

**CENTENARY HISTORY OF THE  
SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY. BASED  
ON FOUR DISCOURSES GIVEN IN  
THE CHAPEL IN MAY AND JUNE,  
1893; PP. 1-184**

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Centenary History of the South Place Society. Based on Four Discourses given in the Chapel in May and June, 1893; pp. 1-184 by Moncure D. Conway

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**MONCURE D. CONWAY**

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SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY

BASED ON FOUR DISCOURSES GIVEN IN THE  
CHAPEL IN MAY AND JUNE, 1893

BY  
MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.

WITH APPENDIX

*CONTAINING AN ADDRESS BY MR. FOX, IN 1842*  
*AN ORIGINAL POEM BY MRS. ADAMS, 1836*  
*AND*  
*A DISCOURSE BY MR. CONWAY, 1893*



LONDON  
WILLIAMS AND NORGATE  
AND AT EDINBURGH

1894

10

12-4-37

## PREFACE

WHILE such imposing centenarian recollections cluster about this year (1893), it may seem rather bold for a single Religious Society to invite attention to its hundred years of labour and vicissitude. And indeed the Author's original intention contemplated no more than one historical discourse, which might, perhaps, form a pamphlet useful to the Society and its friends, who dwell in different regions. But the field was new, and with farther exploration the discourses, despite all compression, extended to four; and since their delivery the work of revision, entailing new inquiries, has so modified and enlarged the original discourses that they may hardly be recognised by those who heard them. This growth of the investigation to the dignity of a small volume followed the Author's increasing impression that the Society's unrecorded story, as dug out of its manuscript archives, from old magazines and pamphlets, and



the memories of aged persons, might fairly claim the interest of a larger public. The historic sense cannot fail to recognise the picturesque, and to some extent representative, relation of the Society to the tremendous events amid which it was born, and find in its conservative radicalism, unbroken by any incitement of violence or iconoclastic insanity, maintenance, in its modest sphere, of the healthier traditions of English progress. From the victorious American Revolution came the torch that kindled the Revolution in Europe; from it also came the lamp which an American, who in youth had seen General Washington besieging Boston, brought to the little chapel in London, where it still burned, after the revolutionary torch was quenched in blood, and through the night of Liberty's despair, till the morning stars sang again.

But it would be a mistake to suppose that in the wayfarer from New England, Elhanan Winchester, or in those who with him founded the Society, there was any consciousness of their relationship to the revolutionary era. They were Scriptural enthusiasts of a new gospel—the ultimate salvation of all mankind in a future world. In France, maddened by the invading league of despots, hurling at them the head of a king, Elhanan Winchester heard only the

apocalyptic trumpet, and recognised its prophesied "Woes." Yet in their doctrine of universal redemption there was an essential spirit and force of humanity which, after the pattern of a new heaven, must inevitably shape the vision of a new earth. Even from a world whose millennial consummation seemed at hand, our London "Philadelphians," as they called themselves, wished to clear away African slavery, and inhuman punishments, and penal statutes against religious liberty. Even amid their raptures, in view of a celestial paradise enjoyed by all, began unconsciously their pilgrimage from the world to come to that which now is.

But these generalizations, here written after my work is printed, find little place in it. The occasion has appeared to me one rather for the recovery of interesting details, illustrating the interior life of an unorthodox Society of educated people, animated by a comprehensive principle of religious liberty, at successive stages of struggle and progress; and also casting some fresh light on individual characters, and on their services to each just cause as it arose, and each new truth. This appears to me the most important contribution that the South Place archives can make to the yet unwritten religious history of England. And though the contribution is so brief,

an outline filled in with sketches and anecdotes, those interested in the study will find the work to some extent an index to a considerable literature which really grew out of the Society, but is cherished by all cultured readers without any such association. In this lies the immediate honour of this old Society. It was in its origin made up of the waifs and strays of many sects, united only by an enthusiasm for the Universal Love which consumed sectarianism; it has steadily remained unsectarian; it has never possessed any denominational trade-mark to stamp on its own productions. The story now briefly told is that of a religious Society founded at a time of extreme degeneration, when government mainly consisted in "lynching" the Liberals, burning in effigy the author of the "Rights of Man," and imprisoning those who circulated such works; when Edmund Burke was insisting on the penal statutes for even moderate religious heresies; when Charles James Fox declared the English Constitution cut up by the roots, and obedience to such "despotism" no longer "a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence": of a Society which, animated by a devout enthusiasm of humanity, did steadfastly, and by purely moral and intellectual weapons, maintain, under four