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REPORT  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE  
OF  
SOUTH PLACE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY,  
FOR THE YEAR 1880.

# SOUTH PLACE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY.

1880.

## Minister

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A., Inglewood, Bedford Park, Chiswick, W.

## Committee

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" W. CROWDER  
" E. DALLOW  
" P. EVERITT  
" S. G. FENTON  
" O. FITCH  
" C. B. GRANT  
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" W. J. REYNOLDS  
" G. E. SADD  
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Mr. W. C. STOREY  
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Mr. G. H. YOUNG.

## Treasurer and Chairman :

Mr. GEORGE HICKSON, 35, Highbury New Park, N.

## Secretary :

Mr. W. J. REYNOLDS, 19, Cawley Road, Victoria Park, E.

## Auditors :

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Mr. A. J. WATERLOW.

## Secretary Soiree Committee :

Mr. S. G. FENTON, 18, Courthope Villas, Wimbledon, S.W.

## Choir Master and Organist :

Mr. J. TROUSSELLE, 4, Upper Spring Street, Baker Street, W.

**Report of the Committee**  
OF  
**SOUTH PLACE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY,**  
FOR THE YEAR 1880.

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POSSIBLY the year that has just passed will take rank as one of the most eventful on record, when considered in relation to the progress made in freedom of opinion. The political changes in the early part of the year may be regarded as indicating merely one side of that broad current of opinion, whose flow, after a period of comparative stagnation, once more runs steadily in the direction of liberty. With the political phase of this phenomenon we are not so immediately concerned; although it may be observed that civil and religious freedom are inseparably bound together, and influences favouring the one cannot but aid the development of the other. With the progress of religious liberty, however, our Society is so intimately associated, both as contributing to it, and as dependent upon it for our own growth, that it is impossible in reporting the history of the microcosm of South Place, to omit an examination of the progress made in the larger world outside.

Undoubtedly one of the most striking features of the past year, is the strangely novel attitude the great representative orthodox bodies have assumed towards those who have ceased to give adhesion to any of the creeds. It seems so short a time since, when mere abuse of free thinkers, coupled with

an entire inability or unwillingness to understand their mental position, were looked for as a matter of course. The proceedings at some of the late religious gatherings have formed, in some respects, a pleasing contrast to the ancient method of dealing with the heretically disposed. Not only have ecclesiastics been found liberal enough to treat with almost effusive kindness the previously despised "dissenter;" but, stranger still, both churchmen and nonconformists have vied with each other in their attempts to win over even the uncompromising "secularist." Furthermore, at these meetings distinct admissions have been made, that orthodoxy can no longer claim a monopoly of noble sentiments or lofty aims. It will, perhaps, be well not to scrutinize too narrowly the reason of this truly remarkable change of front. To what extent it is due to the consciousness that the old favourite methods have resulted in failure, or how much it is owing to a real spread of kindlier feeling, may be left for others to determine. To whatever cause it be at last attributed, the circumstance that people differing so widely in speculative opinions, are now able to regard each other without the bitter animosities of the past, is one of a decidedly gratifying character. It is one, moreover, that our Society ought to be the first to recognize; seeing that it has persistently and faithfully worked for such an end, even in days when there seemed little probability of its realization.

Another circumstance that is at least significant, is the endeavour that has been recently made to include under the head of "Christian," all those who are willing to make any kind of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, irrespective of their adhesion to any of the creeds. The desire would seem to be, to constitute *unselfishness* the sole test of Christianity. Although this may be regarded as an effort to save a respected term, albeit emptied of definite

