

December 6, 1949

Dr. Selman A. Waksman
Dept. of Microbiology
N. J. Agr. Exp. Station
New Brunswick, N. J.

Dear Dr. Waksman:

I just heard of certain claims that Dr. Albert Schatz is making concerning his part in the discovery of streptomycin. In view of the fact that I have firsthand information concerning the validity of such claims I am writing to you to bring you this information.

The claims of Schatz regarding the discovery of streptomycin recall to my mind a conversation I had with him in the early spring of 1946.

You will recall that at that time Beryl (Williams) and I were working on the book Miracles from Microbes which was published by the Rutgers University Press. Since I was still in the Army, Beryl and I divided the work. My being stationed at Fort Monmouth made it easy for me to come to your lab for consultation. You may remember that you spoke to me at length, not only about streptomycin but about the historical aspects of microbial antagonisms which we dealt with in the book. You went so far as to mark in a copy of your book on Microbial Antagonisms, certain sections which we could use to good advantage. When I began to prepare the chapter on streptomycin you once more gave me generously of your time and further suggested that I might talk to Schatz to get a picture of the work as it proceeded in the laboratory.

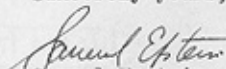
I subsequently made two trips to the laboratory in the evening - meeting Schatz in the basement lab about 8 p.m. in each case and talking with him for several hours on each visit. I need not dwell on the material I got from him: it is available in the book. I would, however, like to emphasize two points: The first deals with his ready willingness to acknowledge the work of E. Bugie and H. C. Reilly as being fully equal in importance to his own. He stated that when the work broadened to the point where it had to be divided, you paid him the courtesy of asking him which part he wanted to continue. Then you assigned the rest of the work to other students. At no time did he say - or imply - that the work he was doing was any more important than that which the others were undertaking.

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The second - and more important point - deals with a conversation I had with Schatz which had no particular bearing on my work, but which I brought up out of curiosity. I asked Schatz how it was that your name was last on the paper announcing streptomycin. Schatz told me, and I can almost quote him, that there were few men in your position as thoughtful and concerned with the future of their students as you were. He said that in many laboratories, students or assistants would be dismissed (on a paper) with a footnote or omitted entirely. But, you, he said, did your students the kindness of not only including their names on papers, but sometimes even put their names before yours. He added that since every step of the work had been closely supervised by you, this procedure on your part was not in the least necessary to give due credit. He was, at the time, greatly moved by your action.

It was, incidentally, Schatz who told us that a culture had been isolated by Jones from the throat of a chicken in Dr. Beaudette's laboratory. The incident as reported in Miracles from Microbes came from him.

Sincerely yours,


Samuel Epstein

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