

# **Past is Prologue: Student Christian Movement Women Leaders, 1880-1920**

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**Abstract:**

The focus of this presentation is to tell the previously untold story through narratives of three courageous women who served as leaders in the early international Student Christian Movement (SCM). Women served in the SCM's three major leadership capacities: committee member, secretary, and pioneer. Committees were the central governing bodies that directed local, national and international student groups. Secretaries were pastors to students and pioneers were developers of new ministries for the movement. I have selected three women, Winifred Mary Sedgwick, Grace Helena Saunders and Frances Cousins Gage, who I feel best shed light on how this generation of missionary women negotiated their "contemporary landscape." Drawing on historical records of the SCM, these stories establish the role of women in the organization from its inception, stressing not only the pressures and prejudices they faced but also the pioneering work and the valuable contributions they offered. To grasp exactly how these SCM women impact our thinking today, we will deal with how they handled cultural awareness, ecumenism and dangerous political contexts.

**Introduction**

If they could come back to life, women leaders of the late Victorian Era Student Christian Movement (SCM) would feel right at home with the themes of this conference. They would resonate with our fixation with how to navigate our "increasingly complex public arena," and how they could be missionally faithful and yet respectful of social differences. They might even be surprised that we in 2017 are still asking these questions. On the other hand, precisely because these questions have plagued each generation of missionaries and missiologists, they might not be surprised at all.

Because the SCM's women leaders faced these same questions, they provide historical models for how to deal with complex public life, missional faithfulness, and respect for social differences. They can help us prepare our students for faithful global mission work. For our purposes, like Shakespeare said, "What's Past is Prologue" (Shakespeare 1610-1611: Act 2, Scene 1).

**Background**

The movement that these women served was called the Student Christian Movement. The SCM began in earnest the late nineteenth century as a missionary movement to a fast-growing college and university community. In its heyday between 1880 and 1920, the SCM spread across the globe with its goal of reaching the student world for Christ and through students, triggering

a transformation of the world. The SCM combined a rather dizzyingly array of local, regional, and national societies into one very large international student movement which both men and women could join and lead.

Groups falling under the SCM umbrella included the student departments of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVMFM) and their non-North American counterparts, such as the Student Volunteer Missionary Union (SVMU), SCMs in different countries, and the global World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).<sup>1</sup>

Picking which stories to tell from over thirty-five women's biographies from my upcoming book, *Women Leaders in the Student Christian Movement, 1880-1920. American Society of Missiology Series* (Maryknoll, NY: 2017), is a difficult task. Women served in the SCM's three major leadership capacities: committee member, secretary, and pioneer. Committees were the central governing bodies that directed local, national, and international student groups, secretaries were pastors to students and staff and pioneers were developers of new ministries for the movement.

I have selected the stories of Winifred Mary Sedgwick, Grace Helena Saunders and Frances Cousins Gage because I feel they best shed light on how their generation of missionary women negotiated their "contemporary landscape." Drawing on historical records of the SCM, these stories establish the role of women in the organization from its inception, stressing not only the pressures and prejudices they faced, but also the pioneering work and the valuable contributions they offered. To grasp exactly how these SCM women navigated their contemporary contexts, we will explore how they handled cultural awareness, ecumenism, and dangerous, life-threatening political contexts.

### **Developing Cultural Awareness**

For our purpose, culture refers to those attitudes, feelings, values, and behavior that characterize and inform a particular social group and/or geographic location. SCM women leaders were forced to become acquainted with several cultures because of the internationalism of the SCM's membership and its locations for ministry. They had to understand the student world as a whole as well as the cultures from which students came from and in which students now lived. So, the SCM's women had to ask themselves, "How do I go about becoming culturally aware?"

### **Winifred Mary Sedgwick (1880-1922)**

Although she never used the term cultural awareness, Winifred Mary Sedgwick had a definite strategy that would allow her to understand the attitudes, feelings, values, and behavior found in her SCM ministries in Geneva, Switzerland (1905-1906) and Moscow, Russia (1907-1909). Because of the rich sources available, particularly her official reports and letters, Sedgwick's efforts offer a substantive picture of how a missionary can develop cultural awareness in a given location or with a given social group.

Of medium height, with slightly round-shoulders, an oval face, very large brown eyes, and golden brown hair, the humorous but always frail Sedgwick was born into a comfortable Birmingham, England family. Baptized into the Church of England in 1880, Sedgwick remained a devout member of this church throughout her short life. About her faith, she said, "To me it is huge comfort that God intends my perfection and does not adapt His standard to mine" (Tatlow 1933: 495). Sedgwick received her education at Somerville College, Oxford (1899-1903, BA, 1921 with Honors in Modern European History, Class II) and Dublin (BA, 1905). Inside SCM circles, Sedgwick played a variety of roles. At Somerville, Sedgwick was treasurer of the Christian Union (1901-02) and then with the British movement, co-secretary, traveling secretary, and evangelist for women students (1903-05 and 1909-14), and finally, with the WSCF, a pioneer (1905-09). After 1914, Sedgwick became warden of Duff House London, a YWCA training center, which offered training classes for YWCA leaders. She was honored by the British government with a British Military Medal for her service in Étaples, France from 1917-1918. Working as a YMCA canteen worker, Sedgwick furnished frontline soldiers with food, fellowship, classes and religious activities. Sedgwick contracted influenza and died in 1922 at the young age of forty-two. She left an estate worth £398,000 in 2016 pounds.

Because of her personality, Sedgwick had the skills necessary for a culturally-aware missionary. About her, Tissington Tatlow, the former general secretary of the British SCM, said:

One's first impression of Winifred was likely to be that she was making a mental analysis of you. She had an incisive, analytical mind... She was immensely interested in people, watched them, considered their motives, and tried to find the principles, good or bad, on which they lived. Some found her critical mind a barrier, but her love of people was deep and true, she had a wealth of kindness and sympathy, and students sought her help in large numbers... The friendship she gave to her friends was stimulating and bracing. She gave her friendship freely to both men and women... She had all

the qualities needed for friendship at its best—steadfastness, insight, candor, patience and tenderness. Perhaps her chief characteristic as a friend was to stimulate. ‘I always feel as if I had had my head shampooed when I have seen Winifred Sedgwick... This gift never failed her, it was partly due to the quality of her mind, and partly due to her vivid interest in everything around her. (1933: 490-491, 494-495)

The first step Sedgwick took to become acquainted with her local contexts was to learn to speak a local language. This helped the missionary communicate and, more importantly, understand her environment, since words often convey the subtleties of a locality’s culture. In her February 22-March 6, 1908 comments, Sedgwick was forthright about her struggles with Russian: “My Russian gets on slowly, and I feel I have to give much time to it. It is an awful language. I find I often understand the gist of conversation without knowing the actual words—so that I believe the girls here think I know far more than I say—and that I understand all their conversation. It is rather a joke!”

To fully appreciate the setting of their ministry, a missionary like Sedgwick had to be able to distinguish between local customs and their own. Sedgwick was shocked by some varying local customs. On November 26, 1905, she observed about a fellow resident at her lodging: “She is very dear, very attractive but my stars—talk of the sex question—she is the whole sex question in herself. There are two men in this pension, to whom she is very attractive—and I can’t cry ‘wolf’ too often, but not too much ‘a l’anglaise.’ The continental ideas of propriety differ from ours! Then she is a little pagan.”

Given that the SCM was a religious organization, it was imperative that one of their missionaries understood local religious beliefs and practices. In her February 22-March 6, 1908 comments, Sedgwick described a conversation she had with a man named Bulgakov, who came to her because he thought she was an expert on English religion.<sup>2</sup> The two discussed the influence of the Church of England on the WSCF, and he asked her what she felt about the value of church life. Bulgakov and Sedgwick also had a heated debate about whether the statement of faith of the St. Petersburg SCM was acceptable. He felt that “I have repented, I have given myself to him and believe that he has accepted me” was “unwarranted daring on our part and very alien to the Slav temperament.” She, on the other hand, believed that this statement summarized what God expected Christians to believe. At the end, all Sedgwick could say was, “We discussed it for a long time, but I am afraid he did not understand.”

In her March 25, 1908 letter to Rouse, Sedgwick gave her opinions about differences between Russian Orthodox and Protestant Christianity. She believed that Orthodoxy stressed modeling one’s life after Christ and the saints,

while Protestantism emphasized putting one's faith in Christ's redeeming work. To her, this meant that Orthodox Christians focused on changing outward behavior, Protestants on changing the inner spirit.

