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The Small Foundation

On a single recent day the Ford Foundation announced grants totaling \$500 million to increase faculty salaries and to improve medical education and practice. This is philanthropy on the grand scale, a scale so grand that the amount exceeds the combined capital resources of the two foundations next in order of size after the Ford Foundation.

Great wealth makes possible such a broadside attack and permits a foundation to support a number of different efforts. A small foundation must necessarily use a different method of making its resources effective, for trying to do on a small scale what the great foundations can do on a large scale might merely dissipate its resources and would certainly accomplish little that is distinctive. If it is to be a significant factor in the philanthropic picture, the small foundation must look about for a worth-while task on which it will not duplicate the work of larger foundations. The Bok Peace prize of a quarter of a century ago was a dramatic illustration of the distinctive use of relatively small resources and made the sponsoring American Foundation known to many who otherwise would never have heard of it.

The American Foundation was established in 1924 by the late Edward W. Bok with an endowment of \$2 million to be used for charitable, scientific, literary, and educational purposes and to promote the welfare of mankind. It has recently completed a study that is distinctive and has special significance for science: publication of a two-volume work entitled *Medical Research: A Midcentury Survey*. In preparation for 15 years, the report was given a ceremonial launching by the foundation on 15 November and was published the following day by Little, Brown and Company.

The theme of the report is that the best hope of solving major outstanding medical problems lies in fundamental research in the basic sciences. The first volume is a critical analysis of contemporary agencies interested in medical research. The second takes nine illustrative problems—for example, cancer, rheumatic conditions, and alcoholism—and examines the relationships between basic research and their eventual solutions.

Obviously such a work drew upon the resources of many organizations and had the assistance of many persons. Special help came from a consulting committee of 26 eminent scientists and clinicians. But the lion's share of the credit for a well done job, the consultants say, belongs to Esther Everett Lape and her assistants on the American Foundation staff. The consultants were enthusiastic in their praise for Miss Lape's skill in organizing and interpreting, accuracy of reporting, and clarity of writing.

The report is directed primarily to the medical practitioner, but it is also, as one critic wrote, "lucid enough for the layman and detailed enough for the scientist in the field." Limited funds could have been used in other ways than to write such an impressive stock-taking and direction-pointing analysis as this report is. But certainly the impact on medical thinking and quite likely the contribution to the solution of major medical problems will be much greater than could have been achieved by an equal amount of money spent in more customary and less imaginative ways.—D. W.