

C. H. Taylor

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The Volunteer Pledge.



THE PLEDGE

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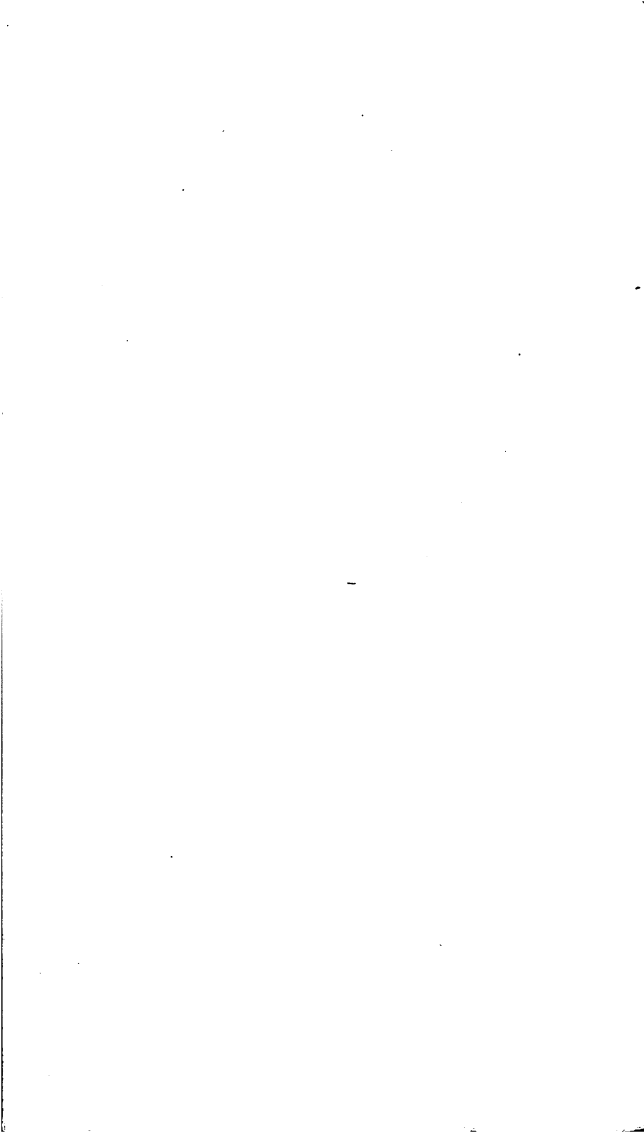
STUDENT VOLUNTEER

MOVEMENT FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

BY

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THE PLEDGE OF THE STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

I. THE NECESSITY FOR A PLEDGE.

I. To secure decisions.

"Man, of all luggage, is the hardest to move." To show a man his sinfulness is comparatively easy; to move him to act is the most difficult part of evangelistic work. The head heeds the admonition; the heart postpones assent. Hundreds of gospel sermons have fallen short of their object because decision was not urged; hence the importance of inquiry meetings and "after meetings," where fishers for men pull in the net which was previously lowered for a draught. The Apostle Paul urges immediate decision even upon one who was about to commit suicide, and the Philippian jailer "was baptized, he and all his, *straightway*."

The principle of decision is operative in successful work among Christians. One speaker impresses upon his audience the importance of Bible study, but presents no plan, and pleads for no decisions; the other secures pledges and organizes a class. "When the nail of conviction is driven in, he clinches

it with a practical twist." Should not the same plan be pursued in missionary meetings to secure prayer, money, and men? General appeals for *prayer* do good. But is not more accomplished by organizing prayer groups, whose members are pledged to pray for definite objects, designating the fields and laborers? In securing *money* for missions, many workers adopt the same plan. When hearts heed their appeals and are eager to aid, then they name a definite object and elicit contributions. Here again a pledge is helpful: it registers decisions, strengthens determinations, and conserves interest. Why not employ the same method in securing *men* to man missionary stations? For years students had been stirred by strong speakers. The addresses were powerful, the needs urgent, the command clear. Seldom was *decision* urged. In my college days much was read and said about missions, but little with reference to deciding to go. We recognized the needs, but did not make a personal application of them to ourselves. It was assumed that the time to decide was when we neared the completion of our professional courses of study. So college men drifted away from missions; for the popular current is away from foreign missions.

