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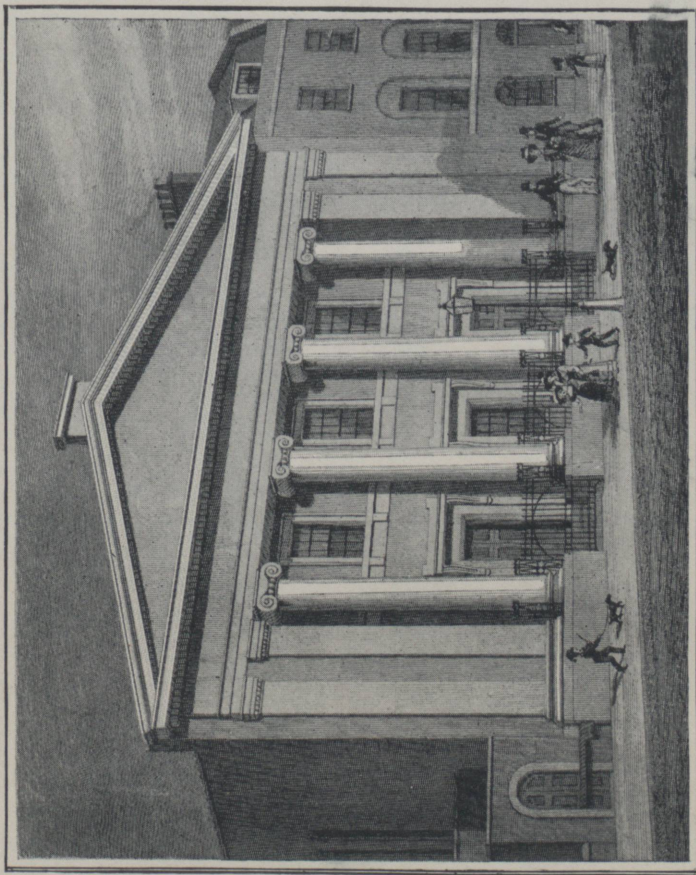


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Drawn by Tho. H. Shepherd.

From an Engraving by J. F. Harell.

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL
1824 - 1927

A Short History
of
South Place Ethical Society
and an
Urgent Appeal

Objects of the Society

"The Object of the Society is the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment, the study of ethical principles, and the promotion of human welfare in harmony with advancing knowledge."

General Committee for the Appeal.



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MRS. H. BRADLAUGH BONNER.	(U.S.A.).
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South Place Ethical Society



BEN JONSON once said of an important personage, "His soul lives in an alley." The churches endeavour to save mankind from such spiritual degradation. All religious bodies, orthodox and heterodox, although differing widely in opinions, are in accord in this endeavour, but naturally each organisation feels compelled to voice independently its own particular beliefs.

For over one hundred years the Society had its centre at South Place in the City of London, where it fostered freedom in moral and spiritual life and thought, and it is in order to have a wider range of influence and greater scope for development that the Society has decided to build a new home in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury.

The present appeal is for help to enable the South Place Ethical Society to continue and increase its work and activities for a fuller and more vigorous moral, intellectual, and religious life.

Our Society is the direct descendant of "The Philadelphians," or Loving Brothers, a Society founded in 1793 at Parliament Court Chapel, Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate, by the **Rev. Elhanan Winchester**, an American ex-Baptist preacher and a pioneer of clerical disbelief in the doctrine of Eternal Hell. Winchester was followed by the **Rev. William Vidler**, who added Unitarianism to Winchester's affirmation of universal salvation, and upheld with great courage the principle of religious liberty.

