

The Student Movement (The History and Organization Of the Student Volunteer Movement For Foreign Missions) By John R. Mott (August, 1889)

One of the greatest missionary revivals of this century had its beginning in July, 1886, at the Mt. Hermon Conference of college students. Two hundred and fifty-one students from eighty-nine colleges of the United States and Canada had come together at the invitation of Mr. Moody to spend four weeks in Bible study. Nearly two weeks passed before the subject of mission was even mentioned in the sessions of the Conference. But one of the young men from Princeton College had come, after weeks of prayer, with the deep conviction that God would call from that large gathering of college men, a few, at least, who would consecrate themselves to the foreign mission service. At an early day he called together all the young men who were thinking seriously of spending their lives in the foreign field. Twenty-one students answered to this call, although several of them had not definitely decided the question, this little group of consecrated men began to pray that the spirit of missions might pervade the Conference, and that the Lord would separate many men unto this great work. In a few days they were to see their faith rewarded far more than they had dared to claim. On the evening of July 16th a special mass meeting was held, at which Rev. Arthur T. Pierson gave a thrilling address on missions. He supported, by the most convincing arguments, the proposition that "all should go, and go to all." This was the keynote, which set many men to thinking and praying.



Luther Wishard

A week passed. On Saturday night, July 24th, another meeting was held, which may occupy as significant a place in the history of the Christian Church as the Williams Haystack Scene. It is known as the "meeting of ten nations." It was addressed by sons of missionaries in China, India, and Persia, and by seven young men of different nationalities, - an Armenian, a Japanese, a Siamese, a German, a Dane, a Norwegian, and an American Indian. The addresses were not more than three minutes in length, and consisted of appeals for more workers. Near the close, each speaker repeated in the language of his country the words, "God is love." Then came a season of silent and audible prayer, which will never be forgotten by all who were present. The burning appeals of this meeting came with peculiar force to all.

From this night on to the close of the Conference the missionary interest became more and more intense. One by one the men, alone in the woods and rooms with their Bibles and God, fought out the battle with self, and were led by the Spirit to forsake all, and carry the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the earth." Dr. Ashmore, who had just returned from China, added fuel to the flame by his ringing appeal to Christians to look upon "missions as a way of conquest, and not as a mere wrecking expedition."



Robert Wilder

Only eight days elapsed between the "meeting of ten nations" and the closing session of the Conference. During that time the number of volunteers increased from twenty-one to exactly one hundred, who signified that they were "willing and desirous, God permitting, to become foreign missionaries." Several of the remaining one hundred

and fifty delegates became volunteers later, after months of study and prayer.

On the last day of the Conference the volunteers held a meeting, in which there was a unanimous expression that the missionary spirit, which had manifested itself with such power at Mt. Hermon, should be communicated in some degree to thousands of students throughout the country who had not been privileged to come in contact with it at its source. It was their conviction that the reasons which had led the Mt. Hermon hundred to decide would influence hundreds of other college men, if those reasons were once presented to them in a faithful, intelligent, and prayerful manner.



Mt. Hermon School

Naturally, they thought of the "Cambridge Band" and its wonderful influence among the universities of Great Britain; and decided to adopt a similar plan. Accordingly, a deputation of four students was selected to represent the Mt. Hermon Conference, and to visit during the year as many American colleges as possible. Of the four selected, only one was able to undertake the mission, Mr. Robert P. Wilder, of the class of 1886 of Princeton College. Mr. John N. Forman, also a Princeton graduate, was induced to join Mr. Wilder in this tour. One consecrated man, who has ever been glad to help on missionary enterprises, defrayed the expenses of their tour.

During the year, one hundred and sixty-seven institutions were visited. They touched nearly all of the leading colleges in the United States and Canada. Sometimes they would visit a college together: again, in order to reach more institutions, they would separate. Their straightforward, forcible, Scriptural presentation came with convincing power to the minds and hearts of students wherever they went. In some colleges, as many as sixty volunteers were secured. Not an institution was visited in which they did not quicken the missionary interest. By the close of the year two thousand two hundred young men and women had taken the volunteer pledge.

