CONSERVATION OF THE GENERIC NAME BACTERIUM AND THE FAMILY NAME BACTERIACEAE

Comments of the Enterobacteriaceae Subcommittee,
British Advisory Bacteriological Nomenclature Committee

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Comment on Dr. Borman's Letter

In his criticism of Opinion No. 4 of the Judicial Commission of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature, Dr. Borman (1) seems to have overlooked that the whole problem was centered on one species, variously known as *Bacterium coli*, *Escherichia coli*, *Colobactrum coli*, etc. The introduction into his argument of generic names such as *Serratia*, *Klebsiella*, *Proteus* and *Pseudomonas*, names that are not normally coupled with the specific epithet *coli*, seems to be irrelevant, and to distract attention from the focal point, which is the question "what generic name for this species is most generally acceptable to all bacteriologists, and which will cause least confusion in the future?"

It seems to us that the choice of generic name is immaterial so long as it is closely associated with the species, and, by combination of species, is not likely to be changed. Our aim, above all, is to seek international agreement on a permanent name for the genus which is centred around the organism named *Bacterium coli commune* by Escherich in 1885.

Until 1918, when Castellani and Chalmers introduced the generic name *Escherichia*, *Bacterium* (or *Bacillus*) *coli* was the only name commonly used for this organism. *Escherichia coli* was popularized by its adoption by Dr. Bergey in his *Manual*, but it is our belief that outside the U. S. A. it is little used by bacteriologists. It appears frequently in papers by biochemists because many of their journals insist on the *Manual* terminology.

The Bacteriological Code aims at the fixity of names (Prin-

ciple 1) and to avoid disadvantageous changes by a strict application of the rules, it allows that exceptions may be made (Provision 2). However, Note 3 to Provision 2 states that:

> "A conserved name is conserved against all other names for the group, whether these are cited in the corresponding list of rejected names or not, so long as the group concerned is not united with another group bearing a legitimate name. In the event of union or reunion with another group, the earlier of the two competing names is adopted in accordance with Rules 19, 20, and 21."

If there is to be any permanence to the combination Bacterium coli, it will be necessary to have a ruling that Opinion No. 4 should be made an exception to Note 3 to Provision 2.

The vulgarisation of the generic name Bacterium is analogous to a similar use of Bacillus. Since 1936, when the Nomenclature Committee conserved Bacillus as a generic name, greater respect has been given to that name, and, with this example in mind, we hope that in future the use of Bacterium will be restricted to the generic sense.

Dr. Borman has requested that the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature should reject Opinion No. 4 of the Judicial Commission: We request that the Committee should approve the Opinion, and, to uphold the aims of the Bacteriological code, should state categorically that Opinion No. 4 shall be an exception to Note 3 to Provision 2.

REFERENCE

(1). Borman, Earl K. Conservation of the Generic Name Bacterium and The Family Name Bacteriaceae. Int. Bull. of Bact. Nomenclature and Taxonomy. 2(2) 60-63. 1952.