Vidler died in 1816, and was succeeded by **William Johnson Fox**, the famous politician, orator, and preacher. In his introductory address to the congregation at Parliament Court, Fox made the following declaration, "I believe in the duty of free inquiry, and in the right of religious liberty," and in 1842 he re-affirmed this confession of faith in an address at the twenty-fifth anniversary of his settlement with the Society. The Chapel flourished under his ministry, and Fox also exercised great public influence by his eloquence and his broad and elevated views upon the questions of the day. The Society, outgrowing its home in Parliament Court, decided to obtain larger quarters, and in 1823 South Place Chapel was built. It was opened by Fox on February 1, 1824, as a Unitarian place of worship, and Fox continued as minister until 1852. During his ministry his religious views became less and less sectarian and theological. He passed from Unitarianism to Theism, and, as was the case with his predecessors and with his successors, carried the congregation with him in his changes of opinion. The Society in these years was deeply indebted to Eliza and Sarah Flower. These two sisters sang in the choir, and their gifts of music and poetry were of the greatest service to the musical and literary aspirations of the congregation. Sarah wrote many of the hymns sung in the Chapel, including the widely known "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Eliza composed the music for the hymns and anthems, and her work won the praise of Mendelssohn.

The retirement of Fox was followed by an interval during which various preachers occupied the pulpit, but in 1864 **Moncure Daniel Conway** became the permanent minister. He held this position until 1884, and under his teaching the Society gave up all theological dogma, and was renamed the South Place Religious Society. **Dr. Stanton Coit** was appointed in 1888, and the Society then adopted its present name. Dr.

Conway resumed his ministry in 1892, finally retiring in 1897. **The Right Hon. J. M. Robertson**, in his address at the Centenary Celebration of South Place Chapel in 1924, said, "It is hardly possible to speak of Moncure Conway in South Place without a special warmth of affection. . . . His personal charm was deeply bound up with his intellectual influence. . . . He came in a period when scientific thought was advancing rapidly, and he responded to the advance at every point. No man could more worthily have fulfilled what we may call the South Place tradition—loyalty to freedom of thought and freedom of teaching, resistance to every form of tyranny of the mind."

Dr. Conway in the preface to his Centenary History of our Society well described the gradual changes of thought that characterised the development of the Society between 1793 and 1893, and his statements are equally applicable to the attitude of the Society at the present day. He wrote: "The present minister of the South Place Society [Moncure Daniel Conway] claims no literal continuity with the particular doctrines of his predecessors, though he believes that their spirit has animated the changes it has undergone. Under its successive names, adopted or given—'Philadelphians,' 'Universalists,' 'Society of Religious Dissenters,' 'South Place Unitarian Society,' 'The South Place Society,' 'The Free Religious Society,' ['The South Place Religious Society,'], 'The South Place Ethical Society'—is traceable a constant endeavour to study carefully and keep abreast of, the growing knowledge of the world, at whatever cost to traditional prejudices or opinions; to do this in a spirit of tolerance no less than of sincerity."

The first congregation that assembled in Parliament Court Chapel was the forerunner of succeeding congregations, whose beliefs have gradually tended to separate the Society definitely from orthodoxy. The Society throughout its his-

tory has attracted those who have found the theology and dogmas of the Churches unacceptable, and have been glad to meet with an organisation that, notwithstanding its heterodoxy, sincerely desires that the soul of man should dwell in open places where there is unfettered room for expansion. It has attracted also, and perhaps in larger numbers, men and women brought up in an atmosphere of religious freedom. To-day our Society aims at maintaining the progressive character of the traditions of its forbears, and it wishes, not only to keep intellectually abreast of the dominant questions of the day, but also to minister to the emotions, to cultivate the imagination and the arts, and to foster a feeling of fellowship among its members. The ideals of the Society are summarised in the statement of its object—“the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment, the study of ethical principles, and the promotion of human welfare, in harmony with advancing knowledge.”