Making individual and group contacts was one of the most crucial tasks carried out when learning about a new culture. "Hanging out" with the locals provided all sorts of insights into local and group values and behavior. On the other hand, "hanging out" with only one's kind severely limited cultural awareness. Contact work required a certain personality type which combined friendliness and the "gift of gab" with a strong faith and courageous spirit that actively sought out new people despite the possibility of rejection.

Sedgwick worked hard to establish relationships with individual students in Geneva and Moscow. Her contacts began at her residence, where she spent most of her time. In a February 22-March 6, 1908 letter from Moscow, Sedgwick wrote about the struggles she was having developing relationships in her pension. She felt her only point of contact was through music. Often eating alone, she observed the women around her and noticed a difference between her and other residents: "I do not feel I am getting on very well yet. I think, it has a special atmosphere of its own and a rather frivolous one—chiefly balls, and theater and young men. I think getting to know them is a slow process." As a whole on March 25, 1908, Sedgwick noted that Russian women "generally post themselves as being utterly indifferent." Yet, she did have some success in a two-hour debate with a "weird specimen," who appeared to take the entire matter without any seriousness. Sedgwick wrote that the two reached an understanding, and then talked quite honestly, even though they got no farther.

Sedgwick's ministry with Russian men seems to have been more successful than her work with women. Writing to fellow SCM women leader Ruth Rouse, she observed, "Last night, the President of the Society which runs this 'intranat' came here and sent for me... He asked me various questions as to my reasons for coming here and I told him quite frankly... at the end of our interview, he gave me his card and asked me to call next Thursday."<sup>3</sup>

In order to more fully understand local life, Sedgwick also labored tirelessly to improve existing student groups and to develop new ones at the Universities of Geneva and Moscow. In group activities, she could learn about many different beliefs and practices found in her mission field.

Sedgwick contacted student groups outside her residence. Following John R. Mott's tactic, she sought out "strategic points" or places where students gathered that were especially advantageous for reaching them. In a November 26, 1905 note, Sedgwick reported that a family's monthly open house for students was such a location: "I rather fancy that to Mott this house is a

strategic point.” She joined student groups, like the *Libertas* (a temperance club), a study group, and attended lectures. Sedgwick joined a group of eight students and one professor, where she labeled herself the lone feminist.

Sedgwick’s ministry at what was later called the *Brasserie Meeting* in Geneva, Switzerland was one of the most important examples of how she contacted groups of students. The gathering got its name because it was held at the *Café Brasserie*, a local pub well-known as a gathering place for socialist agitation.

The *Brasserie Meeting* was held on January 30, 1906 and was the result of the efforts by a small Christian group composed of Sedgwick and a group of men. Planners hoped the meeting would permit them to preach the Gospel or, at least, become acquainted with more students. Sedgwick and the men were shocked at the size of the crowd. From estimates, one-third of the university packed the café with an even mixture of foreign and Swiss students. The audience consisted of “long-haired men and short-haired women; faces stamped with sin, suspicion, hatred, sorrow and despair” (Rowland 1937: 211).

During the meeting, Sedgwick and three men each spoke for about ten minutes, giving a simple, direct account of what Jesus Christ meant to them. The audience greeted each speaker with rounds of applause, and mocking laughter. However, one older woman, “a well-known feminist,” told the crowd that she was bothered by the tone of the audience. The Christians had spoken honestly and were quite fair and serious. Yet, the crowd had made violent, mostly unfair attacks and had derided the speakers. In the end, according to Rouse, the older woman made the audience listen politely (1937: 211).

The meeting triggered a variety of responses. Sedgwick observed that the general opinion of the university community was that the Christians had made fools of themselves. Her public stance also changed her relationships with other women. On February 13, 1906, she noted that some women viewed her now as an “object of curiosity, a little mild surprise.” Some former acquaintances ceased to relate to her, while others became new friends.

Most important, contact work at the *Brasserie Meeting* paid off because it launched a series of meetings in which Sedgwick played an important role. She helped plan the first gathering that followed the *Brasserie Meeting*, but chose not to give a speech as she had at the earlier one. On February 13, 1906, she wrote, “The very thought of it makes me shiver (giving a speech)—one gets so sick of controversy! But it is obviously the right thing to do and if only as a result of it small groups may be formed for study, won’t it be worthwhile.” The meeting was attended by two hundred to three hundred students and afterwards most of the crowd remained to discuss future plans.

