MICROBES AND EVOLUTION
The World That Darwin Never Saw
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The World That Darwin Never Saw

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Preface

The idea of putting together a collection of essays on the general topic of microbes and evolution began to take shape during an American Academy of Microbiology colloquium in Seattle, WA, in February of 2007. Not that the topic itself was discussed at the colloquium; rather, like so many ideas, this one emerged during informal discussions over drinks and in good company. At the time there were plans afoot worldwide as to how to celebrate, in 2009, the 200th anniversary of Darwin’s birth and 150th anniversary of the publication of On the Origin of Species. We felt that organizing a colloquium on microbial evolution at the Galapagos Islands—which indeed took place in 2009—would be a fitting tribute to the role that microbes have played in our understanding of the evolutionary process.

From the concept of the colloquium, a second idea emerged quite naturally. We should ask fellow scientists to write short, personal essays about their work. The essays would clearly manifest the investigators’ enthusiasm for their work and the impact of microbes on our understanding of evolution. Moreover, because we wanted to reach a broad audience, we insisted that the essays be written in a way that would make them accessible to the general public, lacking the typical scientific jargon that sometimes makes books about science impenetrable to non-experts.

Of course, going from idea to concrete results takes time and great effort from many individuals. We were fortunate that these ideas were first voiced in the presence of Carol Colgan, then Director of the American Academy of Microbiology. Her great excitement for supporting these projects was critical to get them off the ground. Jeff Holtmeier, then Director of ASM Press, helped greatly during the early stages of planning the essay collection. Once we had the essays
in hand, Michael Goldberg, ASM’s Executive Director, and Patrick Lacey, Editor of ASM’s magazine *Microbe*, had the idea of publishing some of the chapters in *Microbe*, a step that was very useful in bringing attention to the forthcoming collection. We are much indebted to Christine Charlip, current Director of ASM Press, and Ellie Tupper, Senior Production Editor, for their invaluable assistance in putting the finishing touches on the project.

Finally and most importantly, we are grateful to our many colleagues who agreed to step off the beaten path of scientific writing and compose these personal perspectives on their work.

Roberto Kolter and Stanley Maloy

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