

## HIS TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER

by

THOMAS B. REES

Printed @ August 1945

### CHAPTER TEN - COMPELLING THEM IN

**"Go out . . . and compel them to come in"** (Luke 14:23)

I AM A CONFIRMED BELIEVER in using carefully-designed and well-printed advertising for attracting folk to evangelistic meetings, but again and again experience has taught me that publicity alone is practically useless unless it is followed up by a personal invitation. Often the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed and the power of the Lord is present to heal, but, alas! those who need its healing touch are not present.

True enough, saved men love the Gospel, but it is the lost who need it.

Thirty years ago anyone could fill a large concert hall by simply announcing a public lecture on the dullest of subjects, and charge half a crown for admission too! To-day public meetings are not such a novelty as they were then, so there is only one thing for it - we must go out and **"compel"** them to come in.

I had not been a Christian long before I discovered what a remarkable effect even one meeting can have upon a man's life. An elderly man stopped me one day: "I do wish you would invite young Vernon Harris to one of your meetings, I think they would help him." I promised that I would do as he suggested, but I must confess that I thought such an invitation would be completely wasted. I had known Vernon well for some years. Without exaggeration, he was one of the most godless young men I had ever come across. He had far too much money. His language and habits were anything but commendable. As for religion, he had none.

Not long afterwards I met Vernon in the street, and remembering my promise I said: "I am going to a meeting to-night. I wonder if you would care to come with me!" "Oh, what sort of meeting is it!" I now found myself in a difficult position, for I had been so sure that he would not accept, that I had invited him to a Christian fellowship meeting, a monthly gathering for prayer and discussion - the last sort of meeting that would likely influence a tough like Vernon.

"Well," I said, "it's a sort of meeting for Christians."

"All right, I'll come. You call round for me and we will go over together in my car."

I could hardly believe my ears - he of all people promising to come to a religious meeting. All

through the meeting that night I sat listening as through Vernon's ears, while this one prayed and that one told of answered prayer. As I glanced at my friend's face it was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

Our visiting speaker had closed his address with prayer, and before the meeting broke up he said: "Now, has anybody anything they would like to say?" A moment's pause, and then, very slowly, Vernon rose to his feet. My heart sank; what was he going to say? Oh! that I had never invited him. Then he began to speak:

"Until I came to this meeting to-night I always thought that being a Christian was just a matter of keeping the commandments, putting a Bible under your arm, attending church, and going about with rather a long face. But to-night I have discovered that it is something far deeper than that. I should like to become a Christian and attend this meeting each month."

That night Vernon came to CHRIST, and until I left that district we went together month by month to the fellowship meeting. I have lost touch with him, but the last time I saw him was in the identical street where I first invited him to the meeting - but what a transformation!

"Hello, Tom," he said; touching his overcoat pocket: "I've got my Bible here. Every week I go along and read it to an old blind man I know: he is a great Christian, and we have some grand times together. I'm on my way now." His whole life turned upside down (or should we say the right way up?), because he was taken to one meeting!

I have been invited several times to address a drawing-room meeting where the host and hostess stand at the door, and if any Christian young man or woman arrives without bringing an outsider with them, they are politely yet firmly refused admission! At a meeting of this kind you can be sure that at least half the company are needy folk.

They worked like this in the days of the Apostles. "**There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks . . . and they were healed every one**" (Acts 5:16). When did you last take a sin-sick soul to hear words whereby he might be saved?

The church where they have conversions every week is the church where the members bring their unconverted friends and neighbours to the services and sit and pray while the Message of Life is preached. Any minister will tell you that this is true.

The most fruitful campaigns I have conducted are those where the local Christians have realized their responsibilities and have by prayer and persuasion brought to the meetings those who usually have no interest in evangelistic missions.

I mentioned in an earlier chapter how a man was won for CHRIST after his wife had prayed for him for thirty-five years. Every Sunday afternoon now, that man goes out and invites Service men home for tea, and then takes them to church. He has landed some remarkably good fish this way.

In one city where I was conducting a United Church Campaign a well-known solicitor, a keen Christian man, again and again booked a dinner table at one of the best hotels, and invited his

colleagues and business friends "to dine, and afterwards accompany me to hear Mr. T. B. Rees preach" - who could refuse such gracious hospitality?

In a certain place I had been exhorting the Christians to bring their neighbours to the meetings, and after prayerfully considering the matter Mrs. Anderson approached a neighbour of hers, called Jim Willis. She reasoned, persuaded, and coaxed him, and at last, mainly to keep her quiet, he came. But as soon as the service was over Jim tackled Mrs. Anderson. "What do you mean by it?" he said belligerently, "tricking me into going to hear that man preach, and priming him up all about me beforehand?"

"But Jim, I never mentioned your name to Mr. Rees, he's never heard of you."

"D'you expect me to believe that, when he preached at me, and never took his eyes off me the whole time?"

"I'm sorry, Jim, but if you felt like that, GOD must have been speaking to you."

Jim hadn't been to church since he was married, and hadn't wanted to come now, but his wife had added her pressure to the invitation, and that decided it. Yes, if Hilda said he had to go that settled it. He couldn't forget all she did for him. How many times she had put him to bed dead drunk, made him strong coffee, and helped him to get to work next day. It was the least he could do if she wanted it. One of these days he'd make it up to her and the children. He didn't mean to give way, but then the temptation came and he was powerless.

There had been that time when he'd given it up for two months, but he wasn't strong enough, and things had been worse afterwards.

