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April 26, 1993

Dear Deborah,

It was a thrilling moment when I opened your recent Federal Express mail packet and found therein the Xeroxed transcripts of Nicoll-Leissner correspondence, together with your covering letter. It seems almost a miracle that their messages should have come to light after more than half a century and you are to be commended for perseverance in discovering the whereabouts of the collection. It is also gratifying to me that my memory of Miss Rosanna Thordikie's comment (on one of those days in the long-ago when I happened to be in the Departmental library at Harvard) — that she was transcribing the correspondence — has proven accurate. Having been dedicated to the welfare of 'Bacteriology/Immunology' and Dr. Leissner throughout the entire time of his chairmanship, I could not believe that she would have allowed the collection to disappear after his death.

I have read the transcripts with great interest and without difficulty in translating them into English, except occasionally where there are individual words missing (I presume Miss Thordikie may have had difficulty or inability to decipher the original handwritten French); the style is clear and straightforward. The letters shed light on the work and thoughts of the authors concerning features of the typhus story, as well as their mutual esteem even when they disagreed — also their views of places where they had visited, separately or together, the work or personalities of colleagues, etc. I naturally consider this material confidential, as you and the Courantway Library have requested.

April 26, 1993 (cont'd.)

The transcript you sent cover the period from end of 1930 through end of 1935, shortly before Nicolle's death—and this may be all that is available—but I think it would be very worthwhile to see whether any of earlier date can be found, particularly the period 1928-30 when H.2. went to Tunis to work at the Pasteur Institute there and subsequently went off on a trip in Normandy with Nicolle. This would round out the picture of their relationship as it developed when H.2. renewed his laboratory and field studies in the typhus arena.

Re-reading As I Remember Him, it is clear what H.2. (and Nicolle) thought about the role of the head louse as a susceptible typhus vector. In his early work at Tunis, H.2. worked with lice from "bearded Arabs"; had it been felt that only body lice would do, Nicolle would undoubtedly have secured for him donors of the latter. Similarly, when Castaneda came to Boston and was looking for lice to work with in the lab., he snipped nit-infested hair from the head of an older man; had body lice been considered indispensable, they could have been obtained readily from sources in the hub of that era.

Thanks for bringing to my attention Elmer Bendine's article on H.2. in the Aug. 15, 1992 issue of Hospital Practice. It is illustrated with some nice photographs and the text provides information, previously unknown to me, concerning H.2.'s relationships with immediate family. I have the impression of copious borrowings from As I Remember Him and some details which suggest E.B. was not thoroughly familiar with Nicolle's professional career. I'm glad the journal's editors published the essay and so brought H.2. to the ~~a~~ readers' ^{after} their publication!

I'm thinking about getting up to Boston in the fall, but my next trip is scheduled to go directly via Atlanta, to Paris—at end of May. p.^r