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FIFTH AVENUE AT ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10029

April 20, 1966

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Stanford University School of Medicine
Palo Alto, California 94304

Dear Doctor Lederberg,

My delay in answering your letter of April 1 is due to a lack of competence to deal with your inquiry. Yesterday, I had lunch with Dr. René Dubos at the Rockefeller "University". He was in agreement with both the remarks made in your 1955 reprint and also with your suggestion that the "intellectual history of the interaction of these men" should be written up. However, I well know that I am not the person to do it. In my opinion, nobody could do this more effectively and gracefully than René Dubos.

Actually, interviews with about four persons could supply all facts essential for writing up the proposed bit of history. My guess is that Fred Griffith thought little of his experiment. The concept of pragmatism in the British Ministry of Health at that time was quite different from that of the Rockefeller Institute. On the other hand, there is no doubt in my mind of "how deeply Avery understood the genetic implications". Not only were his restraint and modesty exceptional, but his vision and insight were phenomenal. The sudden cessation of Avery's work was due to the Cupid's Arrow. An invaluable assistant, Miss Harriet Taylor, suddenly left his laboratory for Europe to become Mrs. Ephreussi. (???)

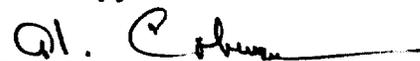
Coburn

One of the extraordinary aspects of the Griffith-Avery story is that the two men were so similar in many respects. This would impress anybody who knew them both.

To my way of thinking, it will be refreshing for future biologists to learn how Avery's mind rejected Griffith's work at first. It was a "foreign body", not to be assimilated. But Avery's mind was not closed. Avery had a deep respect for Griffith and when Avery satisfied himself that Griffith was right, he began his attack on the problem. As you well know, this was gentle, catholic and devastating to preconceived ideas.

It will be good to learn your reactions to my suggestion that René Dubos do the needful. All the best

Sincerely,



Alvin F. Coburn, M.D.
Assistant Dean and
Professor of Microbiology

AFC/fr
c.c. Dr. Rene Dubos