

USShip Vincennes
Hong Kong Aug. 19th 1854

My Dear Dr.

Yours of Feb 19 found me last night
abreast in a portfolio of Bank which I had just
climbed the mountains to collect. I stole time however
to read it at the risk of being obliged to let a portion of
them lie over till today — I had become a little mulish
at not hearing from you for so long a time and it is now
well nigh four months since the date of my last to you
and yet I gave you more credit than it seems you de-
serve. I did believe you had written and that your let-
ters had miscarried as I know some that I should have
received from home have not made their appearance I
have the most implicit confidence in the frequency and
regularity with which letters are sent by my brother
and yet I have received but two since leaving the U.S. I have
guessed at every probable and improbable reason why two
of the first written should have reached the place of their
destination and all subsequent ones for the last four
or five months should have failed or been delayed But
even so it is whatever may be the cause — I am glad the
money matter turn out so well — I had begun to feel a
slight uneasiness quite groundless however I could not but
admit about the money sent by Mr. Ames. Had my
brother's letters arrived he would not be likely to know any
thing about it and not getting any letters from you or
Barry or Mr. Ames who alone would be likely to know of the
circumstances I perhaps naturally felt a little uneasy about
a sum of money entrusted to a man with whom I had been

but a short time acquainted

Before this reaches you the rumor of our late commander's derangement will have spread through the country by the numerous papers. The first indubitable evidence of the true state of his mind was presented on his recovery from a somewhat severe attack of sickness at Canton. It was perhaps reasonably expected that with the recovery of bodily health and strength mental soundness also would ensue. And this result may eventually take place but all hope that he would be again fit to take charge of the expedition is extinct. I write this with reference to himself alone on the same principle that we say "de mortuis nil" & -- while I think the change of command which has taken place will result in good to the expedition. It may justly be suspected that the disease which has now so distinctly manifested itself has been all along acting latently, and that his profligacy now so strong & buying everything which strikes his fancy whether necessary or useful curious or valuable -- or the reverse has been all along working in making changes (mostly with reference to ornament and beauty or what he thought of improvements additions and subtraction / not mathematical) as numerous as a set of -- This may need a little explanation -- Ever since leaving Tripoli (perhaps long before) all the mechanics on the ship (and when in port many from the shore) have been almost incessantly at work on doors, windows, ports, sky-lights, binacles, gangways, railings, davits, stanchions, &c. and all with a spirit apparently of making each thing pretty or it already pretty particular. Now that Capt Rodger takes the management of the squadron we may

reasonably hope that the business of the Expedition will be energetically pursued forward. Who could have dreamed that we would be three months at the Cape of Good Hope that we (this ship) would be five months thence to China that we would remain at Hong Kong or thereabouts five months more. He was offered a better brig than the Surprise yet see what a lossy time spent in repairing her a while of his entailed on us I don't know whether he chose the John P Kennedy of this ship but after great delay and expense in almost re-creating her she has to be abandoned and is to be sent to Canton to contribute to the few despised effeminate denationalized dime-grasping Anglo-Saxons who are too abominably lazy to shatter a musket in their own defense a small fraction of the above so generally denounced have acted very gentlemanly and honorably. The rest have condescended to form & vertebrate in the title of the Commander but ~~feel~~ ^{the desire of} ~~below~~ ^{him} they don't seem to notice don't think this sentiment results from any neglect of your humble servant he asked no favor received none and was not disappointed. It is the general feeling entertained by all the junior officers of the squadron Our country men at ~~this~~ ^{his} place are very gentlemanly men - the Messrs Delvers & co.

Now for Botany I have enjoyed tolerable facilities to work my while here - that is I could go ashore any day but not always at any time of the day and for the most part I have had my own boat hire which does amount to much. The Com. promised to approve my account for such necessary expenses but it was rather too small a business and I let it pass I got an hired a boat to carry my portfolios and other traps which is only a shilling a day and

at that rate Mr Desilver says I oversay them and spoil them
for others who may want their services Then another shilling
for boat hire which I don't always have to pay often finding
the ship's boat at the landing completes my daily expenses
Often I don't get a cooley but carry my portfolio myself
especially if I intend to take only a short ramble Neither
do I by any means go out every day twice a week
would be probably near the truth Occasionally I send my
assistant when I generally give him a little money to buy
his dinner or to pay his boat hire but this is not quite
so profitably spent as when I do it myself Then my liquors
don't cost me much I find them of the best quality on
shore and in the greatest abundance What I save from buying
I don't consider misspent if given to science My bus-
iness and the manner in which I conduct it agree ad-
mirably with my health With the exception of a light in-
termittent fever of about five days continuance when we lay
at Phampoa recently I have been perfectly well since I
left our own land I have been frequently warned by our
countrymen here not to go out in the sun I answer that
I trust to Providence temperance exercise and a good
constitution and if with these to back me I take sick I
throw the responsibility on the doctor whom I will help all
I can in effecting a cure HongKong has a bad reputa-
tion for its effect on health chargeable as usual on the
climate But I don't wonder that folks die who glutton-
ize and gurgle liquors and take exercise in a sedan such
people consider it a great misfortune to lose a dinner yet
I am of a different opinion considering it as the man did
a worthless dog a good loss - occasionally

The Commodore for some time back seems to have had his whole attention directed to the protection of American interests at Canton and to his multifarious improvements on board the ship. With these in mind he had but little thought to devote to Nat. Hist. Stimpson for a while hired a boat for dredging but soon the expense became a serious matter as it produced no present ornamental and the result was a good deal of stink!! (pardon the word) — so he was no longer allowed to hire a boat but at his own expense — and for many weeks he has done little or nothing in his line. I have not done much among the Algae and a while back Stimpson & myself made an exchange — he took the seaweeds and I the insects which we are respectively better able to attend to than if the zoölogy were strictly assigned to him and the botany to me. So there is a possibility? but I may branch off to entomology when I return to the U.S.

