

September 17, 1953

Dear Tracy:

Thank you for your cordial note. I am no less opposed to such awards (in principle) than ever, but suppose it would be in poor taste now to be outspoken on the subject.

Don't be too hard on Dave: while it would be not so much out of character for him to omit to let you know of his plans, I think I can quote some justification for him. It is not many weeks that his own plans were fixed (I think he made a definite comment about August 25); I was away myself at this time; and finally, he was under the impression you were still in Europe or would be till just about now.

Dave's appointment expired the end of August; we would have extended this for the month, of course, if he had been in any condition to do any work. He actually left Madison about August 27, came back for a few days last week. He did not finish the reports he had agreed to have done long before. All in all, his stay here was, I suppose, a disappointment especially as we are all personally very fond of him and respect his undoubted intellectual abilities. I really won't be able to evaluate the research he did until I get his report— this is a token of the lack of communication we have had with him. So I don't know how his fundamental project, on the E. coli immunogenetics, has panned out. Quite possibly, this was too difficult an enterprise, as the serology of this organism is notoriously difficult. Dave did make one very useful discovery, that passing ~~thru~~ certain F+ strains through very soft agar, selecting for optimal motility, often makes these strains F-. The mechanism of this effect is quite obscure: it may have something to do with keeping the bacteria growing in relative isolation from each other at fairly high rates. In one experiment, several days' cultivation in the chemostat had the same effect. The motility has nothing directly to do with it. We really do not yet have enough of the fundamental facts to be able to speculate very sensibly. I don't know whether Dave will be in a favorable position to continue this study; if he does not, we doubtless will.

In Dave's place, we have recruited a Dr. Aleck Bernstein, an M.D. and Dipl. Bact. (London) from England, officially as a project associate and candidate for a Ph.D. in genetics. He is an accomplished serologist and medical bacteriologist, and has had some considerable experience in the serology of E. coli. He is already at work on test-crosses of the medically important E. coli serotypes (055:B4 and 0111:B5)

I am not very well-informed on Dave's position at Cold Spring Harbor. I had written to Demerec about him, in rather general terms, and suggesting that he also write to you if he wished. Bryson replied to this letter, offering

a position under his Army contract. I had mentioned some work that Dave had done here on streptomycin resistance, and suspect that the contract will be concerned mostly with drug-resistance. But I don't know any details. The job offered a reasonably good salary and, though I think Dave would have done much better in an academic position with some teaching in genetics or zoology, he had very little choice other than to take this one. But it will be on a year-to-year basis, and he will no doubt be available for next year.

Tracy, I want to be sure that you understand that I do not hold you responsible for the negative aspects of this business. You gave us a very fair evaluation of him. I am sorry we could not do better; in a way we were so charmed that it was difficult to focus on the shortcomings. The intellectual climate at Cold Spring Harbor may be more congenial to Dave's temperament: I hope so. At any rate, I am sure he will bring them a good portion of viewpoint and criticism of the kind they well need.

I am beginning to trouble my conscience again about our book. As I promised, I have refused to consider other secondary writing commitments and during the summer, I pretty well cleared the slate of accumulated responsibilities along these lines. If I relax a few more weeks or months, I expect I may be quite eager to actually get down to work. What are your feelings about the matter these days? If you had a single finished chapter, I am sure it would be a great stimulus for me to follow your example.

Should we make a point of getting together to talk about the project again at greater length? I had an invitation to visit the Eli Lilly labs. at Indianapolis about 6 weeks hence and thought to combine this with a trip to Bloomington, but when this was then joined with an invitation at the Indiana SAB and Academy at Richmond, it came to too much and I asked for a raincheck. We have just moved into a new house, and if you could ever be induced to visit Madison we would look forward to repaying your own generous hospitality.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg