers and contemplations she might, perhaps, enjoy in the most concealed solitude in the world. She said, her outward employment and all the drudgery she was put to, did not at all cool or weaken that sense of the love and gracious presence of the Lord that she usually enjoyed. Indeed, the more fervent she was spending herself in works of charity, cheerfully complying with everything incident to her life, the more plentiful income she had of the love and favor of God. Hence, it would be the effect of a false heart, if one should quit one's outward employment to gain more rest and quiet in another place. God, she said, knows ways to find souls wherever they are, if they do not willfully shut their hearts against him.

Because her love for God was so great and fervent, the love she bore to her fellows was also wonder-fully influenced and inflamed thereby. When she considered the woeful state of the wicked, and the dreadful judgment that is like to befall them, she felt a more tender and commiserating love. Her very bowels began to yearn for compassion. When she looked upon the happy state she had attained to, and the severe doom attending such reckless and miserable people, she used to say, She seemed to herself like

one who had been in a great storm at sea, and by stress of weather likely to be cast away every minute; but getting off at last safe and sound, remembered now ashore the dangers his brethren and near relations were still exposed to, being tossed up and down in the huge ocean, and left to the mercy of the roaring billows. Alas! she said, thus it is with me when I lay to heart the danger sinners run themselves into. For the more endearing marks of divine grace the Lord has been pleased to bestow upon me, the more fervent is my desire that others might know it also.

And now, learned men and refined wits of the age, come and admire the ignorance and simplicity of this poor country maid! Consider how far she exceeds your high-flown superficial wisdom, and the dark flashes of your human wit and learning. Ask yourself if it was possible for her to attain this heavenly wisdom and divine knowledge & this nobleness and elevation of mind - without the scraps and assistance of your artificial learning and philosophy. If not, then there must be another school wherein those that flow unto the Lord, (Ps. xxxiv. 5) are lighted. Indeed, to know the love of Christ passes all knowledge, Eph. iii. 19. Concerning which our Savior was pleased thus to express his grateful sentiments with hearty joy, and heavenly triumph: I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight, Math. xi. 25,26. For it is written, (says St Paul) I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? But God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that

are. That no flesh should glory in his presence 1Cor. I. 19,20,27-29. Isai. Xxix.14.Chap.xxxiii.

Laurentius de la Resurrection, in his spiritual letters, says: OI desire you to remember what I have often recommended to you, viz., that you do not forget God, day or night, in all your employments and exercises, nor in your bodily refreshment. He is always present with you; do not let him stay alone. It would be very uncivil to leave a friend alone by himself that came to see you. Why will you do so with God? Pray do not forget him; think often upon him, pray to him without ceasing; live and die with him. This is the best work a Christian can be employed about. In short, it is our profession, our trade and calling.

If we do not know it, we must learn it: we must deny all that does not lend to the glory of God, and use ourselves to a continual, familiar and humble conversation and intercourse with him. And withal, to prevent our souls swerving from it upon any occasion whatsoever, our heart must be the spiritual temple, wherein we continually offer up our prayers. We must watch ourselves narrowly, that we may neither do, nor speak, nor think, whatever may be displeasing to him, Col. iv.2 Ch.iii.17.