I have become acquainted with one gentleman a citizen of the island who has paid considerable attention to its flora — a Mr ^{W. Hance} ~~Seante~~ a sort of German name? though he is English by birth. He has named for me a number of plants and yet a considerable proportion he was unable to identify from the dried specimens I went out with him one day and I was brought to think from the little experience that day afforded me that he would not make a very energetic mountaineer. I am inclined to think that among the many specimens collected on the island a very small part of which only I have had means to visit especially as I have a strong proclivity for getting up hill and for sneaking it about in savines and thickets a few novelties at least may turn up. Hereafter I hope I may have opportunities of visiting shores and

islands more likely to afford a greater proportion of new and interesting things I am often asked what particular families I collect which I commonly answer by "everything". So Mr. Curtis Mr. Fickermann and Mr. Sullivant may feel an interest in my labors Mr. Bauer has a kind of taste the antipode of yours - a Compositae phobia - and asked me to determine for him the most common - almost cosmopolite sp. of Agaveum — The package of books came last night also - the Journal also visits me regularly. For these and all other favors many thanks I shall be obliged to ask you to look out for me generally in such matters for I put little confidence in the size of the cavity I fill in the storehouse or the memory of our good friend Dr. Trower if it is not crowded by other and more important matters to a size less than any assignable quantity as say the Algarvians I must confess however that he did send me from New York to Norfolk the last vol. of Trower which I supposed I had already bought of Bridges. He seems to have been as parsimonious of his epistolary favors to me as you have - more so indeed as I have not seen from him except through ^{you} Dr. Barry who sent me a short letter some time ago written as he says at your suggestion. He tells me too that Dr. Bigelow has not quit grumbling because I did not glorify him enough and that he has enlisted Prof. Emory in his cause. I sent him a real blessed of a letter - if it don't cure him & put him in a good humor I must give him up as incorrigible and let him take it out in growling. You may be interested to know in brief what I have been doing and how I have been able to improve my time.

since our arrival here we arrived about the 20th of March From that time up to the 11th June I continued busily employed in making excursions on shore to various parts of the north side of the island reaching the top of the mountains & even under my ramble in a few instances a short distance down the other side. During this time I made an excursion of several days to some islands away to the eastward. No day passed that I did not find something unseen before. On the day above mentioned we got under way for Macao via Canton & we lay at the former place till the 16th In this time I collected what few plants the constant occupation or cultivation of the land for a thousand of years had suffered to retain their natural form - besides making a flying "vis" to Canton. We reached Hong Kong again the 18th On the 22nd a sudden call of the citizen officers of Canton drove the ship away again up the river leaving me behind It would have been a happy thing for me had I been ~~on~~ ^{aboard} to a man A message however was left me to come in the steamer which was detained by divers causes. We did not get off till about thirty hours after the other ships of the squadron. We started just at night early the next morning and came up with the Princesse at anchor at Whampoa. The Commander soon repaired to the steamer and she continued on to Canton. Here we vegetated till the 26th July & then got under way for Macao where we lay till the 2d inst. I made but one botanical excursion here landing on Cypa Island near Macao. From this place we went to Bun-sing-moo - a safe harbor where we could ride out in safety a typhoon which now threatened here. I collected a few things mostly grasses & Cyperaceae. We left Bun-sing-moo on the 8th and anchored again here the next day. I have taken one ramble as I wrote above since my return and find the vegetation changed

Meanwhile Capt Roland in the Poipose sent out to rescue some shipwrecked Chinamen on the Pratas shoals accomplished his purpose returning crowded with the miserable starving wretches and was refused assistance in landing them by the authorities of Hong Kong They could livenise the officer however for that did not cost them any bodily exertion but the expenditure of a little breath He was next sent out on an anti-piratical expedition in company with a Portuguese torcha and some boats with their crews furnished by one of Her Majesty's vessels of war They came upon the pirates but from mismanagement or unavoidable circumstance they fell too far to leeward to reach them with their guns or to prevent them from escaping which they did in fine style During the hunt the previous night Capt R. went reconnoitering in an open boat with one officer some men and two or more bottles of brandy which it seems he fought more perseveringly than he did the pirates In the obscurity of the night he came very nigh being the catchee and the fight was kept up till he was " hors du combat" and retreated to the bottom of the boat while the other officer succeeded in conducting the party back to the big Heis subordinates preferred charges against him offering to withdraw them however if he would go home A court-martial is about being organise for the trial of some deserters and I believe his case is to come before it also He was unpopular as first Lieut. of this ship and is well calculated to be so anywhere - We have a very pleasant mess Since the recent changes my interests have advanced at least 100 p.c. But I did not dream of spinning so long a gain My best wishes to all

Yours sincerely Cha' Wright

P.S. I observe that the Jan. number of Lilligan has not yet come to hand though I have that for March - After the middle or last of November directed to San Francisco



Wright, Charles. 1854. "Wright, Charles Aug. 12, 1854." *Charles Wright correspondence with Asa Gray*

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