

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY

December 19, 1950

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Joshua:

I was delighted to have your letter of December 13 with the news of your decision about the reprint volume. I think you have decided wisely and I am glad that the UW Press went along with you in this matter.

Let me tell you the status of my book so that you can settle in your own mind what the situation is or should be, and your part in it. I have refused to make a contract with any of the various publishers who have contacted me about this because I don't want to be tied up until I see the manuscript finished. Then it will be time to present it to the publishers, for they seem to be avidly anxious for it. At the present time my material is in outline form only, but the outline is very extensive and detailed. The basis at present is in the form of the outline of two courses I have given on Genetics of Microorganisms, one in 1946 and one in 1948. I am about to give the course again beginning in February. Thusfar I have not covered in my two presentations any of the material more than once, and there is still a considerable fraction of the material to be covered--chiefly on bacteria and viruses. I avoided giving this to any extent in the past because Luria was here and covered that ground in his own course. The last time I gave the course I did give a section on bacteria, but deliberately presenting it from a point of view that I supposed would be somewhat different from Luria's and with different emphasis, referring the students to Luria's review and Luria's courses for the remainder of the material and the other point of view. Now that Luria is gone, I shall, of course, have to include the material on viruses and bacteria in my own course.

What I propose to do, beginning in February in my third trial at the course, is to summarize the work on viruses and bacteria and on certain fungi and algae that I have not yet dealt with, although I have covered a good many fungi and Chlamydomonas in previous presentations. In this third presentation of the course, therefore, I should be able to complete my survey of the material and have time left over to

retrace some of the ground, reorganizing it and bringing it up to date. The outline of my two previous trials at this course covers about 100 mimeographed pages each. Actually, mimeographed sheets were made only for the second time the course was given, but I have the equivalent notes in outline in longhand for the first course.

Meanwhile, I have been thinking over how this material should be brought together and put into book form, and have tentatively hit upon a mode of approach which I should be glad to discuss with you if you care to hear about it. It is my present plan to start writing the book during the coming semester while I am teaching the course. How far I will get with it, I do not know, but if I make appreciable progress, I should hope to continue along with it until it is done. I would anticipate that it could be completed sometime during 1951.

Now I should like to raise a question which concerns you. You are, of course, far more intimately involved in the work on bacteria than I am, and you probably know the virus work as well or better than I do. I wonder whether you would like to collaborate with me on the final volume, taking the chief responsibility for the work on bacteria and viruses. This inquiry is, of course, merely a feeler to see what your reactions would be and to see whether, if you are interested, we could agree upon a plan and mode of approach and of organization of the whole with distribution of our various parts in it.

There are, of course, two ways one could approach the subject of the Genetics of Microorganisms. One is to discuss the genetics of each kind of organism in a separate section. This indeed is the method I have used in working up the material and in presenting it to my classes. But one could also devise another approach which might be preferable. On this second approach I would put into an appendix a considerable section on the general biology and basic genetic mechanisms in each of the kinds of organisms to be considered in the body of the text. Then the text itself would be sub-divided by subjects rather than by organisms, with the understanding that the necessary background, if lacking, could be obtained from the appendix. A teacher might, for example, wish to have his students master the appendix first, before going on to the body of the text. I would think this a reasonable procedure.

If you and I were to collaborate on the volume I should like to plan to proceed according to the second method. If this were done, I would hope that you would write those sections of the appendix dealing with the general biology and basic genetic and cytogenetic mechanisms in the viruses and bacteria. I would be glad to cover the fungi, algae, and Protozoa. As to the body of the text, I have not yet fully thought out how this might be done, but there should, of course, be an extensive section on

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biochemical genetics, one on the analysis of meiotic processes and crossing over, one on cytoplasmic inheritance, and so on. In these subject sections, I would think that you and I would each write part as our materials bore on the subject under consideration, and that we would then try to put them together in some way agreeable to both of us. As you can see, this requires considerable coordination of effort, and would involve the necessity for amicable and friendly working relations in the hope that we could agree to some extent upon the ideas and conclusions reached. It would not, however, require that we be in absolute agreement on everything. Let me know your reactions to the general idea of collaboration and as to the method of approach that would be satisfactory to you. We can then discuss further whether or not we should try to proceed together on such a project.

Thanks for your very kind invitation to come and talk to your group at Wisconsin. There is no place I would rather go to see what is afoot and get acquainted with the people, and I do hope I will have a chance to take advantage of your invitation. However, I am head over heels now and once I start my course on Genetics of Microorganisms next semester, I shall spend every minute I can get in study and writing. So I should much prefer not to migrate anywhere until after this ordeal is over. If you would not change your mind in the meantime, I should much prefer to visit Wisconsin some time next year, for I have a semester free from teaching, that is the second semester of the next academic year. I would be glad to consider this a promise if it is satisfactory to you.

With very best wishes,

Cordially yours,



T. M. Sonneborn

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