

Fenton
book

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Professor W. Hayes, M.B., F.R.S.

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8th January, 1973.

Professor J. Lederberg,
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Dear Josh,

Many thanks for your note of December 26 and for all the interesting odds and ends of correspondence you kindly sent with it. I am glad the problem about the Avery Griffith meeting seems now to have been pretty clearly settled.

I would be very interested to know how and in what form all your recent researches into this problem materialise. As I mentioned previously I am concentrating more on the period 1860-1900 which I find most intriguing.

My guess is that biologists did in general think that DNA was important; but certainly not necessarily others such as organic chemists. I remember having quite a violent argument with a distinguished organic chemist in 1946 when I pointed out that I saw no reason in principle why DNA should not contain as much specificity as proteins. Did not quite a number of scientists consider its role was primarily structural and supporting in those early days - or at least providing a mechanism for duplication, without necessarily bearing the necessary specificity for transmission of heritable characters? (I am avoiding the use of the word "information" since I think I am right in supposing this came very much later: was it not as a result of a letter you and others wrote to Nature some time in the '50's?)

With kind regards,

Yours ever,

Marlin