

October 16, 1952

Dear Alain:

About six weeks ago, we were in the heart of French Canada-- practising our French, so we thought. I started to write a letter to you from a town called Notre Dame du Portage, near Riviere du Loup on the Gaspé peninsula. I was trying to write in French as follows:

"Nous vous écrivons maintenant du Canada français. Nous prenons nos vacances en nous conduisant en Canada. Commencant de Madison, nous sommes allés en voiture à Québec, par Haut-Michigan, les Straits of Mackinac, les deux villes Sault Ste. Marie (Michigan, E.U., et Ontario, Canada), au travers d'Ontario (le trans-Canada highway), et par les villes belles de d'Ottawa, Montréal et Québec. Especielllement depuis Québec tout le monde parle habituellement le français, et le plupart ne parle guérement l'anglais. Ce nous offrit une occasion excellent ~~pour~~ à pratiquer notre langue française, qui est devenue atrophiée par desuétude. Les journaux ne nous donnent aucune difficulté mais la conversation fait un autre conte."

After this un auspicious beginning, I am sure that you will be pleased that I did not have a chance to finish just then, and that I will proceed in English. Your own writing (by typewriter) is very clear, and I hope you will continue in your own langue de patrie.

French Canada seemed, at the time, a rather quaint affair with its quiet country towns (each with a magnificent cathedral, by far the richest structure), but we conclude now that ~~the~~ it represents an isolation of an ancient, isolationistic French culture that has recognized no progress since feudal times. The Canadiens seem, to judge from their political role in the life of a growing Canada, an anachronistic residue of feudal France. However, one does not see this so readily on the surface as a tourist, and one may regard as merely quaint the insistence on bilingualism, so the street signs will say Arrêt/Stop and the ads will say "Savourez Coca Cola"! The spoken language there seems rather corrupt-- I still cannot tell how they distinguish between deux and douze, which are pronounced the same. Glasser must have emphasized this sort of thing very often, and we judge he was right.

I know one reason you write to me now: you want some ~~inner~~ inside information on the forthcoming election. I am afraid I cannot tell you very much, but we are sending you a book called "Pogo" which may help you to understand our affairs. (Speaking of books, please ~~do not~~ trouble any more about Catcheside, which is now available here, without trouble, although at an outrageous price. I am using it as a textbook, so received a complimentary copy.) Personally, we find Stevenson very refreshing after all the other candidates, and are working hard (that is Esther is) to help him win. It will be especially tragic if McCarthy gets in again. The primary election results were disappointing, but not as completely hopeless as may seem at first. We lost our remaining respect for Ike when he espoused McCarthy during his visit to Wisconsin. Taft would have been a relatively easy candidate to beat, but then possibly Stevenson would not have been nominated by the Democrats. As it looks to our wishful thoughts, Ike started far ahead, owing to his glamorous history, but many people are just beginning to see through him, so that Stevenson is gaining. It is hard to tell whether he will have gone far enough by November 4. The Nixon business was irrelevant, but nasty. It may backfire on him still, inspite of his tearful melodramatics on TV-- he has refused to publish all of the details that he demanded of the democrats. Do not take Ike's campaign speeches too seriously-- he has never had the responsibility of elective office, and it is impossible to tell whether he will turn out very good or very bad. Of Stevenson we have no such doubt. Even if Ike gets in, the Senate will almost certainly still be Democratic. There will be no serious changes in foreign policy in any event.

Continued: November 26.

Your letter arrived today, and reminds me that I should complete this letter, started in August! Unfortunately, the longer I wait, the more is left to say, so that if I do not stop arbitrarily, this will never get to you.

I am very pleased that you understood and enjoyed Pogo. I was a little afraid that its colloquialism would be so difficult that the point would escape you, or that you might misunderstand its being sent. Pogo is actually one of the most popular comic strips, but it is read by many people much like Gulliver's Travels, the satire being inapparent.

Since the beginning of this letter, the US election has come and gone. There isn't much to be said about it, except that one would wish it were possible for the new administration to assume effective power immediately in the direction of foreign affairs, as the present one is obviously paralyzed. I have been rather disappointed in Acheson anyhow for some time --on this passport business, and the bungling of the recent warfare propaganda charges. ~~RE~~ For a while it looked as if the same kind of mistake would be made on the Indian truce proposals for Korea, but maybe they will correct it in time. I don't think there will be any serious change in US foreign affairs, or its relationships to the United Nations. Dulles' appointment seems dismal, but not vicious, and I am somewhat pleased at the complaints from the most reactionary wing of the Republicans about it. Similarly, once reactionary commentator was criticizing Ike for appointing Mrs. Hobby as Federal Security Administrator, as she had contributed to Senator Benton's (anti-McCarthy) campaign. This appointment is of rather direct interest to me, as the FSA controls the Public Health Service, from which a good part of our research funds comes (also Loeff's!) I don't know Mrs. Hobby's views on research investment.

I am most interested in your remarks about Yugoslavia. What about your visit convinced you of the virtues of that variety of communism? Do you think an authoritarian regime is the only way in which they could make their economic progress? How much political opposition is tolerated there now? Or do you feel this is unimportant at the most primitive stages of political development?

I cannot think at the moment of any French scientific works I would like to have. Perhaps if it were possible to have some of the publishers' price lists (like the Masson series "Actualites scientifiques...") I might be reminded of some of the things I would like to have. By the way, do you know who is a M. Henri Lasard? I had some letters from him a few years ago, and more recently a book by "Portier" on Maladies Polyinfectieuses Inapparentes which seemed to me pure nonsense! It was marked with Lasard's compliments--I suppose Portier is his nomade plume.

Most of my immediate research just now is on serotypic recombination in Salmonella. Many of the numerous serological types can be reconstructed by a genetic recombination technique. The particular problem is the mechanism of flagellar phase variation, which seems at the moment not to be an ordinary gene mutation, but some sort of oscillating local suppression or activation of one of two alternative genes. This is an extension of the work that Zinder and I did while he was studying for his Ph.D. He has gone now to the Rockefeller Institute, and for this year I do not have but two students. However, there are three postdoctoral people, in addition to Esther and myself. One of them is C.C. Spicer, a W.H.O. fellow from Colindale, London; ~~now~~ who is also working on Salmonella. David Skaar is studying immunogenetics of E. coli, and Tom C. Nelson is collaborating on the physiology and cytology of E. coli sexuality.

If we can raise the funds, we hope very much to get to Europe next summer, but cannot tell yet whether this will be financially possible.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg