

Notes by F. T. Gates on J. D. Green's Memo of October 22, 1913

It is generally held by students of civilization that endowments of charitable and religious agencies early outlive their usefulness and then tend to become hindrances rather than helps in the progress of civilization. The charities of one generation are not the proper charities of the next generation. Every decade, almost every year of human progress develops new needs, new methods and new objects, often revolutionary, and destruction is often antecedent to replacement. The progress of the last three hundred years in Italy, Germany, France, England has been possible only by wholesale legislative confiscation of endowments, which, beneficent and desirable perhaps when made, came at last to retard and enslave only. Spain is still held fast in the bonds of the powerfully endowed institutions of the past.

On the other hand, the unique distinction and the peculiar value of The Rockefeller Foundation may prove to be in two qualities, - its universality and its deathlessness. It may adapt itself from decade to decade and from century to century to the changing needs of the times. It is wholly released from those limitations which compel mortals by the certainty of death to give permanent and fixed direction to the charities which they must leave behind them. Endowments are at best a last resource to the dying. But ours is a living, not a dead hand. We are released from compulsion of mortality. Ours is a privilege denied to individuals of giving always and only to current needs, to adjust the giving annually to timeliness, to merit, to efficiency, closely to fit our work to existing or prospective facts, and to withdraw our gift from any recipient when good sense directs. Educational institutions located in this country, not abroad, might in rare cases be aided in endowment.