The group decided to hold regular meetings on announced topics directed by an oversight committee with representatives from the Christian and free-thought groups. When it was suggested that women be placed on this committee, Sedgwick was the logical person. Her enthusiasm was palatable in her February 28, 1906 note:

The first committee is to meet tomorrow and I am to be there to represent feminine Christianity. . . Isn't it thrilling? Or isn't it simply splendid? I could dance a jig of joy—I don't believe you would find such a society anywhere else—and if only it works and if only we can keep up this "entente cordiale" and meet each other fairly regularly just think of the possibilities of it. The audience seemed to think it was quite a good idea. Of course, we can't say a bit how it will actually work, but as a net result of our experiment, it is simply astonishing. It has been worthwhile.

Sedgwick was a good example of a missionary who developed cultural awareness in her mission field. Examples of how she did this include her attempt to learn Russian, local customs, the differences between Eastern and Anglican Christianity, and her contact work with individuals and groups.

### **Forging Ecumenical Relationships**

One of the SCM's founding principles was inter-denominationalism. Instead of having students from only one religious persuasion or making members ignore their denominational distinctives, the movement felt that students should bring the strengths of their denominations to the SCM. As the movement spread around the world, this Protestant movement encountered Eastern and Roman Christians. So, SCM women had to ask themselves, "How broadly constructed should the SCM be?" How can it minister to Eastern and Roman Christian students? What beliefs and practices from the East and Rome should be incorporated into this distinctly Protestant movement?

#### **Grace Helena Saunders (1874-1970)**

Grace Saunders had a very clear sense of how she should handle these ecumenical questions. Because of her official WSCF and YWCA reports and her own articles, she presents a clear picture of an SCM ecumenist.

Funded jointly by the WSCF and the World's YWCA, and armed with the SCM's widened ecumenical spirit, Grace Saunders served as a "kind of area-secretary" in Bulgaria from 1912-16 and again in 1919. She served in Serbia, Romania, and Hungary as well. Saunders had official funding, but there appeared to be a lack of clarity about her position. In periodicals, Saunders was



the Organizing Secretary for the Women's Students' Christian Association or YWCA Women's Secretary at Sophia University, Sophia, Bulgaria or maybe both.

Tall, blond, very confident, and artistically-inclined, Saunders was born into an extremely wealthy, large West End London family with royal blood. In 1874, she was baptized in the Church of England. One of her sisters, Una Mary Josephine Saunders, was also an SCM worker. Like her immediate neighbor, celebrated author Beatrice Potter, she was widely traveled. She took the famed Orient Express on her trips to and from the Balkans. She was a graduate of Kensington High School. Saunders never married and died at ninety-five years of age in Marylebone, London, not far from where she grew up next door to Potter.

To develop new ecumenical relationships, Saunders used a flexible, courageous leadership style. This was demonstrated by the following story:

She has developed greatly in powers of leadership and in general adaptability... To give you an example of the kind of things she is up to now--She came home steerage from America, just by way of a social experiment and on board ship indulged in public controversy with an anarchist, who was attacking Christianity and amongst all things marriage, in his address on deck. Grace ascended the tub to answer him in public. Various lines of thought that have been brought into her life have prepared her curiously well, I think, for dealing with some of the moral questions which are bound to come up. (Rouse 1910: 2-3)

Also, Saunders recognized and appreciated the existence of the Christian world beyond Protestantism. In her June, 1919 WSCF report on her ministry in the Balkans, Grace Helena Saunders wrote, "It is important that the YMCA and YWCA leaders should keep clearly in mind that 'Christian' is not synonymous with Protestant" (Saunders 1919: 7).

Saunders made this case because she was a realist and recognized the failures of the missionary movement because it had not moved beyond Protestantism in her heavily Eastern Christian context:

American and Congregational and Episcopal Methodist missions have been doing educational work in the country for fifty years, but the fact of their having formed Protestant communities, has been deeply resented by the nation as a whole. The Bulgarian YMCA (it is really a Young People's CA, as it includes girls) has grown up around these mission churches, and uses Protestant hymns and extemporary prayer,

which are regarded as foreign practices... It is owing to the Protestant associations of the name that it seems unlikely that the Bulgarian Student Association will be willing to affiliate, at least for a considerable time, to the YMCA or YWCA. (1919: 4)

To model her ecumenical spirit, Saunders developed her student ministry along distinctly Orthodox lines in terms of membership (i.e., more Orthodox than Protestant members), and atmosphere (i.e., she hung icons in the meeting rooms). She encouraged its members to participate in their local Orthodox church. Finally, Saunders advocated Orthodox Christians reach out to other Orthodox Christians.

