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Department of
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Dear Dr Howard Lenhoff:

Today I received the August issue of Biological Bulletin and read your very interesting paper on Ethel Browne Harvey and the organizer phenomenon. I am convinced that you are right; Ethel Browne Harvey did not receive the Nobel prize, nor the recognition, for the discovery, but it had only been fair if she had shared recognition and Nobel prize with Spemann.

If you permit me to make my guess of the reason why her contribution was not recognized, I would state that the Nobel Committee members, then even more than now, laid emphasis on the last word in the prize for "physiology or medicine." As you probably know the Nobel prizes are selected by various committees and that the one in this particular field consists of the faculty members of Karolinska Institute (or a subgroup hereof). The Karolinska Institute is the medical school in Stockholm and the candidates they select are by the general public in Stockholm (and probably elsewhere) called the medicine prize winners - not as Alfred Nobel perhaps would have it - as the physiology winners. (The medical committee members probably never read the hydra paper and as you also state it is likely that for them only matters connected with human health count.)

Having said that, I must then also add that I personally have a high admiration for the work of the committee members (in physiology or medicine as well as in physics and in chemistry) and for their skill in finding proper candidates. It has, however, only rarely happened that they have transgressed the borders of what is of medical interest, but an example is the choice in 1974 or 1975, of Karl von Frisch who discovered bee language. He got it together with Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen, as you may remember. (What prize they will select today remains to be seen; my hope is for Skou who found the first membrane pumps).

I met Ethel Browne Harvey in 1958 and she gave me her reprints from 1913 to 1958. I had several good talks with her on the sea urchin eggs. I both liked and respected the old lady.

Again, with my thanks for your important paper

Boo Afzelius