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SOUTH-PLACE CHAPEL, FINSBURY.

Report of the Committee for 1871.

YOUR Committee commenced last year's Report by congratulating the Congregation on their improved position and prospects, and they have much pleasure in being able to state that there is still greater reason for congratulation now. Several new Members have joined us during the year, and the average attendance of Visitors has increased, while the progress of surrounding circumstances has tended, in various directions, to develop those principles of Religious Truth and Freedom which it has ever been the aim of this Congregation to cultivate. We no longer stand alone, but several other centres have come into existence from which our principles are disseminated. Mr. VOYSEY, whose entire separation from the Established Church has been effected during the past year, and from whom we had a most interesting Service soon afterwards, has established a regular Sunday Morning Service at St. George's Hall, Langham Place, attended by a Congregation which numbers from 800 to 1,000. The *Sunday Lecture Society* gives Literary and Scientific Lectures at the same place on Sunday after-

noons, which are very fully attended; and on the Sunday evening another Society (the *Sunday Evenings for the People*) provides a similar Lecture at the same place. At Croydon, Mr. SUFFIELD, a seceder from the Roman Catholic Church, in which he held an important position, has succeeded in establishing a Free Religious Society very similar to our own. To two of these Societies Mr. CONWAY contributes his occasional assistance, and by them all Principles of Thought are inculcated which are identical with ours. Literature generally is becoming more liberal in its tone; while the discussions that have taken place throughout the country on the subject of Education in connection with the School Boards has tended in the same direction. Nor is this progress towards Mental Freedom confined to our own country. Dr. DÖLLINGER's resistance to the dogma of Papal Infallibility has produced, and will produce hereafter, consequences as important as those which followed from LUTHER's denunciation of Papal Indulgences; while in Germany generally, in Austria, in Italy, in France, and indeed almost throughout the civilized world, strenuous efforts are being made to take the education of the People out of the hands of the Priesthood. All these evidences of progress, with many others, are, your Committee think, subjects for congratulation to the Congregation.

In proceeding to narrate the Congregational events of the year, the Committee feel that the first place is due to the memory of their late friend and coadjutor, Mr. BRAHAM, whose recent death has deprived them and the Congregation of a most efficient, energetic, and devoted Member. Than Mr. BRAHAM no member of the Congregation had its interests more thoroughly at heart; he was always in his place, and ever ready to devote both time and trouble to its service. Your Committee felt it their duty to address a special letter to Mrs. BRAHAM expressive of their deep sympathy with her, and of their high sense of their

mutual loss. Mr. CONWAY conducted his funeral service, which was attended by several members of the Congregation.

The services of the year have been conducted, with a few exceptions, by Mr. CONWAY, with increased pleasure and advantage to the Congregation. He has devoted to them a vast amount of thought and labour, and has shown unflinching courage in denouncing many conventional shams of the day. During his vacation he attended the Miracle Plays at Ober-Ammergau, of which he gave us a most vivid description on his return. The Committee have felt great pleasure in having been enabled by the Congregation to increase Mr. CONWAY'S income in the past year, and thus to assist him in meeting the heavy expenses which are entailed by the preparation of the Lectures delivered here, so different in their character from ordinary Pulpit ministrations. Two of his Lectures have been published during the year by Mr. SCOTT, of Ramsgate, who is doing so much to spread Free Opinions amongst those to whom he has access.

Besides the Service from Mr. VOYSEY, before alluded to, we have had two most instructive and interesting Services from Mr. CHANNING, one in consequence of Mr. CONWAY'S temporary illness, and the other on account of his sudden engagement at Newcastle. Your Committee cheerfully concur in the occasional absences of Mr. CONWAY, not only from their desire to show courtesy to him, but because they also feel that it is their duty to facilitate the extension into new spheres of the Principles which Mr. CONWAY so admirably inculcates. On one other Sunday the Congregation had the great pleasure of listening to an excellent Service from Mr. ROBERT COLLYER, of Chicago; in connexion with whom your Committee cannot but allude to the dreadful fire which occurred in the autumn at Chicago, by which his Church and private dwelling were destroyed, with nearly

all his personal property; and it is very gratifying to them to be able to add that the Unitarian body in England displayed their sympathy with him by contributing about £3000 towards the restoration of the destroyed property. On the Sunday of Mr. COLLYER'S Service an impromptu and informal meeting was afterwards held in the Chapel, presided over by Mr. P. A. TAYLOR, the member for Leicester, to petition Parliament for such an alteration of the law with respect to Sunday Trading as should prevent the partial and unjust oppression which was then being exercised against a few poor shopkeepers, whom the Magistrates were obliged unwillingly to convict and fine.

