

**THE SPIRITUAL  
INTERPRETATION  
OF HISTORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649253791

The spiritual interpretation of history by Shailer Mathews

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**SHAILER MATHEWS**

**THE SPIRITUAL  
INTERPRETATION  
OF HISTORY**



THE  
SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION  
OF HISTORY

BY

SHAILER MATHEWS, A.M., D.D., LL.D. 1867-1947

PROFESSOR OF HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO AND DEAN  
OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL



CAMBRIDGE  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1916

## THE WILLIAM BELDEN NOBLE LECTURES

THIS Lectureship was constituted a perpetual foundation in Harvard University in 1898, as a memorial to the late WILLIAM BELDEN NOBLE of Washington, D. C. (Harvard, 1885). The deed of gift provides that the lectures shall be not less than six in number, that they shall be delivered annually, and, if convenient, in the Phillips Brooks House, during the season of Advent. Each lecturer shall have ample notice of his appointment, and the publication of each course of lectures is required. The purpose of the Lectureship will be further seen in the following citation from the deed of gift by which it was established: —

"The object of the founder of the Lectures is to continue the mission of William Belden Noble, whose supreme desire it was to extend the influence of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life; to make known the meaning of the words of Jesus, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' In accordance with the large interpretation of the Influence of Jesus by the late Phillips Brooks, with whose religious teaching he in whose memory the Lectures are established and also the founder of the Lectures were in deep sympathy, it is intended that the scope of the Lectures shall be as wide as the highest interests of humanity. With this end in view, — the perfection of the spiritual man and the consecration

vi THE WILLIAM BELDEN NOBLE LECTURES

by the spirit of Jesus of every department of human character, thought, and activity, — the Lectures may include philosophy, literature, art, poetry, the natural sciences, political economy, sociology, ethics, history both civil and ecclesiastical, as well as theology and the more direct interests of the religious life. Beyond a sympathy with the purpose of the Lectures, as thus defined, no restriction is placed upon the lecturer."

# CONTENTS

## LECTURE I

	PAGE
THE LIMITS WITHIN WHICH THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY IS POSSIBLE	3

The two possible interpretations of history. I. Two negligible interpretations. 1. History as a mere aggregation of events. 2. History as the product of supernatural forces. II. Interpretations that minimize spiritual elements in history. 1. The geographic. 2. The economic. III. Fundamental criticism of the economic interpretation of history. IV. Facts which the economic interpretation of history minimizes: personality, great men, ideals in social customs, racial pride and jealousy, uneconomic passions, aspirations in art and literature, moral and religious ideals, the independence of conscious motives. V. The limits of a spiritual interpretation of history set by a real world.

## LECTURE II

SPIRITUAL TENDENCIES IN HISTORY AS A WHOLE	35
--	----

History as social evolution involves tendencies as well as events. I. The tendency of history as a whole seen by a comparison of modern with primitive civilizations. Earliest achievements of mankind. Primitive man. The superiority of men to animals due to personality. II. Tendencies in special epochs. 1. Greek history; religion, social life, the Greek soul. 2. Early Christianity. Not



due to mere eclecticism or economic class struggles. The messianic hope. Christianity in the Roman Empire. 3. The Protestant Reformation. Economic aspects of its origin. Genuine spiritual forces within. III. Recent recognition of spiritual forces in historical epochs. Consumption *vs.* production.

## LECTURE III

## THE SUBSTITUTION OF MORAL FOR PHYSICAL CONTROL

67

Outline of further argument. I. The reliance upon force as a point of departure. The Reign of Terror an indication of its futility. II. The general tendency of history in this regard. Customs tend to replace force. III. Conscience as determined by fear of divine force. Ancient codes. The evolution of the Day of Judgment: in the Egyptian religion; in the Babylonian religion. IV. The transition from reliance upon force to moral control seen in the development of religion. Not denied even by persecution. The Christian conception of a God of love. Social ideals as reflected in the development of religion. V. The same transition in the field of law. Force as basis of early law. Roman law. English law. The influence of religion. The change in international attitudes. VI. The present outlook.

## LECTURE IV

## THE GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE WORTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL

109

The question of freedom *in* of fact. I. The relation of great men to history. Luther and the Reformers. Other great persons in history. II. The growing personal worth of the individual seen in: 1. The passing of slavery. 2. The

## CONTENTS

ix

new position of women. 3. The rights of children. 4. The new care of the aged. 5. The care of the unfit. III. The subordination of the economic to the personal values of the individual. 1. The case of war. 2. The case of slaves. 3. New recognition of personal worth in the industrial world. The class struggle.

## LECTURE V

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF RIGHTS INTO JUSTICE 143

The meaning of "rights" and "justice." I. The classes of rights. 1. The right of property. 2. The rights of women; children; parents; classes. II. The development of rights into justice as illustrated by the history of England. Magna Charta. The rights of Englishmen pass into the rights of men. The religious origin of the Bills of Rights. The struggle to get rights. The influence of the philosophy of Bentham. III. The development of duties from the recognition of other people's rights. Rights in a democracy. Personal basis of rights. IV. Democracy rather than imperialism makes toward the giving of full justice to individuals. 1. The new social interest in extension of rights. 2. The replacement of rights by justice in the case of women. Woman in the ancient world; in the Middle Ages; in the eighteenth century; in today's life. 3. The new sense of justice in the industrial world. The labor conflict. The new attitude of corporations. 4. Justice in the new penology. V. Permanent social welfare comes more certainly from giving justice than from the fight for rights. The Fourth of August, 1789. The self-effacement of the Shogun. The relations of Great Britain and the United States.

## LECTURE VI

THE SPIRITUAL OPPORTUNITY IN A PERIOD OF  
RECONSTRUCTION 188

Summary of the argument. I. God in history. Hegelianism and the philosophy of Lotze. II. The call for idealism. Faith in spiritual forces. III. Loyalty to spiritual values particularly needed in: 1. Democracy in which economic elements tend to be over-emphasized. 2. The urging the fundamental principles taught by Jesus. IV. The opportunity for emphasizing spiritual forces in history are especially seen in three fields: 1. Intellectual life. 2. Social reconstruction. 3. Foreign missions. V. The call of the present day to men of spiritual ambitions.

## INDEX