meaning, yet the mere attempt has a value for us ; showing as it does, that those who repudiate all churches and sects, have so grown in numbers and influence, that any contortions of language, or any wholesale surrender of doctrine, will be made by at least some in the churches, to regain even their nominal allegiance. But the day has obviously passed when that could be possible. The desire that now animates the thoughtful rationalist, is not to hark back to the ideals that are discredited and outgrown ; but to assist in building up a new, better, and purely human religion. As the readers of our best current literature must have noticed, some of the ablest minds have joined in this truly noble task, and there can be no doubt that the work of Mr. Conway, in this place, has formed no small contribution towards its fulfilment. How assiduously he has laboured at this important work, and how frequently he has inspired the friends of progress with renewed hopes, by his thoughtful and animated discourses, none of our members need to be reminded. The Committee, therefore, regret on public, no less than on personal grounds, that the illness of Mr. Conway in the early part of the year, and his recent absence in America, have somewhat interrupted this work. They have, however, great pleasure in bearing testimony to the alacrity with which many able friends came forward and rendered assistance during these intervals. To Mr. A. J. Ellis, Mr. W. C. Coupland, Mr. W. F. Revell, and Dr. G. J. Wyld, amongst our own members, the thanks of the Society are especially due for their interesting and instructive discourses ; while the efforts of Miss Helen Taylor, Mr. E. Clodd, Dr. E. B. Aveling, Mr. M. Macfie, Mr. T. W. Frickleton, and Mr. Rhys Davids, who have also supplied Mr. Conway's place, ought to be acknowledged with gratitude. Notwithstanding that opportunities have thus been furnished for having the problems of our age



examined before us by different minds, it was with great pleasure the members greeted the return of Mr. Conway to his accustomed place, in December last. They will also, doubtless, gladly join the Committee in expressing an earnest hope, that the rest and change of scene he has enjoyed have permanently restored his health and energies.

As a compensation for the loss of many of Mr. Conway's oral discourses, it is pleasing to be able to record that during the year several of his writings have been published in "Modern Thought;" and, in addition, "A Last Word," the final discourse at the Athenæum, and two others, "The Religion of Humanity," and "The Rising Generation," have been published in the old pamphlet form.

The prolonged absence of Mr. Conway afforded a favourable opportunity for extending the usual vacation, in order to obtain the necessary time for the repairs and decoration of the Chapel. The members will probably recollect that as soon as the Committee had resolved to recommend this work, a General Meeting was called, at which a draft scheme of the proposed works was submitted. This being approved, operations were commenced, under the professional guidance of our friend Mr. J. A. Gotch, immediately after the closing of the Chapel. The roof has been completely re-slatted, and will, it is believed, not give any further trouble for some years; an efficient warming apparatus has been set up; the ventilation of the building has been considerably improved; and the interior has been decorated in a quiet but artistic manner, that has met with very general approval. The whole of these works have been executed at a total cost of £422. 18s. 1d., of which the Committee are pleased to say, there only remains about £23. 0s. 0d. yet to be subscribed.

In connection with the building, it has long been felt that

as the greater portion of the seats are now let, and that consequently the highest point of our prosperity has probably been nearly reached, some attempt should be made to extinguish or reduce the mortgage. Accordingly, at the early part of the year, a Finance Committee was appointed to report on the best means of accomplishing this end. Two alternative schemes were proposed for raising the funds required. One to increase, by some means, the permanent income of the Society, and the other to open a voluntary subscription. It was resolved to adopt the latter method, with the addition, however, of a collection on the first Sunday in May.

The often-expressed desire that the Sunday Services should be supplemented by some effective work carried on during the week, seems now in a fair way of being fulfilled. At the last Annual Meeting an opinion was expressed that the Lecture Committee might be properly granted the use of the building for the purpose of carrying on their work. Acting on this, it was resolved that the free use of the building should be given on one evening in each week, in order that the Lecture Committee might proceed with more confidence. The anticipations that were then formed, have since been amply justified. The long course of lectures on Political Economy, which was in progress at the last Annual Meeting, came to a conclusion in March last, the result being that a large audience were given efficient instruction in economic questions. This was, moreover, done at a singularly opportune moment, as during the past year some of the gravest economic problems have been brought into startling prominence. To have disseminated that knowledge, by which alone such problems can be properly solved, is, in however limited a way, to have promoted tangibly the public good. These lectures were followed by three on "The Evolution of American Political Ideas," by Mr. John Fiske, of Harvard University, the whole

