Subject: Practice of giving in other countries for charitable and similar purposes.

One of the things which most foreigners cannot understand is the habit of our people in the United States in giving so freely for charitable, educational, and other purposes. I have lived in many countries. I have not lived in any in which it is the practice, even of the very rich, to give to charitable or other purposes. The whole aim is to leave everything to the family and it is considered a cardinal sin and against tradition to leave any money away from the family. I have not lived in England or in Canada, but in these two countries the practice of giving in fairly large amounts has been established for some years, and while it does not in any way reach the scale and scope that it does in our country it at least approximates it. There are many thoughts in this connection which occur to me but I wish here to record the following. When I was stationed in Belgium from the beginning of 1919 until 1928 we became really very much a part of the country. We have always been well received in every country where we were stationed but we did not become attached to the life of a country so much as we did to that of Belgium and particularly of the city of Antwerp. We were fortunate in being stationed in Antwerp, where the Consulate General had its seat, rather than in Brussels. Antwerp had been one of the trading cities of Europe for four or five centuries. Antwerp had been one of the great ports of the world for centuries. It was not only a port for Belgium for the vast hinterland of Belgium. The imports and exports of Western Germany and even Switzerland and Northern Italy went through Antwerp. The history of Antwerp as one of the great trading centers of the Middle Ages and of modern times is so well established that I need not refer to it here. This trade brought riches to Belgium and to Antwerp. There were families in Antwerp which had been engaged in the export-import trade in wool and other products for
centuries. Among these families were the Osterreich, the Kreglinger, and many others. In banking and commercial circles English was spoken almost as generally as Flemish and French. Many of them knew Spanish because of the trade with South America. These important trading families in Antwerp were very interesting, they were cosmopolitan. It was this long connection for generations with the outside world which had made them so. They were widely travelled as well. We always thought we were very fortunate that we had these ten years among these hospitable, friendly and cosmopolitan circles in Antwerp. Some of the most lasting and cherished friendships we formed during the many years of our government were in Belgium. They received us in their homes and we became almost a part of the family. It was a delightful life of which I shall speak elsewhere in these notes.

 Shortly after our arrival in Antwerp in January 1919, I became ill. I began to lose strength; I had no idea what was wrong with me and no adequate diagnosis was made. For family reasons my wife had to return to the United States and I lived, for the time that she was away, at a hotel. One night I went to the home of a friend for dinner and bridge and walked a considerable distance from his house to the hotel. I do not know what happened but the next morning I was found by the hotel servants in bed with my clothes on and a doctor was called and it was found that I'd had a serious hemorrhage. It was found that I had a serious ulcer. I was in the hands of an excellent stomach specialist in Antwerp. The ulcer would not heal. I was advised to go to the American Army Hospital there. Some of the people who had been trained under Dr. Sippey, the great ulcer specialist of his time, were in the American Army Hospital in the military service at the time. My wife and her mother, who was staying with us, and I went by automobile to Coblenz.
I spent well over a month in the hospital at Coblenz and received excellent care but the ulcer did not improve. I was advised to return to Antwerp. We returned by train as I had sent our car back to Antwerp some time before. I recall that when we reached Luxembourg, where we had to change trains for Antwerp, I was so tired that I stretched out on a bench in the waiting room of the station. I was utterly discouraged and exhausted. I felt that there was no cure for the ulcer, that I was a burden to my family and to myself. I recall so vividly the thought occurring to me how happy a solution it would be if I would go to sleep on that bench and never wake again. I came to the realization of what it would mean for my family to be left with me in Luxembourg alone. I pulled myself together and some way or other we got to Antwerp.

The excellent stomach doctor who was looking after me came to the conclusion that he could do nothing about the ulcer and that an operation was necessary. The operation then was an unusual one but he told me that he was confident that a Belgian surgeon named Dr. van der Stricht performed the operation successfully. I went to the hospital in the spring of the year when it was still cold. Fuel was still lacking for heating in Antwerp. I recall that when I was in the anteroom of the operating room and they were preparing to give the anesthetic I felt rather cold even though I was covered with blankets. I turned to the anesthetist and said, "Is it as cold in the next room (pointing to the operating room) as it is here?" and his reply was a laconic "Why not?" I put back my head and, I can recall it as though it were this moment, I hoped for the best for my family for I felt that I would never get through the operation. I knew it was, for that time, a serious operation and a relatively new one. I knew that I was in a terribly weakened condition as the result of the more or less constant loss of blood for months. I felt that I had no chance of getting through the
operation. The operation turned out to be successful and within three weeks or four I was able to return to the Consulate General for my duties. Had I followed the advice of the doctor and of the surgeon I would have not had so much trouble with my stomach in future years. It was a case of too much conscience and too much zeal and too little common sense on my part.

