

Chapter 8: Conversation Betwixt Will Atkins And His Wife

I Was astonished at the sincerity and temper of this pious Papist, as much as I was oppressed by the power of his reasoning; and it presently occurred to my thoughts, that if such a temper was universal, we might be all Catholic Christians, whatever Church or particular profession we joined in; that a spirit of charity would soon work us all up into right principles; and as he thought that the like charity would make us all Catholics, so I told him I believed, had all the members of his Church the like moderation, they would soon all be Protestants. And there we left that part; for we never disputed at all. However, I talked to him another way, and taking him by the hand, "My friend," says I, "I wish all the clergy of the Romish Church were blessed with such moderation, and had an equal share of your charity. I am entirely of your opinion; but I must tell you that if you should preach such doctrine in Spain or Italy, they would put you into the Inquisition."

"It may be so," said he; "I know not what they would do in Spain or Italy; but I will not say they would be the better Christians for that severity; for I am sure there is no heresy in abounding with charity."

Well, as Will Atkins and his wife were gone, our business there was over, so we went back our own way; and when we came back, we found them waiting to be called in. Observing this, I asked my clergyman if we should discover to him that we had seen him under the bush or not; and it was his opinion

we should not, but that we should talk to him first, and hear what he would say to us; so we called him in alone, nobody being in the place but ourselves, and I began by asking him some particulars about his parentage and education. He told me frankly enough that his father was a clergyman who would have taught him well, but that he, Will Atkins, despised all instruction and correction; and by his brutish conduct cut the thread of all his father's comforts and shortened his days, for that he broke his heart by the most ungrateful, unnatural return for the most affectionate treatment a father ever gave.

In what he said there seemed so much sincerity of repentance, that it painfully affected me. I could not but reflect that I, too, had shortened the life of a good, tender father by my bad conduct and obstinate self-will. I was, indeed, so surprised with what he had told me, that I thought, instead of my going about to teach and instruct him, the man was made a teacher and instructor to me in a most unexpected manner.

I laid all this before the young clergyman, who was greatly affected with it, and said to me, "Did I not say, sir, that when this man was converted he would preach to us all? I tell you, sir, if this one man be made a true penitent, there will be no need of me; he will make Christians of all in the island." - But having a little composed myself, I renewed my discourse with Will Atkins. "But, Will," said I, "how comes the sense of this matter to touch you just now?"

W.A. - Sir, you have set me about a work that has struck a dart through my very soul; I have been talking about God and religion to my wife, in order, as you directed me, to make a Christian of her, and she has preached such a sermon to me as I shall never forget while I live.

R.C. - No, no, it is not your wife has preached to you; but when you were moving religious arguments to her, conscience has flung them back upon you.

W.A. - Ay, sir, with such force as is not to be resisted.

R.C. - Pray, Will, let us know what passed between you and your wife; for I know something of it already.

W.A. - Sir, it is impossible to give you a full account of it; I am too full to hold it, and yet have no tongue to express it; but let her have said what she will, though I cannot give you an account of it, this I can tell you, that I have resolved to amend and reform my life.

R.C. - But tell us some of it: how did you begin, Will? For this has been an extraordinary case, that is certain. She has preached a sermon, indeed, if she has wrought this upon you.

W.A. - Why, I first told her the nature of our laws about marriage, and what the reasons were that men and women were obliged to enter into such compacts as it was neither in the power of one nor other to break; that otherwise, order and justice could not be maintained, and men would run from their wives, and abandon their children, mix confusedly with one another, and neither families be kept entire, nor inheritances be settled by legal descent.

R.C. - You talk like a civilian, Will. Could you make her understand what you meant by inheritance and families? They know no such things among the savages, but marry anyhow, without regard to relation, consanguinity, or family; brother and sister, nay, as I have been told, even the father and the daughter, and the son and the mother.

W.A. - I believe, sir, you are misinformed, and my wife assures me of the contrary, and that they abhor it; perhaps, for any further relations, they may not be so exact as we are; but she tells me never in the near relationship you speak of.

R.C. - Well, what did she say to what you told her?

W.A. - She said she liked it very well, as it was much better than in her country.

R.C. - But did you tell her what marriage was?

W.A. - Ay, ay, there began our dialogue. I asked her if she would be married to me our way. She asked me what way that was; I told her marriage was appointed by God; and here we had a strange talk together, indeed, as ever man and wife had, I believe.

