

**CENTENARY HISTORY OF THE
SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY BASED
ON
FOUR DISCOURSES GIVEN IN THE
CHAPEL IN MAY AND JUNE, 1893**

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Centenary history of the South Place Society based on four discourses given in the chapel in May and June, 1893 by Moncure D. Conway

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MONCURE D. CONWAY

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*This work is presented to the South
Place Ethical Society by the Author*

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SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY



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BASED ON FOUR DISCOURSES GIVEN IN THE
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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

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,