

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. TO MEMBERS ONLY.

South Place Ethical Society.

3rd February, 1913.

IN view of the Special General Meeting of Members which is to be held on Tuesday, February 25, 1913, to consider the Resolutions passed by the Special Committee, appointed at the last Annual Meeting, to report on the whole question of the Society's property, the Committee have thought it desirable to inform the Members of the steps which have led up to the present position. Rebuilding has been discussed by the Society for the last twenty years. In the 1893 Report it was stated that rebuilding was under consideration, and in 1899 the Annual General Meeting instructed the Committee to consider the advisability of rebuilding. At least eight schemes and plans for rebuilding on the present site or part of same have been drawn up, two in 1894, and the rest in 1900, 1901, and 1902. The Society has always been faced with two difficulties: (1) That the cost of rebuilding could only be met by a heavy mortgage on the property, to which members were naturally averse; and (2) that the interest on such a mortgage, together with increased cost of upkeep, would be too heavy for the Society to meet.

Early in September, 1910, it was suggested on the Building Sub-Committee that in view of the age of the present building, and the continual expenditure on repairs, it would be well if an expert examination of the building were made. After some discussion this suggestion was adopted, and Messrs. N. Lidstone and F. H. Mansford made a careful and thorough examination of the building and presented Reports in September and November, 1910. These Reports recommended the expenditure in the near future of between £700 and £800 "in order to ensure the safety of the Chapel beyond doubt," and "to put the structure into a proper condition." The Building Committee submitted this Report to the General Committee who, on the 4th November, 1910, passed the following resolution: "That representatives of this Committee be appointed to act with the Building Sub-Committee (with power to co-opt) as a Special Committee to consider the Report upon the South Place property submitted by the Building Committee, and questions arising thereon: also "to obtain any further information, reports, and estimates in connection with the Trust Property, "and generally to report and advise upon any repairs, improvements, rebuilding, or other scheme "which the Committee may consider desirable in the interests of the Society."

In their Report to the members for 1910-11, issued in April, 1911, the General Committee made the following statement: "The Committee think it right to inform the members that during the "year they have received an important report on the condition of the building from the Building "Sub-Committee. This report foreshadows the probable expenditure of several hundred pounds in

“the course of a few years. They have therefore appointed a number of their members to unite with the Building Committee, as a Special Committee, with wide terms of reference, to consider the whole matter of the building, and possible schemes of re-building, on the present or another site. This Special Committee is considering the whole position very carefully, but has not yet presented its report.”

The Special Committee mentioned above held a number of meetings and appointed a sub-committee to make enquiries. Their final Report, presented more than twelve months after their appointment, was as follows:—

Report of Special Joint (Building and General) Committee to the General Committee of the South Place Ethical Society, 27th November, 1911.

After very full consideration by this Committee and a sub-committee thereof of the Reports of September, 1910, and November, 1910, of the Society's experts, Mr. N. Lidstone and Mr. F. H. Mansford, the following Resolutions were passed unanimously:—

(1) “That having reconsidered the reports of the experts the Committee unanimously agreed under all the circumstances not to recommend any of the work mentioned therein to be done at present. They are, however, of opinion that the reports should be considered at least annually so that the state of the building may not be lost sight of.”

(2) “That this Committee are unanimously of opinion that it is impracticable for them to make definite enquiries as to sites for rebuilding until some decision has been come to as to the present building.”

(3) “That in view of the general deterioration of the Society's premises and the burden on its resources through the constant expenditure on repairs and renewals this Committee unanimously recommend that a decision be come to at an early date as to whether the Society will—

“(i) Rebuild on the present site, or

“(ii) Rebuild on some part of the present site, or

“(iii) Dispose of the present site and move elsewhere.”

In the Annual Report, issued in May, 1912, the General Committee, after quoting the last paragraph of the above Report, stated:—“These questions belong pre-eminently to the class which the members should determine for themselves, and the Committee therefore express no collective opinion upon them. They would, however, urge that these matters be taken into most serious consideration at the forthcoming Annual Meeting.”

At the Annual Meeting on 19th May, 1912, the Agenda contained the following Resolution, which was moved by a member:—“That this Annual General Meeting of members authorises the General Committee forthwith: (1) To take all preliminary and necessary steps with a view to a sale or lease of the South Place site under the terms of the Trust Deed at the earliest practicable date; and (2) to formulate such schemes or proposals as may be considered advisable, for submission to the members at the necessary meetings, in relation to any sale, and for the purpose of carrying on the Society in the future in the event of a sale.”