N.B. - This dialogue between Will Atkins and his wife, which I took down in writing just after he told it me, was as follows:-

WIFE. - Appointed by your God! - Why, have you a God in your country?

W.A. - Yes, my dear, God is in every country.

WIFE. - No your God in my country; my country have the great old Benamuckee God.

W.A. - Child, I am very unfit to show you who God is; God is in heaven and made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that in them is.

WIFE. - No makee de earth; no you God makee all earth; no makee my country.

[Will Atkins laughed a little at her expression of God not making her

country.]

WIFE. - No laugh; why laugh me? This no ting to laugh.

[He was justly reprov'd by his wife, for she was more serious than he at first.]

W.A. - That's true, indeed; I will not laugh any more, my dear.

WIFE. - Why you say you God makee all?

W.A. - Yes, child, our God made the whole world, and you, and me, and all things; for He is the only true God, and there is no God but Him. He lives for ever in heaven.

WIFE. - Why you no tell me long ago?

W.A. - That's true, indeed; but I have been a wicked wretch, and have not only forgotten to acquaint thee with anything before, but have lived without God in the world myself.

WIFE. - What, have you a great God in your country, you no know Him? No say O to Him? No do good ting for Him? That no possible.

W.A. - It is true; though, for all that, we live as if there was no God in heaven, or that He had no power on earth.

Wife. - But why God let you do so? Why He no makee you good live?

W.A. - It is all our own fault.

WIFE. - But you say me He is great, much great, have much great power; can makee kill when He will: why He no makee kill when you no serve Him? no say O to Him? no be good mans?

W.A. - That is true, He might strike me dead; and I ought to expect it, for I have been a wicked wretch, that is true; but God is merciful, and does not deal with us as we deserve.

WIFE. - But then do you not tell God thankee for that too?

W. A. - No, indeed, I have not thanked God for His mercy, any more than I have feared God from His power.

WIFE. - Then you God no God; me no think, believe He be such one, great much power, strong: no makee kill you, though you make Him much angry.

W.A. - What, will my wicked life hinder you from believing in God? What a

dreadful creature am I! and what a sad truth is it, that the horrid lives of Christians hinder the conversion of heathens!

WIFE. - How me tink you have great much God up there [she points up to heaven], and yet no do well, no do good ting? Can He tell? Sure He no tell what you do?

W.A. - Yes, yes, He knows and sees all things; He hears us speak, sees what we do, knows what we think though we do not speak.

WIFE. - What! He no hear you curse, swear, speak de great damn?

W.A. - Yes, yes, He hears it all.

WIFE. - Where be then the much great power strong?

W.A. - He is merciful, that is all we can say for it; and this proves Him to be the true God; He is God, and not man, and therefore we are not consumed.

[Here Will Atkins told us he was struck with horror to think how he could tell his wife so clearly that God sees, and hears, and knows the secret thoughts of the heart, and all that we do, and yet that he had dared to do all the vile things he had done.]

WIFE. - Merciful! What you call dat?

W.A. - He is our Father and Maker, and He pities and spares us.

WIFE. - So then He never makee kill, never angry when you do wicked; then He no good Himself, or no great able.

W.A. - Yes, yes, my dear, He is infinitely good and infinitely great, and able to punish too; and sometimes, to show His justice and vengeance, He lets fly His anger to destroy sinners and make examples; many are cut off in their sins.

WIFE. - But no makee kill you yet; then He tell you, maybe, that He no makee you kill: so you makee the bargain with Him, you do bad thing, He no be angry at you when He be angry at other mans.

W.A. - No, indeed, my sins are all presumptions upon His goodness; and He would be infinitely just if He destroyed me, as He has done other men.

WIFE. - Well, and yet no kill, no makee you dead: what you say to Him for that? You no tell Him thankee for all that too?

W.A. - I am an unthankful, ungrateful dog, that is true.

WIFE. - Why He no makee you much good better? you say He makee you.

W.A. - He made me as He made all the world: it is I have deformed myself and abused His goodness, and made myself an abominable wretch.

WIFE. - I wish you makee God know me. I no makee Him angry - I no do bad wicked thing.

