

May 9, 1977

Dr. David Goddard  
Home Secretary, National Academy of Sciences  
2101 Constitution Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20418

Dear Dave,

I am writing in the matter of the Memoir for Benjie Willier which your predecessor asked me to do. I accepted the assignment in appreciation of a long friendship and of all Benjie has done for me since my arrival in Chicago in 1932.

When I received his file from the Home Secretary I found that Benjie had deposited only a short memorandum of 4 pages, written in 1945, apparently shortly after his election. It is not much more than a curriculum vitae up to that year, with bibliography. It has never been brought up to date. I wrote to Helen, asking for more information, particularly about his earlier years and family background, but her very kind response brought practically no new information. So I am finding myself in a real dilemma as to source material for a biographical sketch.

It then occurred to me that Benjie's student and friend Ray Watterson, whom I am sure you remember from Rochester, had written an ~~exclusive~~ biographical essay which was published a year after Benjie's death in "Developmental Biology," vol. 4, 1973. It includes a great deal of biographical material and an appraisal of his scientific work, also a list of his Ph.D. students. It is very thoroughly done and was much acclaimed by Benjie's students and friends, because it gives a vivid portrait of his life and work and strikes a happy balance between anecdotal personal reminiscences and presentation of scientific aspects. Ray knew him better and was closer to him for many years than I was, and he made ~~exclusive~~ <sup>exclusive</sup> use of Benjie's personal files at the Carnegie to which he had access. Altogether, this is a very well written, complete memoir which contains a good deal of material unfamiliar to me.

By now you have probably guessed what I am driving at. I would by no means want to give the impression that I try to renege on a commitment, but I honestly believe that Ray's biographical essay can hardly be improved by me. And furthermore, if I were to write another one, I would have to base it essentially on Ray's information, except for the evaluation of his scientific contributions; and it would be somewhat embarrassing for me to lift out and quote whole pages from him. Therefore I would like to suggest two alternatives.

May 9, 1977

Either to reprint the article as it is, perhaps with a few additions which Ray could make; or to expand and edit it slightly and perhaps extend the scientific part which I would be glad to do, and publish it jointly with Ray. I think there are precedents for Memoirs written by non-members of the Academy, and Ray with whom I had a correspondence would gladly consent to either one of my suggestions. By the way, I am not alone with my idea. Ray quotes a letter which he received from Benjie's daughter, Kathryn, to whom he had sent a reprint: "I just wanted you to know how very pleased Bill and I are with your work. I don't know who is doing the one for the National Academy of Sciences, but I do wish they had asked you. We thought you did an excellent job. I really think that Dad would have approved."

I am sending a revised copy of Ray's article and I would greatly appreciate your advice in this matter.

I have learned one lesson from Benjie's neglect to update his file; In such a case, the biographer faces an enormously time-consuming and laborious task. To spare my biographer this burden, I am sending on an extensive sketch of my scientific work, for my file in the Academy. All that my biographer would have to do would be to use the editorial scissors, and change the "I" to "he." <sup>he</sup> I plan to write a few additional pages concerning personal matters. My ~~biography~~ <sup>biography</sup> is already on file.

I have had my second hip replacement in January, and am back to work, thanks to continued research support by NIH. I hope all goes well with you. I am sorry that I could not attend the meeting. With my warmest regards,

Yours,

VH:im

Viktor Hamburger