Finally, Saunders fostered cordial relationships with Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders. In 1919, she received the endorsement of Orthodox Bishop Miron Christea of Karansehes, Romania.<sup>4</sup> In a formal letter to other Orthodox bishops, he wrote that he was pleased with her explanation of the aims and methods of SCM work. He also officially welcomed other SCM workers and hoped that other bishops would also. During the same period, Saunders met with Sister Augustine, a well-known nun of the St. Vincent de Paul Convent, a man named Bates of the British YMCA, and a man labelled Mr. Masterson and a woman named Mrs. Williams of the American YMCA.

In sum, Saunders was a good example of how a missionary can forge ecumenical relations. Her understanding that Christianity was bigger than her own version, her recognition that the dominant version of Christianity in her mission field was different than her own, her modifications of her own practices to fit the practices of her area of ministry, and finally her fostering of cordial relationships with local Christians representing different branches of Christianity demonstrated this fact.

### **Confronting Dangerous and Life Threatening Situations**

SCM women ministered in a world filled with menacing political situations. Examples include the Boer Wars, the Boxer Rebellion, the Balkan Crises, the Armenian Massacre, the oppressive climate of Tsarist Russia, the “scramble” for colonies, the arms race between Great Britain and Germany and World War I. They even faced oppressive local, petty dictators. So, SCM women had to ask themselves, “Should we send our missionaries to potentially life-threatening locations,” and “How do I as a missionary remain faithful to my call and yet handle these?”

### **Frances Cousens Gage (1863-1917)**

The story of Frances Cousens Gage was one of the most hair-raising tales in SCM history. Gage was a YWCA student traveling secretary in North America and Turkey. In SCM circles, the traveling secretary served as a pastor. While carrying out her ministry Gage found herself in the midst of the Marsovan Massacre and the Armenian Genocide. She became the first overseas American YWCA missionary to die while in service to the YWCA and the SCM. In all these, Gage navigated these treacherous events and yet maintained her committed Christian stance. Her life provides a lesson on how to do this.

At 5 ft. 6 in. in height with light hair and complexion, Gage was born into a middle class family in Quincy, Massachusetts and spent her life in Minnesota and Oregon. She attended Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Gage graduated as Valedictorian with a BS (1890) and afterwards was elected to Phi Beta Kappa as an alumni member. After college, her career involved teaching high school in Minnesota (1890-1891) and at the Girl's school in Marsovan, Turkey (1893-1898 and 1913-1916), working with the YWCA Student Department in Washington, Oregon and Idaho (1898-1913) where she was a traveling secretary in Oregon for the YWCA Student Department and a member of the executive committees of the northwest field committee of the YWCA, and ministering as a traveling secretary for the Foreign Department of the YWCA (1913-1916), where she was also a member of the general committee for the Christian Associations of the Turkish Empire. Wherever her career took her "the outlook of her heart was toward Turkey" (Wilson 1918: 55).

In North America, Gage faced a potentially life-threatening situation while serving as the YWCA traveling secretary on the Pacific Coast sometime between 1898-1913. At this time, she displayed one of her most outstanding qualities, her ability to face a problem that needed solving and then fixing it. She did not "take things laying down." Gage found that girls under her care could not ride a particular steamboat because it was not safe. So, she went straight to the headquarters of the Steamboat Company and told the company's president directly, "Your boats aren't safe for my girls to ride on." When the president said he agreed and said "Tell them not to use them," she responded quickly, "You've got to make your boats safe for my girls." And the president dutifully did what she demanded (*The Woman Citizen*, 1918: 474).

Gage had a firm faith commitment. Despite being raised in a Christian home, Gage later claimed that she did not want to become nor did she become a Christian until college. The impact of this may be what a later report noted about Gage's college years. She was said to have "inspired interest in missions

among the students, all of whom admired her fine intellectual abilities, her earnest spirit of consecration and her beautiful and attractive personality (*Mission Studies: Woman's Work in Foreign Lands* 1918: 27)."