After considerable discussion an amendment was carried authorising the General Committee “To immediately convene a joint meeting of the Trustees and the General Committee, with power to co-opt members, to carefully consider the whole question of the Society's property, with special reference to present and future needs and available alternatives, and to report to the members as soon as any definite recommendation can be made.”

This Committee met at the end of June and appointed a Sub-Committee to obtain information and prepare approximate estimates of income and expenditure. The Sub-Committee consisted of eight persons, seven of whom consented to serve, viz.: Messrs. N. Lidstone, F. H. Mansford, F. M. Overy, E. Pollard, W. Rawlings, W. H. Southon, and B. Symons.

This Sub-Committee issued a unanimous Report, dated 25th November, 1912, which was presented to the Special Committee on 16th December, 1912.

The following is a summary of the **Report of the Sub-Committee**:—

1.—Rebuilding on present site or part of same. We have spent little time in considering rebuilding on the whole of the present site, as the matter has been considered at much length by previous Committees. The difficulties may be summed up as follows: (a) To raise the capital for building it would be necessary to incur a large mortgage of, say, £12,000 on our site. Such a course would, we believe, meet with strong opposition from the members; (b) The interest on the borrowed capital would be too heavy for the Society to meet, say £500 per annum. With regard to rebuilding on part of the present site, a plan was submitted for supporting the present building with stanchions and girders, remodelling the front, providing new entrances and exits, and constructing a small hall on the space now occupied by the organ gallery, etc. To meet the cost it was proposed to sell the site of No. 12 South Place, the proceeds of which were estimated to be sufficient to pay for the bulk of the alterations, leaving only about £900 to come out of the Rebuilding Fund. This scheme was criticised on the grounds that: (a) Such a narrow site as No. 12 would be difficult to sell, and if sold would not produce nearly the amount estimated; (b) It would therefore swallow up the whole of the Rebuilding Fund; (c) The Society would be deprived of the income from rents of No. 12; (d) The assessment for rates would be more than doubled; (e) The Sunday School would be unable to meet in the small hall during a service in the Chapel.

2.—Disposal of the present site. The Committee are of opinion that, granting the desirability of removal, the principal difficulty is to find a purchaser. Before the Society buys a site they consider it should dispose of the present one. The Committee have obtained estimates of the value of the present site, which it would not be wise to divulge, and they are of opinion that, if the Society decides to sell, the site should be put up for sale at public auction, subject to a reserve price and proper conditions of sale. This will advertise the property and be the best method of realising its market value.

3.—The most suitable position for a new building. After considering the question of suitable districts and facilities of approach, the Committee are unanimously of opinion that some site in or near the West Central District would be the most suitable for the Society's purpose.

4.—New Site and Building and future Income and Expenditure. The Committee estimate that, after paying for the cost of a convenient site in the neighbourhood mentioned, and putting up a suitable building containing large hall of equal seating capacity to our present Chapel, small hall, class rooms, etc., and caretaker's apartments, and providing suitable furniture, there would remain about £4,000 which with the Rebuilding Fund makes £5,350. This invested at 4 per cent. would

produce an income of £214 per annum in place of the rents now received of £140 per annum. On the expenditure side we estimate increased rates, taxes, etc., at £136, leaving a balance to be found of about £60 per annum. Against this balance has to be set the important item of lettings. The Committee are confident that the income from increased lettings would be more than sufficient to meet the deficit.

It would seem that with a new building in the West Central District there would be increased opportunities for lettings, and, as they would largely depend on the facilities provided, it would be well to arrange that the halls and rooms could be let separately and simultaneously. There are many Societies without buildings of their own who would doubtless avail themselves of a modern hall in the district referred to. It would be desirable to lay down a floor for our own members' dances. The question then arises whether it would be well to let the hall for dances; if so, it would be necessary to obtain a licence.

If the objects of moving are realised, it may be assumed that membership and attendance will increase, and this would, of course, mean increased subscriptions and collections, which have not been taken into account in the above estimate.

After the Report summarised above had been discussed at some length, the following Resolutions were moved for submission to the members, the first being carried by a large majority, and the second *nem. con.*

“That the South Place property, at present occupied by the South Place Ethical Society,
“should be put up for sale by public auction, subject to a reserve price and to proper
“conditions of sale, or sold by private treaty.”

“That if and when the present site is sold, the Society should take steps to purchase another
“suitable property or a new site in or near the West Central District, for the purpose of
“re-building thereon in such manner as shall suit the Society's needs and requirements.”

C. FLETCHER SMITH, }
F. W. READ, } *Hon. Secs.*