Among the speakers who have occupied the platform under the auspices of the Society are:

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|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| DR. FELIX ADLER. | SIR HARRY JOHNSTON. |
| NORMAN ANGELL. | SIR ARTHUR KEITH. |
| WILLIAM ARCHER. | PRINCE KROPOTKIN. |
| EARL BARNES. | JOSEPH McCABE. |
| SIR FRANK BENSON. | MARGARET McMILLAN. |
| ANNIE BESANT. | WILLIAM MORRIS. |
| BERNARD BOSANQUET. | PROF. GILBERT MURRAY. |
| HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER. | H. W. NEVINSON. |
| C. DELISLE BURNS. | DR. JOHN OAKESMITH. |
| HERBERT BURROWS. | PROF. KARL PEARSON. |
| EDWARD CARPENTER. | DR. MARION PHILLIPS. |
| PROF. W. K. CLIFFORD. | S. K. RATCLIFFE. |
| EDWARD CLODD. | RT. HON. JOHN M. ROBERTSON. |
| DR. STANTON COIT. | HON. BERTRAND RUSSELL. |
| JOHN DRINKWATER. | JOHN RUSSELL, M.A. |
| PROF. PATRICK GEDDES. | S. C. CRONWRIGHT SCHREINER. |

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| F. J. GOULD. | GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. |
| FREDERIC HARRISON. | HARRY SNELL. |
| JOHN A. HOBSON. | W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN. |
| DR. BERNARD HOLLANDER. | PROF. J. TYNDALL. |
| GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE. | PROF. GRAHAM WALLAS. |
| LAURENCE HOUSMAN. | RT. HON. SIDNEY WEBB. |
| PROF. W. H. HUDSON. | REBECCA WEST. |
| PROF. T. H. HUXLEY. | PHILIP WICKSTEED. |
| DR. LEONARD HUXLEY. | ISRAEL ZANGWILL. |

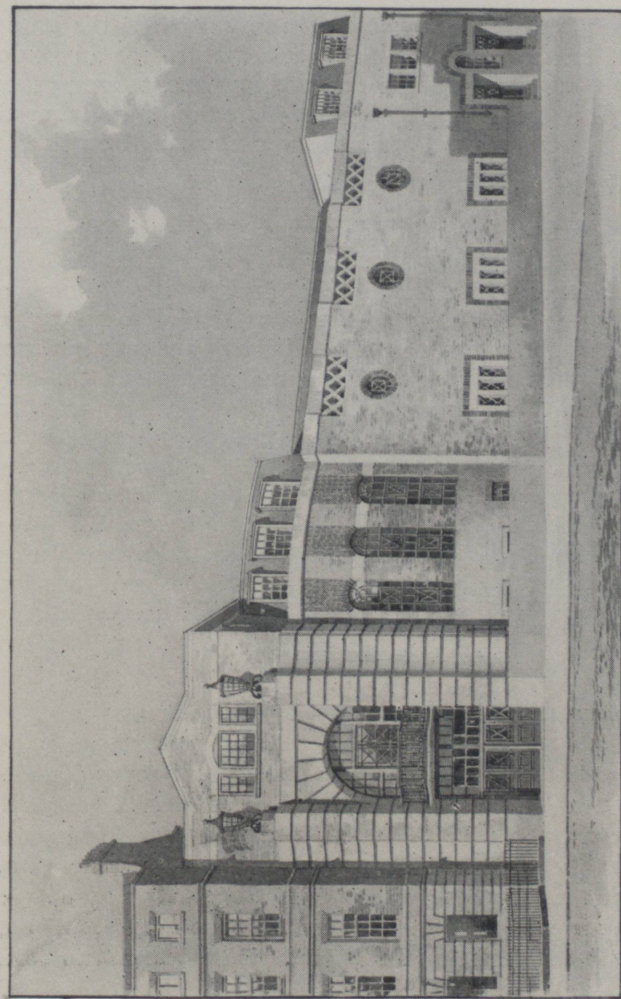
“SOUTH PLACE” has accomplished so much for the benefit of English musical life that the appeal would not be complete without special reference to the Sunday Evening Concerts, one of the strongest and healthiest of the Society’s activities. For forty years past the Society has run a series of Chamber Music concerts, of which that given on Sunday, February 20, 1927, was the 1,000th. The concerts were inaugurated at a time when there were considerable difficulties in holding entertainments on Sundays, and when the public needed education for the full appreciation of the higher forms of music. Under the guarantee and at the risk of the Society, the concerts were started, with free admission, and a collection to meet expenses. It is a pleasing reflection that, from the commencement to the present day, these concerts have been self-supporting, although, indeed, there have been periods of financial strain, and that the public—with the generous co-operation of the artists—have provided the necessary funds to maintain them. The development of intelligent and sound criticism on the part of the audience has been greatly helped by the provision for so many years of the best examples of Chamber Music, and the artists taking part have appreciated the keen and sympathetic attention given to their work. Knowledge of these concerts has spread to many lands, and gratifying evidence of the good they have effected has been received by the Society on many occasions.

