

Articles

Poem: A genetic ode, or A melan coli tale

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I used to be a coli, as wild as wild could be.
They called me Proto Trophic, whatever that would be.
They kept me pure and simple and completely free from faults
And fed me on the simplest food . . . glucose and common salts.

Then Lederberg and Tatum came and put me in the sun
And watched me very closely to see what harm they'd done.
Although they hadn't killed me they had really hurt my pride
And though I looked quite normal I was quite upset inside.

Next day they tried to feed me with my normal sort of food
But they found I couldn't use it in the way I always could.
Glucose I could metabolise—in that I was proficient,
But in synthesising valine they soon found I was deficient.

They couldn't find their valine so they went to biotin
And till they thought just what to do they kept me dietin'.
Then foresight and discernment made this lecturer and Prof.
Enrich my food with Oxo cube and call me Oxo Troph.

They called another doctor and they all discussed my case,
And decided that my DNA must have displaced a base.
They all seemed quite excited and I heard Doc Tatum say,
"Another dose of sunshine might upset more DNA."

They gave me 80 seconds of the brightest light I'd seen,
And I knew a UV photon had displaced another gene.
I remember seeing Lederberg—eyes gleaming through his specs
Excitedly tell Tatum that I'd now acquired a sex.

Then Lederberg asked Tatum if he could foretell my fate
And Tatum thought my only hope was to acquire a mate.
So they gave me you dear Effplus, knowing you alone could right
The little bits of DNA that suffered in that light.

There's just two things I ask you if you really care for me
One little gene for valine—one for fertility.
Your genotype's just perfect to revitalize my strain
And I know you will co-operate to make me wild again.

Be warned O Human Beings by this melan coli ode
You who think you are so clever cracking our genetic code.
There's a moral in this story—I will tell you what it means:
IF YOU STRIP TOO MUCH TO SUNBATHE,
YOU MAY LOSE A PAIR OF JEANS.

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