

January 15th, 1936

My dear Ford,

Many thanks for your letter and the return of the paper. I am exceedingly glad you think well of it, specially of those parts which I found it most difficult to handle. I shall add a short paragraph to avoid too abrupt a finish, but I think it would be too difficult to summarise without being ^{too} dogmatic on points where I only wish to set out the evidence.

Your question as to Mendel's strategy is really most interesting and important. It is difficult to know how much confidence he felt as to the application of his laws to other organisms. I imagine that his confidence wavered greatly from ^{one} time to another. He stresses once or twice that his data refer only to a small plant group. Against this, he writes rather confidently of the results with Phaseolus^{co}, which, later, it seems, he decided not to publish, for he only includes qualitative statements in his paper on Pisum. The two indications available as to his preliminary experiments

are that attention was, from the first, directed to leguminous plants, and that ornamental garden plants were used, so perhaps Watkins was actually right in saying that Mendel bred sweet-peas! If it were not for the mention of ornamental plants, one would suppose that he had ascertained seed character segregation in Pisum either before he went to Vienna or after his return, and that, after the first large counts in 1859, the ideas formed from these early observations crystallised rapidly into a factorial scheme being ^{definite,} defined. This scheme suggested a number of verifications, which might well lead him to work more extensively with peas, perhaps at the expense of other plants, than he had originally intended.

When he wrote his paper, I should judge that his attitude was that he would refuse to claim that his laws had been demonstrated beyond Pisum, but he would be much disappointed if they did not, in fact, extend much further. It is not really improbable that he was theorising much more confidently before his experimental work than he was afterwards.

Yours sincerely,

R.A. Fisher