

Peg Leg Tom Heard the Spirit's Call

by Walter L. Wilson, M.D.

Tom Bailey was at one time a locomotive engineer. He was strong, rugged sort of a fellow with a happy, genial personality which enabled him to make friends readily. But there was no room for God in Tom's life; he never went to church, and used for his excuse the unusual hours of service in the cab of his locomotive.

One fateful day, as the great engine was plowing its way through the murky night with Tom at the throttle, there seemed to be an unusual number of hazards: the mist and the fog obscured the lights, extra trains were scheduled to run, the connections were unusually close, and the trip that night was a rather long one. Tom was very weary with the close vigil and became a bit drowsy from the drone of the engine. He did not see an open switch with the red light set against him. The huge, screeching mass of steel hurtled its ponderous body through the open switch, turned on its side, and burst open as the steam in the boiler became imprisoned.

Poor Tom was caught by one leg in the cab, and could not escape. The scalding steam cruelly burned the leg, and when he was finally rescued it was found necessary to amputate that limb. However, this handicap did not deter Tom from his determination to make good in life. He could not again serve the railroad, so he took up the trade of sail making, an occupation which would keep him sitting on a bench with palm and needle, with thimble and thread. Tom's big hands and strong arms soon enabled him to excel in this line of work.

One would think that such a close call and such a serious accident would have caused Peg Leg to turn his thoughts to God and eternity, but such was not the case. His companions now called him "Peg Leg Tom" for he wore a wooden leg always exposed and with no attempt at disguise. Liquor and tobacco made Tom quite filthy in his body, while his oaths and vile stories revealed the wickedness of his heart.

One day Tom applied at the employment office of our factory,

looking for work in the roping department. His fine experience quickly obtained for him a position on the tent floor where the splices were made and the ropes were sewed to the tents. Although there was a number of Christians in the department, Tom was not interested in their conversations, nor in the gospel which they sought to proclaim. Evangelistic meetings were frequently held among the employees of the factory, but Tom would not only leave the building during the noon-hour meeting, but would endeavor to take others with him, so that they, too, would miss the message of the love of God.

The management of this institution decided to begin a revival meeting among the employees, holding services at the noon hour. A splendid evangelist was engaged and a special effort was made to persuade all the employees to attend the meetings. The Holy Spirit began to work in hearts from the very opening day; hardened old sinners turned to the Saviour; flippant, silly girls from various departments were convicted of their need and trusted Christ; some of Tom's pals were reached and saved as the gospel was proclaimed. These began to talk with Peg Leg, urging him to come and listen if only for just one time. He did come; the Holy Spirit used to Word to grip his heart; and he saw the utter folly of continuing in his sins and going on to the lake of fire by rejecting the Saviour's love.

Tom would not come to the meeting the next day, but tried to forget his danger and his trouble by playing a game of cards in the adjoining alley with some who had no interest whatever in their souls. He knew that the Spirit was warning him; he knew that his days were numbered, for he was then about sixty-six years of age; he realized that his life had been filled with sin and wickedness; there was no peace in his soul over the card game, nor in the company of other scoffers. He had heard the cry from the preacher's lips, "The wages of sin is death." Over and over this message was repeated in his soul. He heard from the lips of another, "The wicked shall be turned into hell" (Psalm 9:17). His own conscience answered an "Amen" for he knew and realized his guilt.

There was no need of inviting Tom on the following day. He remained in his place on the bench eating his lunch, while the preacher urged those in the audience to turn to Jesus Christ. He called within their hearing, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye

die?" Tom had never turned. He was still on his way to the second death. The worry of it made him sick. One day he sent for me to come to see him in his home.

How gladly I responded to the call, looking to the Holy Spirit for the right word to say to this old man who had spread wickedness and sin along his way throughout the years. The Lord of the harvest reads human hearts, and directs the worker to the seeker with the proper message of light and life.

Upon arriving at his home, I found Peg Leg Tom in bed, trembling with the fear of God upon him, and crying to Heaven for mercy. I seated myself on the edge of the bed and began reading from Isaiah 53:5 — "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." From this passage I turned to I Peter 3:18, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust [that is for, Tom)], that he might bring us to God."

"Are you ready to be saved, Tom?" I inquired. "Christ is ready. He has already paid the price, He has already suffered for you at Calvary, and He has died for your sins. You do not need to be lost. Your life is lost — you have wasted it in riotous living. Christ does not offer to save your past life, but He does offer to save you from your sins, 'For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost'" (Luke 19:10).

The messages from the Word of God were like balm to the broken heart of this repentant sinner. The Spirit of God had prepared the way before the messenger arrived. Tom saw himself in all his wickedness and sinfulness before God. He was profoundly convicted and sincerely repentant. He was waiting to hear the pardoning voice of the God he had offended. As the message fell on his ears, he became calm and quiet; his sobbing ceased, and with a clear, firm voice, he said in his Irish brogue: "I am glad the Lord Jesus will save such a wicked sinner as I am; I will trust Him now. I believe His precious blood will cleanse even the vilest stains of old Peg Leg Tom." As he closed his eyes, I saw by the moving of his lips that he had surrendered his Lord and had accepted his Saviour.

Three days after this wonderful event, Peg Leg Tom hobbled back to work. The news of his conversion had preceded him, so that upon his arrival he received a wonderful welcome from the

many who had accepted the Saviour during the meetings and from the older Christians who had long prayed for him. His first request was for an opportunity to tell the folks what Christ had done for his soul. This privilege was granted at the noon hour, and about 150 employees listened in silence, as old Tom told the story of God's pardoning grace as best he was able. His tears of joy deeply affected his fellow-workers. The silence of the service was broken only by the weeping of many who had known him. What a battle had taken place! What a victory had been won!

That day was the beginning of a new life for our old friend. He became an earnest evangelist in his weak, faltering way. He lost no opportunity of urging his friends and unsaved associates to come to the Saviour. There was no wavering in Tom's testimony. His message was not much for oratory, but was wonderful in its convicting power. He lived three or four years before being called home to meet his Lord, and was a bright, happy sample of what God can do with the devil's wrecks. Will you not come to the same Saviour and let Him transform you?

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