

# **THE NORTH AMERICAN IDEA**

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The North American idea by James A. Macdonald

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**JAMES A. MACDONALD**

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AMERICAN IDEA**



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*The Cole Lectures for 1917*  
delivered before Vanderbilt University

# The North American Idea

By  
JAMES A. MACDONALD, LL. D.



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## THE COLE LECTURES

THE late Colonel E. W. Cole of Nashville, Tennessee, donated to Vanderbilt University the sum of five thousand dollars, afterwards increased by Mrs. E. W. Cole to ten thousand, the design and conditions of which gift are stated as follows :

"The object of this fund is to establish a foundation for a perpetual Lectureship in connection with the Biblical Department of the University, to be restricted in its scope to a defense and advocacy of the Christian religion. The lectures shall be delivered at such intervals, from time to time, as shall be deemed best by the Board of Trust; and the particular theme and lecturer shall be determined by nomination of the Theological Faculty and confirmation of the College of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Said lecture shall always be reduced to writing in full, and the manuscript of the same shall be the property of the University, to be published or otherwise disposed of by the Board of Trust at its discretion, the net proceeds arising therefrom to be added to the foundation fund, or otherwise used for the benefit of the Biblical Department."

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## A FOREWORD

**I**T was inevitable that the Cole Lectures for 1917 should carry the accent and the atmosphere of the Time of War.

10/29/1927

These Lectures were delivered under the auspices of the School of Religion of Vanderbilt University, in Nashville, Tennessee, during the six days that closed April and opened May. That was the historic week when the British Mission and the French Mission, led by the Right Hon. Arthur Balfour and Marshall Joffre, were foregathering in Washington with President Woodrow Wilson and his Cabinet, and were making history more memorable, more crammed with world events, than their three world nations ever knew before.

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Homes

During those very days, the undergraduates of Vanderbilt, all the men fit for war, were mustering on their campus and were marching away to their training-camps, their

American hearts filled with a new emotion, and their eyes aflame with the strange light flashed back from the trenches in France and Flanders. The war accent was inevitable.

More than that. (The war touch came nearer still.) The very title of this volume, "The North American Idea," was chosen for the Weil Lectures of 1916, in the University of North Carolina, and was first used for three Lectures on that Foundation, which I had the honour of delivering before that University in December of last year. It was planned that those lectures should be published at the time of their delivery. But war conditions made that impossible. Early in 1917, with the generous consent of the authorities of both universities, I substituted "The North American Idea" for the title previously chosen for the Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt.

Personally it would be to me very agreeable to have been associated with President Graham and his colleagues of North Carolina in the publication of those Lectures. But, now that events changed so suddenly and so

completely the whole American situation, setting free the North American idea from the hesitations and the discords which the neutrality of the United States had imposed on the free expression of the North American mind, most grateful am I that, even at the last moment, with the very opening of the Lectureship, the horizon line of "The North American Idea" was so widened that its view-point was put into complete harmony with the spirit of Canada and with the achievement of North America's internationalism.

The confusions of party politics, on both sides, sometimes made it seem as though there could be no supreme, dominant, and united North American idea. But those differences were only on the surface. Those discords were but for the moment. In the deepest note there is harmony. Two nations: in their expanding democracy the United States and Canada are true to one ideal. Two flags: the battle-fields of Europe are consecrated by the poured-out blood of their own people. Two records: in the long