It was an extraordinary piece of good fortune and perhaps the most fortunate thing that happened to me in this respect, in my whole life, that I fell into the hands of Dr. van der Stricht. Although he already had a reputation as a great surgeon at that time and was a relatively young man, he has become one of the great surgeons of Europe. Had it not been for his skill in performing this relatively new operation I certainly would not have survived the operation or in any event would have been a wreck after it and had no real further usefulness. I have felt and feel towards him a debt of gratitude as great as that I feel towards any man because he definitely saved my life and whatever usefulness I may have had in life and whatever happiness I may have enjoyed with my family and friends in these many years since 1919 is due to his skill.

The charges which he made for the operation and for his care of me were very reasonable. I always was thinking of a way in which I could in some way repay him for his saving my life and making life possible. I found that his great ambition was to found a clinic in which he could train young surgeons and young doctors. Such clinics in Antwerp at that time and in Belgium, as in a good many countries in Europe, were completely unknown. I determined that if at some time in my life I would be able to help Dr. van der Stricht bring about a realization of his ambition I would do so.
One evening we had dinner, that is, my wife and myself, in the beautiful home in Antwerp of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest van der Linden. They were one of the old Belgian aristocratic families and their home was a jewel and the dinners which they served were wonderful. After dinner the men adjourned to the library. The conversation turned almost immediately to giving by Americans in the United States. The men present were all wealthy men who occupied important positions in the commercial and banking life of Belgium and Antwerp. They had all become good friends of mine. I think they had a fairly good opinion of me as I had of them. They had learned to appreciate the interest which I was showing in my work and the understanding which I was showing of Belgium's problems and of our relationship with Belgium. In other words, their mood was certainly most friendly and sympathetic. When this provoking question was asked me, showing skepticism as to whether Americans really gave to charity and to educational and other causes as they were supposed to give, I rose to the challenge. I began to tell them something about our habits of giving in the United States. I said that they must not only think of the giving by men such as Mr. Carnegie, Mr. Rockefeller, and others, but that they must realize that this practice of giving was not confined to the very rich nor to the rich. I found nothing but skepticism in the eyes of those present. I said that they knew the names of Carnegie and Rockefeller because they had given away so much money and for so many purposes, I went into great detail to try to make them understand that even among people of moderate means this giving was general. Finally, in desperation I said that a man who died worth a hundred thousand dollars, or even fifty thousand dollars, would hardly think of making his will unless he left a few thousand dollars or even a few hundred dollars to some charity. If he could do nothing else he might leave a few hundred dollars to the local cemetery. I was not in
any way exaggerating the picture but I could see that my friends did not believe a word that I said. I became really exasperated, but as it was a friendly dinner there was not much that I could except to tell them that I hoped that they would learn what I had said was correct. I'm absolutely confident that the opinion which some of these people held of me before this conversation started was changed during the dinner. They felt that I was exaggerating and perhaps boasting as Americans had at that time the reputation of doing. I was all the more exasperated because these people, rich as they were and having still very large fortunes, had been able to live comfortably in Belgium during the war. It was true that they had suffered from the German occupation which lasted during the war and had had many inconveniences, but so far as food was concerned they had been able, through the work of the Belgian Relief Committee which depended almost one hundred percent on aid from hundreds of thousands of American citizens, to enjoy delicacies which we did not enjoy in the United States.