Your Committee, through their Treasurer, have the pleasure of occasionally hearing from Mr. SEN, their interesting visitor of last year, and of learning that, partly by his efforts; the Theistic movement is steadily progressing throughout the vast population of India. The friends of Mr. SEN in England, amongst whom are to be reckoned many Members of this Congregation, have had the pleasure of sending him an Organ for his Church, which, it is hoped, arrived on New Year's Day. Another generation will probably see vast progress made towards dispelling the darkness of Indian superstition by the simple and rational efforts of Mr. SEN and his fellow-workers.

In the course of the year a case of gross Religious Persecution occurred at a township near Sydney, New South Wales, which greatly excited the sympathies of the Congregation. A person named JONES had been convicted of Blasphemy, and sentenced to fine and imprisonment, for the expression of sentiments, in a controversy to which he had been provoked, which, at least, are not very unlike our own. A Meeting was held in the Chapel, and Resolutions were passed, but happily it was not necessary to take any action in the matter, as the conviction was quashed on appeal to the Superior Court.

Several amateurs, Members of the Congregation, have joined the Choir during the past year, in response to the invitation of the Committee. It is still susceptible of further improvement from further additions, and the Committee repeat their invitation. They also invite volunteer additions to the Committee.

A very pleasant *Soirée* of the Members and their Friends was held at the Cannon Street Hotel early in June, which was fully attended. These *réunions* give an opportunity to the Congregation of becoming personally acquainted with each other, which is scarcely furnished by the brief weekly meeting at the Chapel on Sunday mornings, especially considering the different and distant localities from which the Congregation gather, and the absence of those other various means of personal intercourse possessed by most Congregations. The Committee hope to arrange another *Soirée* shortly, and anticipate from it not less pleasure than has been afforded by previous ones. It is gratifying to be able to state that these pleasant Meetings are self-supporting, and do not burden the General Funds.

In furtherance of the same object of promoting the personal acquaintance of the members with each other and with himself, Mr. CONWAY has instituted a series of Receptions at his own residence, to which he invites the Members of the Congregation. Two such pleasant Receptions have already been held, and it cannot be doubted that they greatly tend to further the object in view, that of assimilating the Congregation to the character of a Family, and of promoting mutual Union and Coöperation.

The Treasurer's Report shows the Receipts during the year to have been £579 8s. 5d., and the Expenditure £624 5s. 0d., leaving a balance due to him of £44 16s. 7d.

It must be gratifying to the Congregation to observe that, although a larger sum than usual has been paid to

Mr. CONWAY for his invaluable services during the past year, the deficiency to be now made up is much less than usual. They feel it their duty, however, to state that the Treasurer is almost always without Chapel Funds, chiefly in consequence of many of the Seat Rents, which ought to be all paid in advance, being considerably in arrear—sometimes to the extent of a whole year. This is a state of matters which ought not to exist, and your Committee hope that it is only necessary to call attention to it to ensure its being remedied.

The Benevolent Fund Report is as follows:—

1871.	DR.	£	s.	d.	1871.	CR.	£	s.	d.
Jan. 1.	To Balance in hand	32	1	3	Jan. 1 to Dec. 31.				
Dec. 31.	Subscriptions and Donations throughout the year	11	3	7	By Annuities, Donations, and Christmas Gifts	11	2	0	
					Balance	32	2	10	
		<u>£43</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>10</u>			<u>£43</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>10</u>

During the past year the Committee have been enabled to render help to others besides the one Annuitant now on the Fund; especially have they been able to assist one afflicted Member of the Congregation, and to help him to help himself. They are glad still to have the means of meeting any emergency that may arise.

Your Committee conclude their Report in the same tone of congratulation with which they commenced it. Looking back to the time when this Chapel was built—not quite fifty years since—and noting the vast social improvements which have since been effected, in the promotion of which this Congregation has honourably borne its part, they cannot but feel that they have every encouragement for continued effort. And there is still a vast phalanx of evils against which to devote our efforts: amongst them, at the present time, perhaps the most

immediately prominent are the defects in the Education Act of last session. Each and all of us must do what in him lies to root out Denominationalism from the State Education of the People, and to effect a complete separation between Secular and Religious Teaching. When that has been done and the Education Boards have got into working order, we may fairly hope for our Country that the Night of Ignorance will have begun to pass away, and that the Day will be dawning in which Superstition shall give place to Faith in Universal Law, and the Heaven hoped for in another world shall have commenced its realization in this.

January 28, 1872.

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