

November 24, 1954

John Wiley and Sons, Inc.  
440 Fourth Avenue  
New York 16, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Polhemus:

Thank you for yours of the 23 inst.

As I did not attend the Sevag-Resistance symposium in person, I can only guess at its contents, but I think I can make a fairly accurate judgment from the name of the editor, the list of contributors, and a review that appeared in Science last week by Prof. Gerard.

I would say that the chief distinction is that the Sevag project was a symposium, and as such directed specifically to people now actively engaged in research on antibiotic resistance. Also it represents the views of a number of authors on a series of disconnected topics, and all of them on a current basis. We are planning an interpretive monograph which will endeavor to synthesize the valid conclusions from the whole literature; the symposium volume will certainly be a useful primary source. We are also directing our effort to the interests of medical students and others who would prefer a more comprehensive secondary source of information on the whole subject, including its historical and theoretical, as well as contemporary experimental aspects. In my opinion, this is a sufficient distinction to justify our work (and a publisher's investment).

I must add, however, that Gerard's review and Sevag's own record in print themselves provide a strong incentive for us to proceed with our monograph. The symposium, to justify the kind of conclusion with which Professor Gerard expressed, that there was no operational distinction between various theories of drug resistance, must have been either deficient or biased in its representation. (See our outline chapter 5 which concerns this question; it is indeed the very core of our discussion. Whatever conclusion a given investigator may adopt, I think most of your competent authorities [for example Professor Wagner] would agree that the distinction between these theories is not only operationally possible, but of critical importance for the understanding of drug resistance, as well as for general biological implications). I imply no criticism of Professor Gerard, he speaks, so to speak, as a bystander from another discipline, but it is precisely because he could be misled that we feel the necessity of our "interpretive" writing. In many respects, he would typify the most alert but unfortunately poorest informed element of our hoped-for audience.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics