

Westex
4-18

Abstract of letter from Carl Sagan summarizing
conversation with G. F. Gause (11/59).

"...At the Darwin Centennial Celebration at Chicago last week I had the opportunity of talking at some length with G. F. Gause of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences. He assured me that both the instrument package and the final stage carrier rocket of Lunik II were sterilized. But when I pressed him for some details, he claimed that his knowledge of the sterilization did not exceed that published in Izvestia. He said that the sterilization methods were those known to every graduate student in microbiology at the University of Chicago, and to every manufacturer of canned food, but he would not be more specific than that. He explained his reluctance by the analogy that Abbott Laboratories in Chicago would not divulge trade secrets to competing pharmaceutical firms; he shrugged off my objection that this was not a case for competition but for cooperation. I feel that he knows more than he is saying, because he read a prepared statement on the decontamination of lunar probes at the first panel session of the Centennial. Gause said he was interested in the possibility of preparing antibiotics from extraterrestrial microorganisms as might be found on the Moon and elsewhere, and that a paper entitled 'Cosmic Microbiology' is shortly to appear, or has recently appeared, in the Russian equivalent of the JAMA. At the end of our discussion I asked him who in the Soviet Union was working more closely with the sterilization of space vehicles and so could provide somewhat more information. He suggested I write to Nesmyanov! (I've forgotten to mention that he said that sterilization of sealed components by heat or radiation posed no problems.) On all topics unrelated to probe sterilization Gause was most affable."