How proud Hilda had been of him when they were first married, how eagerly she had displayed his many running trophies on the sideboard, and encouraged him to keep fit, but how often since he got this new job of bottling whisky had she looked thoroughly miserable. Drink is always difficult to resist. "Take what you like while you're bottling," they said.

How could a fellow resist that? And now this man Rees preaching at him like that, showing him what GOD thought of his life. That's what Hilda must think of him, and everyone else.

It was almost a week of restless nights for Jim. The eye of GOD seemed to be burning into his very soul. Next Sunday night it was the same when he came to hear me preach.

"It's no good you denying it this time. You have been telling that man all about me."

"I assure you, Jim," answered Mrs. Anderson, "I have never mentioned anything about it to Mr. Rees."

Jim's anxiety was too great to be hid from his wife and friends, and the next morning Mrs. Anderson called on us and told us about Jim. We prayed for him during the day, and as we were about to have supper, my wife said to me, "I think you ought to go and see Jim Willis now." Supper looked very tempting, but "I also am a man under authority" - so I went!

Jim opened the door to me himself. "Oh, it's you," he said, "I was expecting you. Come in, I know why you've come."

"Why were you expecting me?" I asked.

"Well," said Jim, "since I first heard you preach I've had the most awful week of my life. I couldn't sleep again last night, and at three o'clock this morning I was on my knees by my bedside asking GOD for mercy. I just knew you'd come tonight." I followed him into the kitchen, where he and his wife sat down, while I opened my New Testament to explain the way of life. "What about you, Mrs. Willis?" I asked. "Have you ever received CHRIST as your SAVIOUR?"

"Well, Mr. Rees, I can't say I've approved of the way Jim's been going on, and I've tried to keep straight, and send the children to Sunday School, and go to church myself, but I am afraid I have never received CHRIST."

I opened my Bible at John chapter 5, verse 24: "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word** - you have both heard His word - **and believeth on Him that sent me** - you want to believe on Him, that is, trust yourself to Him, don't you?" And I continued to explain the old, old story simply, as to a little child. We then knelt in that homely kitchen and I prayed, then Jim prayed, then his wife, simply yielding themselves to CHRIST.

When I opened my eyes, those two new-born souls were standing with their arms round each other, crying like children. I slipped quietly from the house to tell the good news to my wife. The supper tasted all the better for the interlude!

What a thrill the new life was to Jim and Hilda. Almost every day Jim had some new miracle to report.

"Mr. Rees, what do you think? I had to bottle whisky to-day, and I can't stand the smell of it, it nearly made me sick." (Remember Jackson?) "On my rounds to-day I told twelve people about my SAVIOUR." "I banged my head to-day on the roof of the van, and instead of losing my temper and swearing, I found the words didn't come! My mate nearly fainted."

"If Jim Willis is really born again," I said to my wife, "I am confident that he will very soon leave his present job. I can't see how any man who is a child of GOD can be engaged in that trade. But I don't intend to say a word to him myself. We will let the Lord speak to him."

One day Jim came in looking rather serious. "I was delivering whisky to-day, and told a lady about all the Lord had done for me, and how I was trying to serve Him, and she said, 'Well, what in the world are you selling this stuff for?'"

It was not long after this that Jim gave notice, and the only job available to him then was that of a labourer in the building of an aircraft factory. It was not the kind of work he had been used to, but he did it with all his might.

He was a puzzle to his mates.

"Here, Jim," they said, "what are you working like that for, can't you see the foreman's gone?"

"Look here," Jim said, after several of these attacks, "you just work for what you get out of it, and when the foreman's not looking, you slack. You get your wage packet just the same. But I belong to the Lord, and I'm shoveling muck for the glory of GOD, and He's always looking."

Soon after war broke out Jim was called up and after his training was sent to North Africa. His letters home were full of the joy of salvation. One letter told me two things, and I don't know which pleased me most. One was that he had just won another soul for the Lord; and the other was that his truck was declared the best-kept vehicle in the unit. Jim believed in the witness of lip and life.

It was a dreadful day when Hilda received the news that Jim was missing, after the fall of Tobruk.

However, the Lord stood by her in the dark days that followed. "The Lord knows where Jim is," she said, "whether he is with the Lord or still here on earth, he is in the Lord's hands."

It was some weeks before we heard that Jim was a prisoner. He wrote to tell us that just before Tobruk fell, he escaped with several others along the beach and back into the desert. One of his companions was a man who had bitterly opposed Jim's witness for CHRIST. They were not long in the desert before they had completely lost their way, and for three days they were in the scorching sun without food or water.

Things were desperate, and Jim's former opponent said, "Jim, you'd better pray for us." Soon after they had prayed they came upon an abandoned vehicle, and were glad to drink the water from the radiator. That day they were taken prisoners.

Jim wrote home saying, "I have proved again that '**All things work together for good**'," and told how that as a result of their experiences his former persecutor had come to CHRIST. He asked for a supply of New Testaments. "We have a Bible study every afternoon and a prayer meeting each evening" (many a mature Christian might find this too strong a diet!). And again: "I'm longing for home, but many thicknesses of barbed wire cannot separate me from the love of CHRIST."

Andrew was glad he had brought Peter to CHRIST, Kimble was glad he brought D. L. Moody, Mrs. Anderson was glad she invited Jim Willis, I am glad I invited Vernon Harris. Take a neighbour with you and join this happy band!

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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