I made up my mind that I would more than ever see what I could do towards starting something in the way of giving by some of these people. I knew that they were very good people; I knew that they were governed entirely by tradition and practice in the way they left their money only to the family and gave nothing to charity. One of my best friends in Belgium was Mr. Bunge. He was a great merchant and one of the principal merchants in Europe and certainly perhaps, at the time, the richest man in Belgium. He had a large family and lived in a beautiful chateau on the outskirts of the city. He was a kindly and generous man in his way. He entertained lavishly in his home. Two of his had married Americans who had been with the Belgian Relief in Belgium during the war. He was remarkably free from many prejudices. I began to tell Mr. Bunge, in friendly conversations we had, how wonderful it
would be if this practice of giving in Belgium was started and it would be wonderful if he were to take the lead in it. I am sure that his son-in-law, Milton Brown, and his daughter, Erica, encouraged this idea. I had, however, no idea that the seed was germinating. In our conversations I spoke frequently of Dr. van der Stricht and of what he was adding to Belgian prestige by his great capacity and reputation as a surgeon and how much he was doing for so many poor people as well as for people in circumstances such as Mr. Bunge was. There was really not much response.

It was, therefore, with a great deal of surprise that I learned that Mr. Bunge had informed his children that he was going to leave a considerable amount to Dr. van der Stricht for the establishment of a clinic in Antwerp. I think all of his children were not only in accord but extremely happy that Mr. Bunge was taking this action. Shortly after the clinic was established, Mr. Bunge, who was well advanced in years, was taken ill and had to undergo a serious operation in this clinic.

After Mr. Bunge's death, by agreement among his children, the amount which he had left to this clinic was increased by them. It was the beginning of this sort of thing in Belgium. For me it gave me a great deal of happiness not only because of the good that I knew the clinic would do but because I felt that I'd been able to pay partially the great debt of gratitude which I owed to Dr. van der Stricht in the realization of the dream and ambition which he had. The clinic has become an important element in the medical life of Antwerp and of Belgium, and I am glad to say that Dr. van der Stricht is still alive at this writing, 1955; what I was able to do was little to repay him for what he had done for me, but as my means would never have permitted me to do anything to really repay him I was at least happy that I'd been able to
sow these seeds in the mind of Mr. Bunge, which germinated, and brought such gracious fruit.

During the last thirty years I have noticed in various countries of Europe and in Latin America that this practice of giving is increasing, but it is still pitifully inadequate. I think that a good many foreigners still believe that we are a very extraordinary people and an incomprehensible one. They cannot understand this habit of giving of ours; they have immeasurably benefited from it in many countries. Some of the foundations, like the Rockefeller Foundation, have done work of immeasurable benefit in countries like China, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and so many other countries. I only mention this because it is one of the outstanding examples. Other foundations and individuals in the United States have done so much to help humanitarian, sanitation, education, and other basic needs in so many countries. I do not like to express this thought but I cannot help but have the conviction even after all these years, and although this practice of giving has increased so much in some of these other countries, that we are still looked upon with a certain amount of even disdain for what we are doing. Certainly I doubt whether it has increased the respect which many other peoples have for us. In Latin America where hospital needs are so great and where in a good many countries the great mass of the population still suffer from inadequate medical care and hospitalization, this task is left almost entirely to government. The Sociedad de Beneficencia up until the Peron regime had been doing a good deal of work in helping to raise money from the wealthy families in the Argentine for hospitals. As a matter of fact, however, even in the Argentine the members of the Sociedad de Beneficencia, who came from the wealthy aristocratic families of the country did not give so liberally themselves but they did acquit
themselves/endeavoring to get funds from merchants and industrialists. Until this spirit of giving is developed in the Latin countries of America, there will be something lacking in their social structure which will impede the development of democratic processes. I would say, from my observations in recent years in Latin America, where I have had the best opportunity in these latter years to observe developments, the movement is towards greater dependence on the state for these fundamental things rather than upon greater participation by those with some means in these important works. In Mexico where so much progress has been made in recent years in every field, these things are still left almost entirely to the government. There is, however, an interesting change taking place in Mexico in this respect. There is slowly developing a social consciousness which is having its fruit, even though it still be meager. Some of the larger and better hospitals in Mexico City are very largely supported by private contributions, such as the French Hospital and the Spanish Hospital and the American-British Hospital. Various technical schools have been established and business schools, largely through the contributions of wealthy Mexicans. Notable among these is the Technical Institute in Monterrey, which is training some of the best engineers being developed in the country. Another important example of the increased interest is the school which has been established at the initiative of banking interests in Mexico for the advanced training of employees in banking institutions in order to fit them for higher positions in the banks and in commercial and industrial life. If this interest in giving in Mexico has not developed in ratio with the increasing wealth of a considerable group of the population, there are at least evidences of increased interest and promise for the future.