About three years ago it was stated that out of every dollar raised for Christian work in the United States ninety-eight cents remain at home; out of every hundred thousand communicants only twenty-one go abroad. "In drawing a map of Europe, I may outline Russia, for example, with geographical nicety, respecting conscientiously its longitudinal and latitudinal dimensions, and then go on, but with a different scale, to do the same thing for Germany, England, and the rest of the Continent. However accurate my delineation of each country may have been, my map of Europe as a whole will be vitiated by that fatal alteration of scale." Relative to the world's evangelization, Africa and Asia, in the popular mind, are drawn on the same scale; but the United States is magnified out of all proportion, *even five hundred times*; for, proportionately, there are five hundred times as many ministers in the United States as ordained missionaries in foreign fields. *Our map of the world is vitiated by this fatal alteration of scale.*

Facts show that though "God is no respecter of persons," though the African has as much of a claim on the gospel as the American, nevertheless the popular current is against foreign missions. Men do not drift

into foreign work, the drift is the other way. If recruits are to be secured for this work, they must be brought face to face with *decision* — with the question, Why not go? A pledge presents this question in definite form; it makes the matter of decision tangible.

2. To secure decisions early in the course of study.

What are the advantages of an early decision? Men's minds are thus made up before prejudiced by other, and what may appear to some, as more inviting spheres of work. If laymen are to be secured for foreign service, their decisions must be reached while undergraduates in college; otherwise they may select some occupation calculated to keep them in the United States. It is well also for prospective divinity students to decide early, before the pressure of a "good call" to a city church warps their judgments.

An early decision allows more time for preparation. This is an age of specialists. To succeed in anything a man must concentrate time and study on that one thing. The man who goes to a strange land and stranger people should be trained in the religions, customs, literature, and peculiarities of those among whom his life is to be spent. The

student who decides in his freshman year can devote the remaining years in college and the three years of theology and medicine to a prayerful study of the foreign field. Has not such a man an advantage over one whose decision is not reached until the senior year in his professional course, and who can give but a few weeks to personal study and preparation for foreign service?

A pledged man can appeal more effectively for money and men: he says, "Come"; professors and pastors say, "Go." One of the volunteers secured, in six weeks' campaign, pledges for five thousand dollars. Men were moved because the appeals came from a heart given to foreign work. The speaker had pledged his life: the hearers felt constrained to give at least their money. Another volunteer secured, in three months, a hundred recruits. Many of these had been unmoved by more rhetorical appeals of abler men, who had not given their lives to the work of foreign missions. This volunteer writes that he may have done more for foreign missions in those three months than he can ever accomplish on foreign soil. If the hundred prove to be as good laborers as he, his life will be multiplied a hundredfold. Had he remained undecided until the time

of sailing, the above results would have been impossible. In his work, this volunteer found a pledge indispensable.

Let a number of students decide early: let them, during their collegiate, medical, and theological courses of study, enlist men and money for foreign service,—and the problem of the world's evangelization will soon be solved. But experience proves the inadequacy of previous methods. To secure such an uprising a pledge is necessary. Before the Pledge was inaugurated but few college men were deciding to become foreign missionaries. From the records of the college Young Men's Christian Association we learn that, "In 1885, the number of persons reported who intended to be foreign missionaries was 187, an average of 3 in each of the 65 institutions reporting. In 1886, 126 were reported by 59 institutions, an average of only 2. This was before the inception of the Student Volunteer Movement. In 1887, after the movement had been in progress but eight months, 109 institutions reported 943, an average of nearly 9."

3. To confirm those who have decided.

Sowing seed is not sufficient; weeding and watering are necessary. Gaining converts is

not enough ; hence the Apostle Paul “ went over the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, *strengthening* all the disciples.” When Messrs. C. T. Studd and Stanley P. Smith appealed to British students, hundreds were moved, and scores signified a purpose to become foreign missionaries. Such eloquent scriptural appeals from consecrated hearts were irresistible. This beginning promised a mighty movement. A resident of England, conversant with missionary matters, writes recently that this uprising “ has no permanent representation to-day in England, as far as I know.” Why was not the work of the “ Cambridge Band ” followed up and conserved ? Doubtless the necessity of some declaration or pledge was not suggested to the leaders. Such an uprising on either side of the Atlantic cannot be conserved without securing the names of those who need strengthening. Of what avail would the names be unless the names of men who have decided on some course of action ? Hence the necessity for a pledge.

In short, but for the Pledge, could there be a Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions ? Volunteers for what ? How differentiated from other Christians ? The bond which binds together these five thou-

sand recruits is the Pledge ; but for it the Movement would be meaningless.

II. WHAT SHALL THE PLEDGE BE?

Thus far we have considered the necessity for some pledge as a *sine qua non* for the existence of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. Now arises the question, "What shall this pledge be?" Here two classes confront us: the one conservative; the other radical.