In 1893, the Women's Board of Missions of the Interior (A Congregational missionary society) appointed Gage to teach at the Girl's School in Marsovan, Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Upon arriving in Turkey Gage was witness to what has become known as the Marsovan Massacre. That year, Ottoman troops took many Armenian students and faculty to jail and damaged some college buildings. This occurred because Armenian activists had displayed posters supporting Armenian rights. The Turks accused some of the school's Armenian students and faculty of colluding with the activists.

A *Los Angeles Herald* article in 1895 included a description of the massacre's events very close to the school from an unidentified person at the school (*Los Angeles Herald*, 1895: 2). This person might have been Gage herself, but since they are unidentified, no one will ever know. The article said, "A storm broke over Marsovan." The article's witness said that slaughter, shrieks, and yells could be heard close to the school. "Bullets came humming and struck the girl's school." The noise of soldiers banging on nearby doors could be made out also. The cries of a wounded woman could be heard just outside the school gates one entire day. About twenty-five soldiers guarded the institution and no one was permitted to attack the school nor harm the students or staff. Students and staff were huddled in a room. Several years later, because she was a woman of prayer, Gage would recall praying for protection in that room during the massacre.

Because she was a realistic person, in the fall of 1898, Gage came back to the United States and she was not sure she would ever return to Turkey. If she had lived one-hundred years later, she might be diagnosed as having Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The combination of her teaching load, the death of a close colleague, and the massacres had taken their toll.

Since the "outlook of her heart was toward Turkey," Gage was faithful to her call and returned there in 1913 or 1914 depending on which account one accepts. Gage's desire to return to Turkey, in particular Marsovan, was strengthened by her previous experience of living in Turkey and her knowledge of the Turkish language.

Travel was fraught with danger and it was difficult for missionaries, particularly women. Journeys inside Turkey and around the world included rough roads, exposure to all kinds of weather conditions and diseases with the absence of accessible health care, poor sanitation, and a lack of protection from robbers. During her first months in Turkey,

Gage spent eleven weeks traveling, checking out local associations and also examining the conditions of Turkish women. This trip included ten days of sea travel, twenty of wagon, two by horseback and twelve by rail. All-in-all she traveled over 2500 miles. She visited with a mix of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant believers as well as members of other religions. Gage had to be sensitive to the beliefs and practices of all these groups. During her travels, Gage generally spoke on “The Preciousness of Womanhood” to large audiences. In local associations, she gave evangelistic and inspirational speeches and she spoke in Armenian, Greek, Turkish, Islamic, Roman Catholic, and secular schools.

In 1915, Gage was caught up in what is known today as the Armenian Genocide (or the Armenian Holocaust, Armenian Massacres, or the Medz Yeghern, in Armenian, the “Great Crime”).<sup>6</sup> Her part in the Armenian Genocide occurred in 1915 when the genocide came to Marsovan. With the assistance of fellow teacher Charlotte Willard, her actions were considered to be “one of the most thrilling stories of women’s work during the war.” To many, it made her and Willard real life heroes.

One day in the summer of 1915, a force of Turkish soldiers came into the school compound. Armenian men and boys had already been taken. This time they came for Armenian women and girls. Depending on which account is to be believed, sixty-two or sixty-three were taken in fourteen open carts. Gage herself went to the classroom mentioned in the 1895 account to pray. As a result, she reaffirmed her belief that she had to defend all girls, including the ones just kidnapped.

Gage and Willard devised a plan to get the kidnapped women and girls back. They had to wait around six days to get the travel permits they applied for. But once they received these, they were off on the approximately one-hundred and thirteen mile journey. Fearlessly, Gage and Willard passed large groups of refugees as soldiers let them pass. The roads were crowded, dusty, and dangerous. They telegraphed the Governor of Silvas, an upcoming town, and asked him to hold the kidnap victims there. About an hour after their arrival there, most of the women and girls appeared. Undeterred by the violent reputation of the Governor and his soldiers, she had a “momentous interview” with them (1918: 99-100).<sup>7</sup> In the end, she convinced the Governor to let forty-eight women and girls return with Gage and Willard to Marsovan.

Recalling how the men listened to her and Willard, Gage would later say, “You might say that the Boli courteously gave us back fifty girls.” But to her intimate friends, she said, “The result was directly of God, nothing we could

do was even slightly adequate, so many had tried and failed. This was just one of God's miracles" (Wilson 1918: 99-100). Typical for her, Gage gave God all the credit for the rescue.

