

Discussion on the mutagenic effects of alkylating agents

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Recently, a publication under this title has been distributed by Drs O. G. and M. J. Fahmy. On top of every page, it carries my name and not that of the authors. This has already resulted in its summary having been printed mistakenly as 'author's summary' of a paper of mine in *Biological Abstracts*. Since this curious publication is likely to lead to more confusion, its origin is explained below.

In 1957, the New York Academy of Sciences held a symposium on 'Biological Effects of Alkylating Agents', at which I had been asked to read a paper on the mutagenic effects of these substances. Dr O. G. Fahmy, as one of the official discussants, was given five minutes in which to make a few remarks. To these, Dr I. I. Oster, the other discussant, and myself answered equally briefly. The remarks by Dr Oster and myself have been printed in the New York Academy's Symposium volume, but they now follow a paper twice the length of mine by Drs Fahmy, which the editors, without my knowledge, had substituted for the brief discussion remarks which the Drs Fahmy actually delivered. It is this paper which has now been issued as a separate reprint.

Actually, this paper had been read, but not at the Academy meeting. It formed the basis for a discussion at the Sloane-Kettering Institute, arranged at my urgent wish so as to give the Fahmys an opportunity to explain and defend their far-reaching claims. Professor Haddow, F.R.S., was in the chair, and the discussion was mainly restricted to the Drs Fahmy, Dr Oster and myself. It lasted four hours and was very lively and unrestrained. Subsequently, Professor Haddow asked me to draw up a report of this discussion for inclusion in the Symposium volume; but to publish the proceedings of a semi-private meeting at which the Fahmys had been severely criticized did not seem fair, and I refused Professor Haddow's request. I would certainly not have done so, had I been told that this would lead to the Fahmys' paper being published without the criticism to which it had been subjected.

A brief report of the meeting, drawn up by Dr Oster and myself and seen and approved by Professor Haddow and the Drs Fahmy, has been circulated privately. Copies are still available.

It seems that the Drs Fahmy have profited from this report to the extent that the printed version of their talk omits some of the most severely criticized statements and contains some additional data that do not seem to have been available at the meeting. These slight changes do not, however, affect the main conclusions which read as follows:

'Drs Fahmy have reported many radically new effects of chemicals. Geneticists who work on *Drosophila* must admire the tremendous amount of work, carried out at unprecedented speed, which was necessary for the accumulation of the data on which these claims are based. Unfortunately, the published data represent only—according to Drs Fahmy—a very small proportion of those actually obtained. In fact, hardly any of these claims can be substantiated from the published data.'