1. The former say that the field is the world: no Christian should bind himself to work only in America; nor is he justified in promising to labor anywhere except in America, since America is a part of the world. There must be no exceptions in our world-wide consecration; there must be no line of demarkation between the home and foreign fields: the field is one. Hence they say, Let the pledge read, "We are willing to go anywhere for Christ."

There are several objections to such a pledge. *First*: It would be meaningless. Every Christian should sign it; for a willingness to go anywhere is a badge of discipleship. "So, likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." *Secondly*: Such a pledge

would be equivalent to that taken when uniting with the church. We then promised to surrender all to Christ. What occasion for another pledge covering the same or less ground than the church pledge? Would not such a pledge reflect on the efficacy of the church pledge, or the honesty of him who has united with the church? *Thirdly*: This pledge, though theoretically placing the foreign fields on a par with the home fields, practically leaves the advantage on the home side, for lack of decision to go means stay. As long as the children of Israel lacked decision to leave Egypt, so long they remained in the land of bondage. Such indecision is not neutral: "possession is nine-tenths of the law." Egypt possesses them. Indecision in the wilderness is neutral, for they are now between Egypt and Canaan. So, if we were half way distant between America and Africa, indecision as to laboring in either land would be fair; for a lack of decision to go to Africa would not be equivalent to remaining in America.

Thus far we have assumed an absence of bias. We have taken it for granted that the man undecided as to his field for work is unprejudiced; he has no preferences; he is as willing to labor in Africa as America. Un-

fortunately such men are rare. Consciously or unconsciously, patriotism, home ties, and a pleasant environment attract ; a land of aliens, the dread of loneliness, and uncongenial surroundings repel. Does not this account for the fact that nine-tenths of our money, men, and prayers are centered on one twenty-sixth of the world's population? Does this not explain why two-thirds of our race know nothing of Christ? The heathen labor under the disadvantage of distance and degradation. A penny placed close to the eye may hide the sun. A home parish selfishly close to the heart may hide the heathen from our spiritual vision. One instinctively prefers the cultured to cannibals. Hence, the insufficiency of a pledge simply signifying to go or stay. We need a pledge voicing Paul's purpose "to preach the gospel in the regions beyond," and "not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand" ; a pledge to press into places "not where Christ was named," lest we "should build upon another man's foundation."

2. The other class suggests an iron-clad pledge whose signers must enter foreign service whether or no. They would lay a track to foreign lands along which there are no switches to be opened by prayer or Provi-

dence. They desire a pledge so strong that none can break it.

There are three objections to this pledge. *First:* The strongest pledge cannot hold all the signers. In every enterprise we find men who say "I go sir, and went not." The marriage pledge is broken by many. Did not Israel violate solemn vows of allegiance to Jehovah? What does the word "backslider" signify but a broken church pledge? *Secondly:* Such a pledge would not secure the signatures of sensitive Christians who shrink from a severe pledge. *Thirdly:* Such a pledge would be unscriptural. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, . . . whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."

The safe course lies between this Scylla and Charybdis. The Pledge of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions avoids either extreme; for it means more than a willingness to go anywhere, it signifies a purpose to enter foreign service. On the other hand, men, by signing it, do not take their lives into their own control: the signers are still under God's direction; they will not become foreign missionaries unless He permit.

III. THE MEANING OF THE PLEDGE.

The Pledge of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions reads as follows : "*We are willing and desirous, God permitting, to become foreign missionaries.*" God permitting, not God willing. To permit means "not to prohibit or prevent" ; to will means "to decide, to determine, to decree." The former places the burden of proof on the signer ; the latter on God. The former signifies our purpose to go abroad unless God prevent ; the latter our purpose to go abroad if God approve. In the latter case, we profess ignorance concerning His will : He may want us to go, He may wish us to stay. The signers of the former will go to the front unless detailed by the captain for service in the rear ; the latter are not satisfied with the general command to move forward ; they remain in their intrenchments ; they will not move until the commander make known his will in a special manner to each private. The difference between the two is as great as that between motion and rest. The former go unless stopped ; the latter stay unless spurred on.

The pledge means, *We are fully determined to become foreign missionaries unless God block the way.*

Those who sign it signify that the presumption is in favor of foreign missions. They place the burden of proof on America. They throw open the throttle-valve and steam out on the main track of the greatest need, believing that God will switch them off on a side track if he wants them in less needy fields. They press into the province of Asia until "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." After coming into Mysia they essay to go into Bithynia, till the Spirit suffer them not. Then they pass, like Paul, into other lands, going "not to those who need them, but to those who need them most."

