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ENTEROBACTERIACEAE RAHN 1937, AN ILLEGITIMATE NAME

H. Haupt

Department of Veterinary Hygiene
University of Giessen
Giessen, West Germany

The status of the family name Enterobacteriaceae Rahn 1937 has been reviewed in connection with the "Status of the generic name Bacterium, the specific name Bacterium coli, and the family name Bacteriaceae" (1). This statement (pp. 75-78) indicates that the generic name Enterobacter and the family name Enterobacteriaceae are invalid and without standing in nomenclature. The statement continues: "If the family name Bacteriaceae is rejected, it would seem desirable that the status of the family name Enterobacteriaceae be fixed by international agreement, and the type genus definitely designated." In this connection the statement mentions that at the Fifth Congress of Microbiologists in Rio de Janeiro, approval was given to the validation of family names which are not derived from names of the contained genera, providing that there is international agreement.

The generic name Enterobacter Rahn 1937 has been accepted and used by no other author to the best of my knowledge. However, the family name Enterobacteriaceae Rahn 1937 was used in Bergey's Manual of Determinative Bacteriology, 5th and 6th editions (1939 and 1948)¹. It is to be regretted that some bacteriologists have followed this unfortunate example; moreover, a nomenclatural subcommittee of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature uses this family name in designation of its own name and for characterizing the special group of bacteria with which it works.

In 1939 the Code of Botanical Nomenclature (3rd Ed., 1935) served as a basis for the nomenclature of bacteria. Its Article 23 prescribes: "Names of families are taken from their present or former genera and end in -aceae." The acceptance of Rahn's family name without mentioning a genus Enterobacter completely disregarded the rules governing the bacterial nomenclature at that time.

¹Editorial Note. The family name Enterobacteriaceae will be used also in the 7th edition (1957) of the Bergey's Manual.

In 1953 the generic name Bacterium as well as the family name Bacteriaceae were rejected (International Congress of Microbiologists in Rome), so that the case for a proposal of conserving the invalid name Enterobacteriaceae 1937 may now arise.

To ask microbiologists to agree to the conservation of a name which has been introduced and used in contravention to the internationally approved rules, might well undermine the fundamentals of the bacterial nomenclature. This would seem to constitute a precedent such that any name of a taxon may be validated, if only a bacteriologist accepts the name in a textbook. We are confronted by a rather serious situation; it is possible that such a proposal might open the way for common disregard of the rules.

REFERENCES

1. Editorial Board International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature. 1951. Preliminary Statement, File No. 5. Status of the generic name Bacterium, the specific name Bacterium coli and the family name Bacteriaceae. Internatl. Bull. Bact. Nomen. and Taxon. 1(2):64-79.