[Here Will Atkins said his heart sunk within him to hear a poor untaught creature desire to be taught to know God, and he such a wicked wretch, that he could not say one word to her about God, but what the reproach of his own carriage would make most irrational to her to believe; nay, that already she had told him that she could not believe in God, because he, that was so wicked, was not destroyed.]

W.A. - My dear, you mean, you wish I could teach you to know God, not God to know you; for He knows you already, and every thought in your heart.

WIFE. - Why, then, He know what I say to you now: He know me wish to know Him. How shall me know who makee me?

W.A. - Poor creature, He must teach thee: I cannot teach thee. I will pray to Him to teach thee to know Him, and forgive me, that am unworthy to teach thee.

[The poor fellow was in such an agony at her desiring him to make her know God, and her wishing to know Him, that he said he fell down on his knees before her, and prayed to God to enlighten her mind with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to pardon his sins, and accept of his being the unworthy instrument of instructing her in the principles of religion: after which he sat down by her again, and their dialogue went on. This was the time when we saw him kneel down and hold up his hands.]

Wife. - What you put down the knee for? What you hold up the hand for? What you say? Who you speak to? What is all that?

W.A. - My dear, I bow my knees in token of my submission to Him that made me: I said O to Him, as you call it, and as your old men do to their idol Benamuckee; that is, I prayed to Him.

WIFE. - What say you O to Him for?

W.A. - I prayed to Him to open your eyes and your understanding, that you may know Him, and be accepted by Him.

WIFE. - Can He do that too?

W.A. - Yes, He can: He can do all things.

WIFE. - But now He hear what you say?

W.A. - Yes, He has bid us pray to Him, and promised to hear us.

WIFE. - Bid you pray? When He bid you? How He bid you? What you hear Him speak?

W.A. - No, we do not hear Him speak; but He has revealed Himself many ways to us.

[Here he was at a great loss to make her understand that God has revealed Himself to us by His word, and what His word was; but at last he told it to her thus.]

W.A. - God has spoken to some good men in former days, even from heaven, by plain words; and God has inspired good men by His Spirit; and they have written all His laws down in a book.

WIFE. - Me no understand that; where is book?

W.A. - Alas! my poor creature, I have not this book; but I hope I shall one time or other get it for you, and help you to read it.

[Here he embraced her with great affection, but with inexpressible grief that he had not a Bible.]

WIFE. - But how you makee me know that God teachee them to write that book?

W.A. - By the same rule that we know Him to be God.

WIFE. - What rule? What way you know Him?

W.A. - Because He teaches and commands nothing but what is good, righteous, and holy, and tends to make us perfectly good, as well as perfectly happy; and because He forbids and commands us to avoid all that is wicked, that is evil in itself, or evil in its consequence.

WIFE. - That me would understand, that me fain see; if He teachee all good thing, He makee all good thing, He give all thing, He hear me when I say O to Him, as you do just now; He makee me good if I wish to be good; He spare me, no makee kill me, when I no be good: all this you say He do, yet He be great God; me take, think, believe Him to be great God; me say O to Him with you, my dear.

Here the poor man could forbear no longer, but raised her up, made her kneel by him, and he prayed to God aloud to instruct her in the knowledge

of Himself, by His Spirit; and that by some good providence, if possible, she might, some time or other, come to have a Bible, that she might read the word of God, and be taught by it to know Him. This was the time that we saw him lift her up by the hand, and saw him kneel down by her, as above.

They had several other discourses, it seems, after this; and particularly she made him promise that, since he confessed his own life had been a wicked, abominable course of provocations against God, that he would reform it, and not make God angry any more, lest He should make him dead, as she called it, and then she would be left alone, and never be taught to know this God better; and lest he should be miserable, as he had told her wicked men would be after death.

This was a strange account, and very affecting to us both, but particularly to the young clergyman; he was, indeed, wonderfully surprised with it, but under the greatest affliction imaginable that he could not talk to her, that he could not speak English to make her understand him; and as she spoke but very broken English, he could not understand her; however, he turned himself to me, and told me that he believed that there must be more to do with this woman than to marry her. I did not understand him at first; but at length he explained himself, viz. that she ought to be baptised. I agreed with him in that part readily, and wished it to be done presently.