What does *renouncing* the Pledge mean? It cannot be applied to those who are providentially prevented from becoming foreign missionaries. If God does not permit their going, they are exempt, for the Pledge reads, "We are willing and desirous, God *permitting*," etc. It should be applied to those who, though having no valid excuse for remaining in America, have renounced all thoughts of becoming foreign missionaries.

What is a valid excuse? This must be settled by each volunteer with God. But if after prayer he be convinced of his unfitness to go, he owes it to himself and to the Stu-

dent Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions that this unfitness be demonstrated; otherwise, he will be regarded as one who "having put his hand to the plough," has looked back. To avoid the appearance of evil, he should apply to the board of foreign missions of some evangelical denomination. The examination of candidates by these boards is most thorough. One unqualified for the work rarely, if ever, passes muster, since the requirements are most rigid. The candidate need not fear confiding in the secretaries, who can appreciate heart as well as head difficulties. If, after squarely facing the issue, the board reject him, he is exempt before our Movement, since the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions co-operates with the missionary societies, and abides by their decision. But such exemption by no means proves that he is exempt before God. Missionary organizations are fallible. One of Africa's best missionaries was rejected by three boards. Like William Carey, he felt, "Go I must, or guilt will rest on my soul."

As long as a volunteer purposes applying eventually to some foreign missionary board, we keep his name on our list; but if he has not applied to any society, and does not in-

tend to do so, we must regard him as no longer a volunteer. We must erase his name, lest by continuing in our ranks he imperil the steadfastness of others. "What man is fearful and faint hearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

IV. USE OF THE PLEDGE.

The following suggestions may be of service to volunteers engaged in addressing churches and institutions of learning : —

1. In theological seminaries, pass the Pledge for signatures in the main meeting, since the audience is composed of Christians.

2. In colleges, at the close of the address, invite all especially interested in foreign work to remain for a brief consecration service. In this after meeting the Pledge may be circulated.

3. In preparatory schools and churches, experience has shown that it is not advisable to circulate the Pledge in the main meeting. Invite all whose hearts are specially touched to tarry for a service of prayer. During this after service, press home the importance of decision, and so explain the Pledge that none

can mistake its meaning. But do not pass the Pledge : remember that those before you are young ; their minds are immature and undisciplined. Adopt an additional precaution : ask those fully decided upon foreign work to tarry at the close of this after meeting. Be much in prayer for these young recruits. Again explain to each, individually, the solemn import of the step to be taken. If, after personal probing, you are convinced of their sincerity, allow them to sign. But do not rebuff even the youngest, since some of our best missionaries decided on foreign work while preparatory students.

The following cautions should be observed. *First:* After explaining the Pledge, always allow an opportunity for questions. These will draw out a fuller explanation and clear up any misapprehension. *Secondly:* Never use the Pledge without prayer.

V. WHO SHALL USE THE PLEDGE?

We have seen that a wrong or imperfect interpretation of the Pledge may do damage to the Movement ; hence, great care should be exercised in selecting right men to use it.

1. It is to be used by all officially connected with the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions.

2. By the leaders of bands of volunteers. After being instructed in its use by the field secretary or corresponding member, all volunteers should be urged to do personal work ; but when, as a result of such work, a recruit is secured, he should not be allowed to sign until the leader of the band be convinced that he thoroughly understands the Pledge.*

3. The Pledge may be used by carefully selected and competent men expecting to address churches or institutions. These workers should watch the field secretary in his use of the Pledge. They should also avail themselves of valuable suggestions given at summer schools for Bible study.

The Pledge cannot be handled too carefully. It is the keystone to the arch of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. Urge home its importance. But do not decide the foreign missionary question for another. The world can be won for Christ in

* Every band should provide itself with a large, strongly bound book containing the Pledge. Under the Pledge, room should be left for the name of each volunteer, denomination, class, home address, date of signing, preferences as to field and method of work, etc. Space should also be allowed for future memoranda as to date of sailing, married or single, society with which he is connected, where stationed, post office address, reports of work, years of service abroad, etc. Such a book will prove of great value in future years.

this generation, but not by drafted troops. God calls for volunteers, men like Amasiah, "who willingly offered himself unto the Lord. and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valor;" men like Bezaleel and Aholiab: "even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it;" men like David's volunteers: "For at that time, day by day, there came to David to help him, until there was a great host, like the host of God;" men who willingly "jeoparded their lives unto the death in high places of the field." Ten such men are worth more than ten thousand drafted troops. "The stars in their courses fought" for these volunteers, and "the river of Kishon swept" their enemies away. "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves." God's church will be avenged when the young men of Christendom have "willingly offered themselves" for the conquest of the world. Five thousand are already pledged. More are coming. The prophecy is being verified, "Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power: In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning. Thou hast the dew of thy youth."



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