The erection of the building in Red Lion Square will provide a new home for the concerts; and for this reason this appeal should commend itself to all who love music and appreciate its value as a civilising influence.

The valuable freehold site which South Place Chapel occupied was originally acquired for the accommodation of a resident membership long since scattered over the enormous area of Greater London. For some years past it had become increasingly evident that the Society's activities could be carried on far more effectively if the property were sold and the proceeds devoted to the purchase of a less valuable freehold site and the erection thereon of a larger and more convenient building. As is now generally known, the sale was effected, and a new site was acquired in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury. Plans have been prepared for the erection of a dignified and commodious building, which it is hoped may become the Headquarters of the Ethical Movement in the British Isles, and also provide an open platform for speakers from any part of the world. We think all subscribers to this appeal will approve of the decision to name the new building "Conway Hall."

To accomplish our aim satisfactorily, we estimate that the sum of about £45,000 is required. The Society is in the position to supply £30,000 towards this amount, and we now ask our members and friends to subscribe the remaining £15,000.

We trust that those members of the public who sympathise with us in our work, but who do not know us intimately, will accept as evidence of our earnestness and of the soundness of our scheme, the fact that already the Society has expended £11,000 in the purchase of the new site, that we have in hand £30,000, and that we propose to devote the whole of it to the Building Fund.