During the college year 1887-88 the movement was left without any particular leadership and oversight. Notwithstanding this fact, over six hundred new volunteers were added during the year, very largely the result of the personal work of the old volunteers.

About fifty volunteers came together at the Northfield Conference in July 1888, to pray and plan for the movement. When the reports were presented, showing the condition of the movement in all parts of the country, it was found that there were three dangerous tendencies beginning to manifest themselves: 1) A tendency in the movement at some points to lose its unity. All sorts of missionary societies and bands - with different purposes, methods of work, and forms of pledge and constitution - were springing up. It was plain that it would lose much of its power should its unity be destroyed. 2) A tendency to a decline in some colleges. Because not properly guarded and developed, some bands of volunteers had grown cold. 3) A tendency to conflict with existing agencies appeared in a very few places. All of these tendencies were decidedly out of harmony with the original spirit and purpose of the Volunteer Movement; accordingly, the Volunteers at Northfield decided that immediate steps should be taken toward a wise organization.

Another consideration helped to influence them in this decision, and that was a desire

to extend the movement. Messengers Wilder and Forman, in their tour, had been unable to touch more than one-fifth of the higher educational institutions of America. Upon Mr. Wilder was urged the importance of his spending another year among the colleges which he had previously visited, and thoroughly organizing the missionary volunteers, - a work which was also appointed to permanently organize the Volunteer Movement. That Committee, after long and prayerful consideration, decided that the movement should be confined to students. It was therefore named the Students Volunteer Movement for foreign Missions. It was also noted that practically all of the volunteers were members of some one of the three great interdenominational student organizations; vis., the College Young Men's Christian Association, The College Young Women's Christian Association, and the Inter-Seminary Missionary Alliance. This suggested the plan of placing at the head of the movement a permanent Executive committee of three, one to be appointed by each of the three organizations, which should have power to develop and facilitate the movement in harmony with the spirit and constitutions of these three organizations. The plan was first submitted to the College Committee of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, and they heartily approved. They appointed as their representative Mr. J. R. Mott. Later the plan was fully approved by the National Committee of the Young Women's Christian Association, and Miss Nettie Dunn was chosen to represent them. The Executive Committee of the Inter-Seminary Missionary Alliance endorsed the plan, and named Mr. Wilder to represent them.

The new Executive Committee began its work in January, 1889. Since then they have perfected a plan of organization for the movement which has commended itself to the leaders of the different denominations to which it has been submitted. The plan of the organization may be briefly outlined, as follows:

- 1.) The Executive Committee shall lay and execute plans for developing the movement wherever it exists, and for extending it to the higher educational institutions which have not yet come in contact with it.
- 2.) The Committee has its agents, the principal one of whom is the Traveling Secretary. Mr. Wilder has filled this office during this past college year (September, 1888, to August, 1889). During that time he visited ninety-three leading institutions, in which he developed the missionary department of the college Associations. He has also secured nearly six hundred new volunteers. In more than thirty colleges he has wisely induced independent missionary organizations to merge themselves into the missionary department of the college Associations. Another striking feature of his work this year has been the fact that over forty institutions have been led to undertake the support of an alumnus in the foreign field. Their total annual contribution amounted to twenty-six thousand dollars. The plan pursued in denominational colleges has been to have the men sent by the regular Church Boards. In undenominational colleges, such as State universities, the money is usually contributed to some from of undenominational effort; as, for example, the extension of the regular Association work in the foreign lands. Mr. Wilder now retires from this position to complete his seminary course preparatory to going out to India, and Mr. Robert E. Speer, of the class of 1889 of Princeton College, has been chosen to succeed him. The Committee has also a Corresponding Secretary and an Editorial Secretary.
- 3.) There is an advisory Committee composed of seven persons - five representing as

many of the leading evangelical denominations, and one each from the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations. The Executive Committee is to confer with this Committee about every new step which is taken, so that nothing will be done which will justify unfavorable criticism. The movement is designed to help the Church Boards in every way possible, and in no sense to encroach upon their territory or to conflict with their work.

