

JOHN SWIFT'S LETTER HOME

The American ship *Empress of China* left New York on February 22, 1784 and arrived in Canton, China six months later on August 18. John White Swift, the ship's purser, wrote the following letter to his father in Philadelphia in July, shortly after the ship had sailed into the Sunda Strait.

Mr Dear Father

At last I address you from the East Indies. We came to this Bay last Ev'ning after a Passage of three months & 18 Days from the Island of St Jago, (our first halt, & from whence I address'd Letters to you—) We have had no agreeable passage. It has been one dreary waste of Sky & water, without a pleasing Sight to cheer us. I am heartily tired of so long a Voyage, more especially as we are not yet at our Journeys End by about Sixteen hundred Miles. We are employ'd Wooding & Watering & expect to sail in about four Days, in Company with a French Ship of Sixty four Guns, which we found riding at Anchor here, & employ'd in the same business. In about a Month more we have a prospect of being at Canton.

I send this to Batavia by a ship bound to that Port, (which we also found here) under a promise from a Dutch merchant on board, that he would forward it to Holland. I am in tolerable good health tho exposed to hotter sun than I ever before experienced. The Thermometer stands Commonly at 86°. We are constantly visited by the Malayans — Inhabitants of Java & Princes Island, & have got a fresh supply of Stock including a Dozen or two of fine green Turtle, (I wish you had the largest) Make my Love & Compts to all my friends. Capt Hodgkinson who is along side of me, offers his likewise, he is very hearty but does not write by so precarious & long opportunity, but lest I shou'd never have another, I embrace it, with this only view, to tell you how much, how often I think of you & how ardently I wish to see you again in America. Canton next, and then, O Ye Gods! how happy shall I be when I am returning.

I am most affectionately & Most sincerely yours &c M.D.H.

John W. Swift

● QUESTIONS

1. Why does Swift say the journey has not been agreeable?
2. How far do they still have to go to get to Canton? How long will it take?
3. How is Swift sending this letter?
4. Why is he bothering to send the letter if he can't send it directly to Philadelphia ?
5. Do you think John Swift will continue working on the ship making more trips to China?