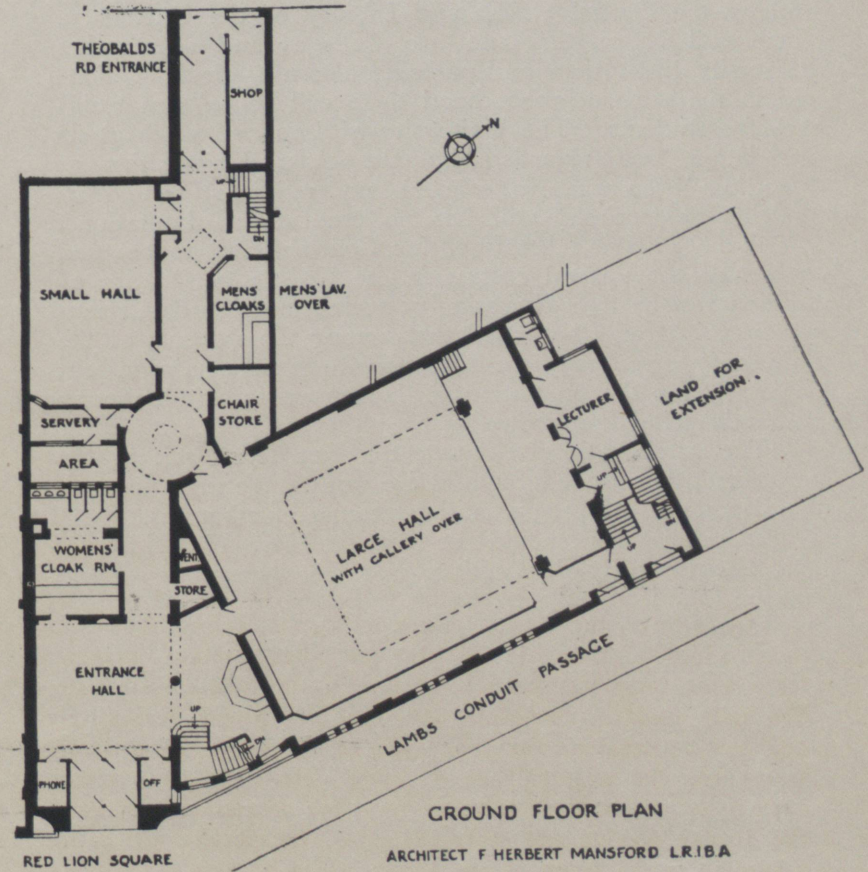


CONWAY HALL.
Perspective View of Proposed New Building.

The sum of £45,000 would not only provide the kind of building desired, it would also leave a margin for an Endowment Fund, an important safeguard, as the outgoings connected with a really worthy building would be so large that unless there were a substantial assured income the risk could not reasonably be faced.

It is intended that the new building shall comprise, among its principal features, a large hall with a seating accommodation of 500; a small hall seating about 100; a Library, 47ft. by 23ft.; Lecturers' and Artistes' Room and Club Room; a flat for a caretaker over the Library, and two rooms would be available in 49, Theobalds Road for use as offices. There would remain a portion of the site for extension or realisation. It is the aim of the Trustees and Committee to place at the disposal of members and visitors from the Provinces, British Dominions, United States of America, and other countries, Headquarters in the heart of London, where men and women of advanced thought could meet and enjoy the amenities of social intercourse, with facilities for writing, rest, and refreshment. It is felt that such a comprehensive centre would not only supply a real need, but would command the approbation and support of those who value freedom of thought.

If, however, this Appeal brings in a considerably larger sum than £15,000, then the Society has already plans prepared for a more comprehensive scheme covering the whole of the site. The halls would accommodate 750 and 180 people respectively, and the construction would be such as to permit of a second storey over the large hall at a future date. The extra seating capacity of the larger hall would be of the greatest advantage for the Sunday evening and other Concerts. The Society will decide, according to the result of the Appeal, which of these two schemes to adopt.



The future of Conway Hall will, no doubt, be affected by the development of the University of London. Within a few years the area behind the British Museum will be occupied by the Central Offices and Library of the University. There will be on this site two Colleges and some other University Institutions and probably also a Students' Union; and in the same neighbourhood there will be halls of residence for students. The University of London, which at its foundation was regarded by the older Universities as "godless" because it exacted no religious test from students or teachers, still has no ecclesiastical limitations. It will be possible, therefore, for Conway Hall to be used as one of the natural centres in the University Quarter of London for the free discussion of social, moral and religious questions. It may be hoped that among the students of the University some may be attracted to membership in our Society "for the promotion of human welfare in harmony with advancing knowledge."

The whole Ethical Movement suffers from lack of the accommodation needed for effective work. We urge upon all the importance of prompt and generous contributions.

All donations should be sent to Mr. N. Lidstone, 96, Blackstock Road, London, N.4. A Subscription Form will be found on page 19.

On behalf of South Place Ethical Society:

C. DELISLE BURNS, *Chairman, Conway Hall*
Appeal Fund.

NICHOLAS LIDSTONE, *Hon. Treasurer, Conway Hall*
Appeal Fund.

CAROLINE FLETCHER SMITH } *Joint Hon. Secretaries.*
FRANK M. OVERY }

C. EDWARD LISTER, *Hon Treasurer.*

September, 1927.

The Society's Present Activities



Sunday Morning Services.