No, no; hold, sir," says he; "though I would have her be baptised, by all

means, for I must observe that Will Atkins, her husband, has indeed brought her, in a wonderful manner, to be willing to embrace a religious life, and has given her just ideas of the being of a God; of His power, justice, and mercy: yet I desire to know of him if he has said anything to her of Jesus Christ, and of the salvation of sinners; of the nature of faith in Him, and redemption by Him; of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection, the last judgement, and the future state."

I called Will Atkins again, and asked him; but the poor fellow fell immediately into tears, and told us he had said something to her of all those things, but that he was himself so wicked a creature, and his own conscience so reproached him with his horrid, ungodly life, that he trembled at the apprehensions that her knowledge of him should lessen the attention she should give to those things, and make her rather contemn religion than receive it; but he was assured, he said, that her mind was so disposed to receive due impressions of all those things, and that if I would but discourse with her, she would make it appear to my satisfaction that my labour would not be lost upon her.

Accordingly I called her in, and placing myself as interpreter between my religious priest and the woman, I entreated him to begin with her; but sure such a sermon was never preached by a Popish priest in these latter ages of the world; and as I told him, I thought he had all the zeal, all the knowledge, all the sincerity of a Christian, without the error of a Roman Catholic; and

that I took him to be such a clergyman as the Roman bishops were before the Church of Rome assumed spiritual sovereignty over the consciences of men. In a word, he brought the poor woman to embrace the knowledge of Christ, and of redemption by Him, not with wonder and astonishment only, as she did the first notions of a God, but with joy and faith; with an affection, and a surprising degree of understanding, scarce to be imagined, much less to be expressed; and, at her own request, she was baptised.

When he was preparing to baptise her, I entreated him that he would perform that office with some caution, that the man might not perceive he was of the Roman Church, if possible, because of other ill consequences which might attend a difference among us in that very religion which we were instructing the other in. He told me that as he had no consecrated chapel, nor proper things for the office, I should see he would do it in a manner that I should not know by it that he was a Roman Catholic myself, if I had not known it before; and so he did; for saying only some words over to himself in Latin, which I could not understand, he poured a whole dishful of water upon the woman's head, pronouncing in French, very loud, "Mary" (which was the name her husband desired me to give her, for I was her godfather), "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" so that none could know anything by it what religion he was of. He gave the benediction afterwards in Latin, but either Will Atkins did not know but it was French, or else did not take notice of it at that time.

As soon as this was over we married them; and after the marriage was over, he turned to Will Atkins, and in a very affectionate manner exhorted him, not only to persevere in that good disposition he was in, but to support the convictions that were upon him by a resolution to reform his life: told him it was in vain to say he repented if he did not forsake his crimes; represented to him how God had honoured him with being the instrument of bringing his wife to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and that he should be careful he did not dishonour the grace of God; and that if he did, he would see the heathen a better Christian than himself; the savage converted, and the instrument cast away. He said a great many good things to them both; and then, recommending them to God's goodness, gave them the benediction again, I repeating everything to them in English; and thus ended the ceremony. I think it was the most pleasant and agreeable day to me that ever I passed in my whole life. But my clergyman had not done yet: his thoughts hung continually upon the conversion of the thirty-seven savages, and fain he would have stayed upon the island to have undertaken it; but I convinced him, first, that his undertaking was impracticable in itself; and, secondly, that perhaps I would put it into a way of being done in his absence to his satisfaction.

Having thus brought the affairs of the island to a narrow compass, I was preparing to go on board the ship, when the young man I had taken out of the famished ship's company came to me, and told me he understood I had a clergyman with me, and that I had caused the Englishmen to be married

to the savages; that he had a match too, which he desired might be finished before I went, between two Christians, which he hoped would not be disagreeable to me.

I knew this must be the young woman who was his mother's servant, for there was no other Christian woman on the island: so I began to persuade him not to do anything of that kind rashly, or because he found himself in this solitary circumstance. I represented to him that he had some considerable substance in the world, and good friends, as I understood by himself, and the maid also; that the maid was not only poor, and a servant, but was unequal to him, she being six or seven and twenty years old, and he not above seventeen or eighteen; that he might very probably, with my assistance, make a remove from this wilderness, and come into his own country again; and that then it would be a thousand to one but he would repent his choice, and the dislike of that circumstance might be disadvantageous to both. I was going to say more, but he interrupted me, smiling, and told me, with a great deal of modesty, that I mistook in my guesses - that he had nothing of that kind in his thoughts; and he was very glad to hear that I had an intent of putting them in a way to see their own country again; and nothing should have made him think of staying there, but that the voyage I was going was so exceeding long and hazardous, and would carry him quite out of the reach of all his friends; that he had nothing to desire of me but that I would settle him in some little property in the island where he was, give him a servant or two, and some few necessaries,

and he would live here like a planter, waiting the good time when, if ever I returned to England, I would redeem him. He hoped I would not be unmindful of him when I came to England: that he would give me some letters to his friends in London, to let them know how good I had been to him, and in what part of the world and what circumstances I had left him in: and he promised me that whenever I redeemed him, the plantation, and all the improvements he had made upon it, let the value be what it would, should be wholly mine.

His discourse was very prettily delivered, considering his youth, and was the more agreeable to me, because he told me positively the match was not for himself. I gave him all possible assurances that if I lived to come safe to England, I would deliver his letters, and do his business effectually; and that he might depend I should never forget the circumstances I had left him in. But still I was impatient to know who was the person to be married; upon which he told me it was my Jack-of-all-trades and his maid Susan. I was most agreeably surprised when he named the match; for, indeed, I thought it very suitable. The character of that man I have given already; and as for the maid, she was a very honest, modest, sober, and religious young woman: had a very good share of sense, was agreeable enough in her person, spoke very handsomely and to the purpose, always with decency and good manners, and was neither too backward to speak when requisite, nor impertinently forward when it was not her business; very handy and housewifely, and an excellent manager; fit, indeed, to have been governess

to the whole island; and she knew very well how to behave in every respect.

The match being proposed in this manner, we married them the same day; and as I was father at the altar, and gave her away, so I gave her a portion; for I appointed her and her husband a handsome large space of ground for their plantation; and indeed this match, and the proposal the young gentleman made to give him a small property in the island, put me upon parcelling it out amongst them, that they might not quarrel afterwards about their situation.

This sharing out the land to them I left to Will Atkins, who was now grown a sober, grave, managing fellow, perfectly reformed, exceedingly pious and religious; and, as far as I may be allowed to speak positively in such a case, I verily believe he was a true penitent. He divided things so justly, and so much to every one's satisfaction, that they only desired one general writing under my hand for the whole, which I caused to be drawn up, and signed and sealed, setting out the bounds and situation of every man's plantation, and testifying that I gave them thereby severally a right to the whole possession and inheritance of the respective plantations or farms, with their improvements, to them and their heirs, reserving all the rest of the island as my own property, and a certain rent for every particular plantation after eleven years, if I, or any one from me, or in my name, came to demand it, producing an attested copy of the same writing. As to the government and laws among them, I told them I was not capable of giving them better rules

than they were able to give themselves; only I made them promise me to live in love and good neighbourhood with one another; and so I prepared to leave them.

One thing I must not omit, and that is, that being now settled in a kind of commonwealth among themselves, and having much business in hand, it was odd to have seven-and-thirty Indians live in a nook of the island, independent, and, indeed, unemployed; for except the providing themselves food, which they had difficulty enough to do sometimes, they had no manner of business or property to manage. I proposed, therefore, to the governor Spaniard that he should go to them, with Friday's father, and propose to them to remove, and either plant for themselves, or be taken into their several families as servants to be maintained for their labour, but without being absolute slaves; for I would not permit them to make them slaves by force, by any means; because they had their liberty given them by capitulation, as it were articles of surrender, which they ought not to break.

They most willingly embraced the proposal, and came all very cheerfully along with him: so we allotted them land and plantations, which three or four accepted of, but all the rest chose to be employed as servants in the several families we had settled. Thus my colony was in a manner settled as follows: The Spaniards possessed my original habitation, which was the capital city, and extended their plantations all along the side of the brook, which made the creek that I have so often described, as far as my bower;

and as they increased their culture, it went always eastward. The English lived in the north-east part, where Will Atkins and his comrades began, and came on southward and south-west, towards the back part of the Spaniards; and every plantation had a great addition of land to take in, if they found occasion, so that they need not jostle one another for want of room. All the east end of the island was left uninhabited, that if any of the savages should come on shore there only for their customary barbarities, they might come and go; if they disturbed nobody, nobody would disturb them: and no doubt but they were often ashore, and went away again; for I never heard that the planters were ever attacked or disturbed any more.