

Preface

This edition follows the style of previous editions. It has similar aims, and was written with the same enthusiasm and care.

It is vital that readers be aware of the type of alphabetization used in the Dictionary. A glance at 'Notes for the User' – particularly the first paragraph – is essential.

September 2001

Preface to the Second Edition

In writing this new edition of the Dictionary we had several aims in mind. One of these was to provide clear and up-to-date definitions of the numerous terms and phrases which form the currency of communication in modern microbiology and molecular biology. In recent years the rapid advances in these disciplines have thrown up a plethora of new terms and designations which, although widely used in the literature, are seldom defined outside the book or paper in which they first appeared; moreover, ongoing advances in knowledge have frequently demanded changes in the definitions of older terms – a fact which is not always appreciated and which can therefore lead to misunderstanding. Accordingly, we have endeavoured to define all of these terms in a way which reflects their actual usage in current journals and texts, and have also given (where appropriate) former meanings, alternative meanings, and synonyms.

A second – but no less important – aim was to encapsulate and integrate, in a single volume, a body of knowledge covering the many and varied aspects of microbiology. Such a reference work would seem to be particularly useful in these days of increasing specialization in which the reader of a paper or review is often expected to have prior knowledge of both the terminology and the overall biological context of a given topic. It was with this in mind that we aimed to assemble a detailed, comprehensive and interlinked body of information ranging from the classical descriptive aspects of microbiology to current developments in related areas of bioenergetics, biochemistry and molecular biology. By using extensive cross-referencing we have been able to indicate many of the natural links which exist between different aspects of a particular topic, and between the diverse parts of the whole subject area of microbiology and molecular biology; hence the reader can extend his knowledge of a given topic in any of various directions by following up relevant cross-references, and in the same way he can come to see the topic in its broader contexts. The dictionary format is ideal for this purpose, offering a flexible, 'modular' approach to building up knowledge and updating specific areas of interest.

There are other more obvious advantages in a reference work with such a wide coverage. Microbiological data are currently disseminated among numerous books and journals, so that it can be difficult for a reader to know where to turn for information on a term or topic which is completely unfamiliar to him. As a simple example, the name of an unfamiliar genus, if mentioned out of context, might refer to a bacterium, a fungus, an alga or a protozoon, and many books on each of these groups of organisms may have to be consulted merely to establish its identity; the problem can be even more acute if the meaning of an unfamiliar term is required. A reader may therefore be saved many hours of frustrating literature-searching by a single volume to which he can turn for information on any aspect of microbiology.

An important new feature of this edition is the inclusion of a large number of references to recent papers, reviews and monographs in microbiology and allied subjects. Some of these references fulfil the conventional role of indicating sources of information, but many of them are intended to permit access to more detailed information on particular or general aspects of a topic – often in mainstream journals, but sometimes in publications to which the average microbiologist may seldom refer. Furthermore, most of the references cited are themselves good sources of references through which the reader can establish the background of, and follow developments in, a given area.

While writing this book we were very fortunate in having exceptional and invaluable cooperation from a number of libraries in South-West England. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the generous help of Mr B. P. Jones, B.A., F.L.A., of the Medical Library, University of Bristol, Mrs Jean Mitchell of the Library at Bickton College of Agriculture, Devon, and Maureen Hammett of Exeter Central Library, Devon. Finally,

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we are grateful to Michael Dixon, Patricia Sharp, and Prue Theaker at John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, for their enthusiastic and efficient cooperation in the production of the book.

Paul Singleton & Diana Sainsbury
Clyst St Mary, Devon, April 1987