Services are held every Sunday at 11 a.m. The central feature is a discourse on a topic of definitely humanistic interest, delivered either by one of our appointed lecturers (C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit., John A. Hobson, M.A., S. K. Ratcliffe, Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson), or some other speaker of authority and distinction. The following representative selection of recent addresses gives an idea of the type of discourse delivered:

"Eugenics, Love and Marriage"	Dr. Bernard Hollander
"Disarmament"	C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit.
"The Religion of Bernard Shaw"	S. K. Ratcliffe
"China and the West"	Prof. Hu Shih (Pekin Univ.)
"Is the Good Life Interesting?"	John A. Hobson, M.A.
"Pirandello's Plays"	C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit.
"Jesus and Judas"	Right Hon. J. M. Robertson
"The Psychology of Hero Worship"	C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit.
"Morality and its Substitutes"	John A. Hobson, M.A.
"The Ethics of Force in International Affairs"	Norman Angell.

The order of service preceding the discourse consists of two readings by the lecturer, two ethical hymns, and an item of vocal or instrumental music.

Since the departure from South Place Chapel, now demolished, the Sunday morning services are being held temporarily in the theatre of the School of Oriental Studies, which adjoins the old site.

Sunday Evening Concerts.

During the winter Free Chamber Music Concerts are held on Sunday evenings. These Concerts, whose history is referred to more fully elsewhere, hold an important place in the musical life of London.

Lending Library.

This comprises upwards of 5,000 volumes and includes many standard works in literature, science, art, politics and economics. The library is free to members, and when the books are systematically arranged in the commodious Library designed for them in the new building, there is every reason to believe that a fuller use will be made of it. The widened scope and opportunity for improved service will help to make the Lending Library one of the most attractive and valuable features of the Society's activities.

Discussions.

Discussion of ethical, political, literary and social questions has always keenly appealed to the Society, and the meetings arranged for this purpose attract not only members, but also many other persons similarly interested. The discourse of the preceding Sunday is sometimes taken as the subject of discussion, thus affording those who wish to criticise it an opportunity to express their views, and on such occasions the Lecturer himself not infrequently attends and joins in the discussion.

Social Activities.

It has always been felt by the members of this Society that the provision of means of social intercourse for those whose sympathies with free thought have attracted them to South Place, is an important part of its work. These are provided for in the following ways:

SOIREES.—One evening in each month during the winter is devoted to a social meeting of members and friends. An item of literary, musical or dramatic interest is usually arranged, but the chief attraction of the soirées is the opportunity afforded for talk with kindred spirits.

DANCES.—Dances are held monthly. They are much enjoyed by members of all ages, and have also the valuable result of consolidating the interest of the younger members in the Society and in one another.

PLAY READINGS.—For the last few years a small group of members has met periodically to read plays aloud. These meetings have proved attractive, both to students of the drama and to those possessing dramatic talent.

RAMBLES.—Very frequently throughout the year attractive country walks are undertaken by parties of members and their friends, and during the winter, expeditions to places of interest in London are arranged. The Rambles Committee also organises each Easter a co-operative holiday in the Isle of Wight. This is perhaps the most effective force in the social life of the Society in forming and cementing friendships between members.

South Place Ethical Society

Temporary Address :
35, BLOOMSBURY SQUARE, W.C.1

SUNDAY MORNING SERVICES

during re-building are held at 11 a.m., in
THE LONDON INSTITUTION THEATRE
South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2

SUNDAY POPULAR CONCERTS (CHAMBER MUSIC)

During the building of our new Hall, or until further notice, these
Concerts, by kind permission of the School Governors, will be given
in the Great Hall of the

CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL,
VICTORIA EMBANKMENT, E.C.4
(Facing Blackfriars Bridge).

The Forty-Second Season will begin on Sunday, October 2nd, 1927.
Doors open 6.10. Concert 6.30 p.m.

Subscription Form.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY, 35, Bloomsbury Square,
London, W.C.1.

CONWAY HALL APPEAL FUND

To Mr. N. LIDSTONE, 96, Blackstock Road, London, N.4.

I enclose (promise to pay)* £ as a Donation to the
Conway Hall Appeal Fund.

I promise an Annual Donation of £ for years

Name.....

Address.....

.....1927.

**Strike out words inapplicable.*

Cheques should be crossed Barclay's Bank, Ltd.