of which excited the deepest attention, the first being rendered more interesting by the circumstance of Professor Huxley presiding on the occasion. The later efforts of the Lecture Committee have been equally successful. Desiring to make the utmost possible use of the opportunities afforded, two courses of Lectures on the same evenings were organized during the Autumn Session. These have consisted of ten, on Ethical Principles, by Mr. W. C. Coupland, and the same number on Biology, by Dr. E. B. Aveling. Of the wide research, and the critical acumen displayed in Mr. Coupland's lectures, it is impossible to speak too highly. Dr. Aveling's able and eloquent exposition of his subject also proved a most thorough success, having attracted the largest audience the Lecture Committee have yet secured. It is gratifying to know that work of this kind will now proceed regularly in this place, and the Committee feel justified in asking the members to give it their countenance and support.

Kindred societies, whose work is not immediately connected with our own, have also availed themselves of our building. The National Sunday League, striving to relieve the grim monotony of an English Sunday; and driven from many of the public buildings in London by the bigotry, which even survives the contempt of the intellectual, have once more found a welcome here. Another body, "The People's Concert Society," also sought our assistance to enable them to give a series of free concerts of high class music on Sunday evenings. So popular did these become, that many had to be refused admission, and the experiment was so thoroughly successful that it is intended to repeat it as soon as possible. A writer, in a recent number of *The Nineteenth Century*, mentions these concerts in high terms of commendation.

Although the Soirées have not presented any very marked



or novel features in the year that had just elapsed, they have still afforded the usual opportunities for social and friendly intercourse,—opportunities which appear to have been appreciated as highly as on any previous occasion. The Annual Soirée was held on May 1st at the Cannon Street Hotel, and again attracted a numerous assemblage of the members and their friends, who spent a most enjoyable evening. The Committee suggest that it would be well to give continued and earnest support to all these attempts to bring the members closer together, and increase friendliness of feeling amongst them. Societies that have been successful in accomplishing their chief aim have generally welded together their individual units by evoking their social sympathies; a plan which, when adopted, has the double merit of rendering the society stronger, and its working more easy and agreeable. Another incidental advantage too, is, that when strangers come amongst us, they are enabled to see that those who take reason for their guide in higher matters, do not therefore disregard the emotional needs, and that the social philosophy of South Place is—

“Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute.”

In concluding their review of the past year, the Committee would remind the members, that upon them, as constituents of one of the few bodies struggling against the baneful influence of superstition, a great responsibility rests. The work accomplished by us may be but a minute fraction of the greater work wrought by the intellectual forces of the age. But on no account should its importance be overlooked or under estimated; nor the efforts of even one amongst us be thought of small value. By the cumulative effect of actions small in themselves, and by the loyal co-operation of

the workers, the most difficult tasks can be made certain of accomplishment. Remembering this, our friends may rest assured that by working in accord with the high principles constantly enunciated in this place, and by standing firmly together in the struggles of the present, they are giving no mean assistance towards the emancipation of humanity in the future.

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#### NOTICE.

In accordance with the Rules, seven members of the Committee will retire from office at the ensuing Annual Meeting, and are not eligible for re-election until next year. The members so retiring are:—Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. T. Tayler, Mr. E. K. Blyth, Mr. E. Dallow, Mr. G. Hickson, Mr. W. D. Thomson, and Mr. G. H. Young. The members will, therefore, have to elect seven new members of the Committee and two Auditors. Nominations for the above offices must be forwarded to the Secretary (in writing) on or before February 3rd. Printed forms for nominations can be obtained in the library, or will be forwarded by the Secretary upon application.

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The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday, February 17th at 7. 0. p.m. precisely.



