

## Robert Wilder

**"It is my purpose, if God permits, to become a foreign missionary."**

Robert Wilder was born in Kolhapur, India in 1863. His father, Royal Wilder, was one of the very first missionaries who sailed for India in 1846 as a result of the haystack prayer meeting. Royal Wilder, after thirty years of service, returned home from ill health. Robert was fourteen when his family came to the U.S. His family's heart for the mission field never dampened. While Wilder was a student at Princeton University, he met with several students to study the Bible and to pray for missions on a regular basis. When he was a junior, Wilder attended a conference of the 'Interseminary Alliance' and went home motivated to challenge students to pray for a revival at Princeton and increase their interest in missions. Wilder and his friends founded the 'Princeton Foreign Mission Society' that same semester. **The purpose of the society was to take a bold stance on missions with the intent and purpose of being raised as missionaries.** At the same time, Robert's sister Grace was going to an all-girls school, Mt. Holyoke, with the same intention to "hold ourselves willing and desirous to do the Lord's work wherever He may call us, even if it be in a foreign land." When the Princeton group met on Sunday afternoons, Grace was in another room praying for them. In Robert's senior year, he and Grace got together regularly and prayed for an extensive missionary movement in the American colleges and universities.

In the summer of 1886, Wilder attended a one month Bible conference sponsored by D.L. Moody and organized by Luther Wishard of the YMCA at Mt. Hermon in New York. Before Robert had even left for the conference, he and his sister Grace had prayed that **God would raise up 100 students who would volunteer out of that conference for missionary service.**

It was not even planned for foreign missions to be a central part of the conference, but Wilder convinced D.L. Moody to have a world mission night, and on top of that, Wilder got a group of guys together to pray every afternoon of the conference for foreign missions. The prayer group grew to 21 and each one of them signed a declaration Wilder had brought. It read, **"We, the undersigned, declare ourselves willing and desirous, God permitting, to go to the unevangelized portions of the world."** These students not only signed the declaration, but then they started challenging others during the conference. **Missions was being talked about everywhere!**

Wilder ended up organizing an entire night of the conference where students presented the spiritual need of 10 nations. The audience was genuinely moved and silent as they heard about lost souls in China, India, Persia, Japan, Native America, Siam, Germany, Armenia, Denmark, and Norway. **On the last day of the conference, 99 students had signed the missionary declaration. At their farewell meeting while they were praying, one more person slipped, completing what is now known as the Mount Hermon 100. Grace's prayers had been answered!**

The next school year, Robert and a fellow volunteer from Princeton traveled to 162 campuses and received **2,106** more volunteers (**500 of these were women**) who were committed to support missionaries through prayer and finances, and they would begin training with the goal of going overseas as missionaries. Among these volunteers were some of the greatest missionary leaders, including Samuel Zwemer and Robert Speer. **One major impact all of these volunteers had was the American churches were mobilized and challenged to have a mission. Churches who had denied the command of Jesus to go into all the world were repenting.** This became known as the 'Forward Movement' of churches.

In 1888, the missionary movement was formally organized as the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) and Wilder became the traveling secretary. The SVM's motto was "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation." In 1893, Wilder obeyed his pledge and moved to India with his wife. Robert continued to come back to the SVM conferences to mobilize students and tell them of the need. At one conference he spoke at, **he urged students to prove Christ is risen and live a spirit-filled like today.** He said, **"The early Christians turned the world upside down because they themselves were first turned upside down by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the time Wilder left India, India had hundreds if not thousands of student volunteers working there.**

In the next 40 years the SVM became the greatest single force for missions that the world has ever seen. **At least 20,000 young people went overseas as a result of its ministry.** It spread across into England and Europe. In 1938, at age 75, Robert Wilder was laid to rest.

Sources: Pierce, Dr. Dan. *The SVM and Robert Wilder*. Princeton UBF.

<http://grove.ship.edu/ubf/leaders/wilder.htm> Gary, Jay. *Come with Me: The Story of the SVM*. 1986.