4.) Mr. Speer will be unable to visit more than one-fifth of the colleges next year. It was therefore plain that some other means must be devised in order to bring the other colleges in touch with the movement. The Executive Committee have accordingly decided to have a Corresponding Member in every State and Province in which the movement has been sufficiently introduced and established to secure its permanency. This Corresponding Member will be the agent of the Executive Committee in that State, and carry out their policy; viz., to conserve and extend the movement in the State. The Traveling Secretary will touch only the leading colleges in each State. In States where it is thought to be advisable there will be a Corresponding Committee instead of a Corresponding Member. The States of Maine, New Jersey, and North Carolina were organized on this plan last year, and a strong work was done in each of them. New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kansas will be organized this year. The work in a State consists not only in arousing more missionary interest in the colleges and seminaries, but also in quickening the missionary spirit in the churches by means of visits from volunteers. Those who have the time and fitness for such work spend all or a part of their vacations in assisting churches. In this way the contributions of many of the churches have been increased. One volunteer, in less than a month, influenced a number of churches to contribute over five thousand dollars to missions over and above what they were already giving to that cause. This work is attempted only where the full approval of the church is previously obtained, and has always been highly endorsed by the pastors of the different denominations. A young man who is actually going into the foreign field has a peculiar influence over a congregation.

5.) In the colleges the movement will be organized as the Missionary Department of the College Association. The reasons for this are clear. It will ensure the permanency of the missionary interest in the college by placing it under the direction of an organization, which from its very nature is destined to be permanent as long as the college exists. Moreover, by making it a department of the Association it will have a far wider constituency and basis of support, because the Association includes students who are interested in five or six distinct lines of work, and not simply one. Experience has abundantly proved that this is the best plan. In more than sixty colleges during the last two years independent missionary societies have merged into the Associations, and not one of them has changed back to the old plan. The chairman of the Missionary Department of the Association should, where possible, be a volunteer.

The movement has far outgrown the early expectations of its nearest friends. Even Dr. Pierson and Mr. Wilder at its inception did not expect over one thousand volunteers from the American colleges. Today there are recorded three thousand eight hundred and forty-seven volunteers ready, or preparing, to proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ" in every land. This made Dr. McCosh ask: "Has any such offering of living young men and women been presented in our age, in our country, in any age, or in any country, since the day of Pentecost?" a very large

majority of these are still in the different college classes. Probably not more than five hundred have actually sailed for foreign lands. Today, after over one hundred years of Protestant missionary effort, there are only about six thousand ordained missionaries in the foreign field. If the Church does not send out but one-half of the present number of volunteers, it will still mark one of the most significant and encouraging chapters in the annals of the Christian Church. But every one of the three thousand eight hundred and forty-seven volunteers is needed, and many more. Mr. Wishard writes back from Japan that twenty thousand native and foreign ministers are needed in that fast-moving Empire before the year 1900 in order to keep pace with the inroads of infidelity. Dr. Chamberlain appeals for five thousand missionaries for India during this century.

"The evangelization of the world in this generation" is the watchcry of the Students Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. What does this mean? At a convocation of missionaries held a few months ago in India it was estimated that at least one foreign missionary was needed for every fifty thousand people in unevangelized lands. This is regarded as a conservative estimate. It means, then, that at least twenty thousand foreign missionaries are needed in order to "preach the gospel to every creature" within this generation. Is this too much to ask and to expect? Already nearly four thousand have volunteered in less than two hundred colleges from those same colleges, during this generation, will pass over a score of classes to be influenced by this movement before they graduate. There are hundreds of colleges, which have not yet been touched by it. The colleges of the south, of the far west, and of the Maritime Provinces know almost nothing about it. There are two hundred medical colleges and schools in America from which are going annually thousands of graduates. Nineteen-twentieths of those graduates are locating in this country, where there is one physician to every six hundred of the population, whereas in unevangelized lands there is not more than one medical missionary to every one million of the population. Are twenty thousand volunteers too many to ask and expect from this generation? Over two million young men and women will go out from our higher institutions of learning within this generation. The foreign field calls for only one one-hundredth of them. But where will the money come from to send and support them? It would take only one six-hundredth of the present wealth of the member of the Christian Church in America and England. There are men enough to spare for this grandest mission of the ages. There is money enough to spare to send them. May the Spirit of Christ lead His Church to consecrate her men and money to the carrying out of His last command!



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