Gage's reputation for all these things followed her when she died on July 15, 1917 in Marsovan at the age of fifty-one. Her funeral the next day had a crowd of over three-hundred men and women in a small local cemetery. In her honor, the Portland, Oregon YWCA started a Frances Cousins Gage Club and established the Frances Cousins Gage Memorial Fund. Soon after her death, *The Woman Citizen* observed:

Among the women who deserve to be held in remembrance... is Frances C. Gage, who has laid down her life in Turkey since the war began. Miss Gage was a Y. W. C. A. worker in Marsovan... There are many incidents which show Miss Gage as a path breaker in the woman movement. A feminist? Yes, of the old-fashioned pioneer sort, like Frances Willard and Susan B. Anthony, women who pushed the world along until it has become almost safe for women. (1918: 474)

Gage was a bit more humble in assessing her own gifts, saying, "I am not very brave, but I realize that a missionary's life is by no means an easy one, and after looking at the matter in the face, I believe, God helping me, I can meet the emergencies He may send me (1918: 28)."

In conclusion, Gage's story is more than a heroic tale of daring deeds in the face of life threatening challenges. Her ministry shows the tools one humble woman missionary used to confront kidnappers, difficult and unsafe travel, human suffering, and evil while maintaining her faith commitments.

## **Final Thoughts**

Recounting the lives and ministries of Winifred Sedgwick, Grace Helena Saunders, and Frances Cousins Gage, hopefully has shed some light on the themes raised by this conference, such as handling today's "increasingly complex public area," and "negotiating the contemporary landscape." Whether developing cultural awareness, forging ecumenical relationships, or traversing dangerous and life-threatening political terrain, these three women were able to respect differing beliefs and customs while at the same time, maintain their missional commitment. The successes and failures of their engagement provide a backdrop for facing contemporary versions of the same concerns for us and for our students. Many of their strategies are still relevant and of universal value, regardless of the era and particular cultural struggles. As William Shakespeare said, "What's Past is Prologue" (Shakespeare).

## Endnotes

1 Or the World's Student Christian Federation.

2 Even though Sedgwick does not identify Bulgakov, one wonders if this man was Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944), a Russian Orthodox theologian, philosopher, and economist with ties to the SCM inside and outside Russia before and after the 1917 Russian Revolution. He was chair of Political Economy at Kiev Polytechnic Institute (1901-1906) and chair of Political Economy at the Institute of Commerce at Moscow University (1906-1911). This conversation appears to have occurred in Moscow when he would be in Moscow, but it is only speculation.

3 An internat was a student hostel, pension or small residential house with student bedrooms and a common dining hall.

4 Miron Cristea (1868-1939), a bishop of Transylvania, became the Metropolitan-Primate of the Orthodox Church in Romania in 1919. In 1925, he was enthroned as its first Patriarch. In 1938, Cristea became the Prime Minister of Romania. His term was quite short because he died within a year.

5 In 1840, Bebek Seminary was established outside Constantinople by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In 1862, this school was transferred to Marsovan. In 1886, the Anatolia College was established there. Students were mainly Greek and Armenian. Most were boarding students because they came from outside Marsovan. Students quickly numbered one-hundred and fifteen and in 1893, a girl's school was founded.

6 This was the Ottoman government's systematic extermination of its Armenian population. Victims are estimated to number 800,000 to 1.5 million. April 24, 1915 is considered the first day of this genocide. On that day, the Turkish government rounded up, arrested, and deported between 235-270 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders. The majority of this group were later murdered. This extermination program was conducted during and after World War I. The first part involved the killing of able-bodied males through massacre or forced labor. Then women, children, the elderly, and infirm were sent on death marches to the Syrian desert. These individuals did not have food or water and were subject to robbery, rape, and massacre.

7 The man referred to as the “governor” or “vali” may have been Ahmed Muammer. He was the governor of the Vilayet of Sivas from 1913-1916. Muammer has been accused of complicity in the killing of the Armenians, which would make him particularly dangerous to Gage and Willard. Sivas was a town in north central Turkey located in the Sivas Vilayet, one of the six Armenian districts of the Ottoman Empire. It is located southeast of Marsovan. Gage’s use of the term “boli” is unclear and why she used it may never be known. However, there are at least three possibilities for its use. Boli is the older name for the Bolu Province northwest of Marsovan, the term “boli” is slang for confirming a person agrees with something someone else is saying (i.e., someone being “dead right” or “on point”) or the term is a misspelling of the word “vali” or governor.



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