The validity of American ideals

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE MAKING OF TO-MORROW
The Validity of American Ideals

By

SHAILER MATHEWS
Dean of the Divinity School, the University of Chicago
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GIFT

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INTRODUCTION

George Slocum Bennett, a graduate of Wesleyan University in the class of 1864, showed his lifelong interest in the training of youth for the privileges and duties of citizenship by long periods of service as a member of the Board of Education of his home city, and as member of the boards of trustees of Wyoming Seminary and Wesleyan University.

It was fitting, therefore, that, when the gifts made by himself and family to Wesleyan University were combined to form a fund whose income should be used "in defraying the expenses of providing for visiting lecturers, preachers, and other speakers supplemental to the college faculty," it should have been decided that the primary purpose should be to provide each year a course of lectures, by a distinguished speaker, "for the promotion of a better understanding of national problems and of a more perfect realization of the responsibilities of citizenship," and to provide for the publication of such lectures so that they
INTRODUCTION

might reach a larger public than the audience to which they should, in the first instance, be addressed.

To give the third course of lectures on this Foundation, the joint committee for its administration appointed by the board of trustees and by the faculty, selected Shailer Mathews, Dean of the Divinity School in the University of Chicago. The varied and brilliant career of this teacher, administrator, editor, author, and lecturer, has brought him into contact with the people of almost every part of this country. His extensive studies in the fields of religion, history, economics, and sociology have peculiarly fitted him for the task of correlating and interpreting his impressions of American life and character in such a way as to bring out the real significance of those national ideals which have become a part of the American tradition, and in which we are accustomed to find the justification for our type of democracy.

WILLIAM ARNOLD SHANKLIN.
DAVID GEORGE DOWNEY.
ALBERT WHEELER JOHNSTON.
HENRY MERRITT Wriston.
FRANK EDGAR FARLEY.
PREFACE

Any brief discussion of the history and significance of America is exposed to the danger of falling into theoretical criticism or nebulous generalization. I am not sure that I have escaped either danger. The validity of American ideals deserves a much fuller treatment than these lectures permit. Yet I feel that an understanding of the constructive ideals of our nation is indispensable to an intelligent citizenship. Especially in an age like ours, which is suffering from the chaotic conditions that have always followed great wars, is there need to see American life in its perspective and to realize its inner spiritual forces.

There is no lack of men who are eager to point out the shortcomings of America. There are all too many who can see in our social order only an opportunity for arousing the spirit of conflict which a war demands for its success. But the psychology of peace is radically different from that of war. While we are fighting even for the noblest ideals our unity must rest largely upon a common enmity. But in times of peace we must aban-
don hatred as a basis of social unity unless we can perform the almost miraculous feat of making it serve as a basis of united assault upon social injustice and other evils which are a part of our human lot.

A nation in peace has seldom been able to utilize the attitudes developed in war. Even the common hatred which has united us in the face of an enemy becomes a source of internal misunderstandings and conflicts. Now that we have ceased to fight, we must learn to cooperate. The position of our nation as the final arbiter in the great war is being duplicated in the more difficult field of the reestablishment of civilization and the making of a better world. The problem of the citizen is more complicated and difficult than that of a soldier.

In these lectures I have tried to help the generation that bore the brunt of the war to take up the course of development interrupted by that great tragedy. If, despite the obvious insufficiency of presentation, I have in any way succeeded in my effort, I shall feel that I have to some degree fulfilled the purposes of the founders of the lectureship under whose auspices I spoke.