

5 Lower Street
Plymouth

October 22nd, 1780

Mr A. Volta
35 Via Paulo
Como, ITALIA

Dear Sir,

My name is Will Preston. I am twenty-three years old. I come from England, from Plymouth to be more precise. I have a little family ; I have never seen my father much because he was a shipowner, so he worked hard. My mother died when I was fourteen and I was their only child. I had a good education and I went to University College, in Bristol where I studied Anthropology. It is a new science which is interested in the societies of men, their customs, their rites...

I had always dreamt of leaving my house to improve my knowledge about Anthropology and to discover new peoples and their cultures. When I was young, I lived next to the sea and everyday I was looking at it and dreaming about navigating around the world. So when I had the opportunity to get on a ship, I was really happy and I felt so lucky to navigate with James Cook on his famous boat, the Resolution. When I was a young boy, I built lots of model boats which I painted. I was fascinated about ships. I said to myself everyday : « When I am eighteen years old, I'll go for a long trip around the world ». It was my dream come true ! I was so excited !

July 12th, 1776 was my first day on the boat. When I arrived on the port, I saw a massive vessel. She seemed taller than three flats. Everybody was busy. On the docks, sailors hurried up to load the boat with our provisions. There was « sauerkraut » in boxes because James Cook said : « That's really good against scurvy ! ». A lot of animals, sheep, cows, goats, pigs and chickens, were taken alive on the boat to be killed and eaten by the sailors. When I came on board, I was so shy

because it was the first time for me on a real boat and I did not know anything about navigation. I hoped I would not be seasick ! James Cook came and he talked to me very nicely. He introduced me to the crew . His first lieutenant was John Gore. James King was his second officer and John Williamson was the third. The master was William Bligh. The crew also included six midshipmen, a cook and a cook's mate, six quatermasters, twenty marines and forty-six seamen. Then, I introduced myself and a sailor showed me my cabin. We were three in it: William Anderson, the surgeon and also a botanist, John Webber, a painter, and myself. In the cabin we had to sleep in hammocks and in the middle, there was a small table. When the boat left the port, I was on the deck. I felt nervous but impatient. I could see my city and the people on the port becoming smaller and smaller . I hoped to discover new populations and to travel safely. Afterwards I went to my cabin and slept, I had to recover from my emotions !

I will not tell you about all the voyage : there were not any serious incidents during the first part of the trip except that we had to go back in the Bering Strait because a big iceberg blocked our way.

One afternoon - I think we were approximately between Tahiti and America somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean - in the distance, we spotted a larger island among others. We approached it, and the sailors cast anchor. Later, James Cook decided to call these islands , the « Sandwich Islands » and we learnt that bay was called « Kealakekua Bay ». We got into a small boat to explore the island. When we got off , I looked around me. The weather was very beautiful because it was sunny and hot. A light breeze was caressing my cheeks. The turquoise blue water was very clear. The landscape was wonderful and stunning ! I could see the beach of white sand and multicoloured parrots flying above us. On the mountains, we

could see a jungle with probably a lot of exotic animals. The sand felt smooth and hot under my feet. There were some strange trees behind the beach : palmtrees, coconut trees and banana trees.

Suddenly, from behind the palmtrees, we saw a group of people approaching. In their hands, they were carrying a lot of incredible presents : they offered us jewels, baskets of exotic fruit and vegetables, pretty flowers, bows and arrows, knives, axes, skins of wild animals... They were very nice and welcoming ! The men only wore a skirt of cloth or leaves ; they had no shoes on ; their skin was sun-tanned and tatoored ; they had long black hair ; they were strong and athletic. One of them wore a hat of skins and flowers so we assumed he was the chief of the tribe. He took us to their village. It was a group of cabins which were situated in the forest. Their huts were built in wood and straw. They gave us the most beautiful cabins which were small, but nicely decorated. We stayed with them for a one month. During that period, I spent a long time observing their everyday life, their routine . They ate mostly fish, exotic fruit and roots. Men went fishing and hunting everyday while women were taking care of the children, cooking and building the fire. They had little but seemed peaceful and happy : it was like paradise on earth ! I think they considered us, and especially James Cook, as an incarnation of one of their gods ! At night, they often organised religious ceremonies around the fire : they sang and danced to celebrate their gods and they invited us to share and enjoy their rites.

After that unforgettable adventure, we were sad to leave that gorgeous island ! We left in February 1779. One night, everybody was asleep on the boat, but I was hot and I couldn't sleep. So, I decided to go outside and to have a walk on the deck. The air was fresh. It was dark. I was watching the stars when I heard a scream. It was the man on watch in the crow's nest. He screamed : « A sail on

starboard ! » After that, everything went very fast. I saw an old ship with the skull and crossbones flag and on that ship, horrible men. In their right hands, they had a knife, and in the other one, there were the biggest guns I had ever seen. They were pirates, ready to hook on the Resolution. Suddenly, a loud sound rang in my ears and the deck shook. I was really scared : a cannon ball had just broken one of our masts and killed one of the men. Some sailors took guns and shot at the pirates. James Cook decided we had to run away in the direction of the Sandwich Islands. He shouted orders which the sailors quickly executed. Fortunately, the pirates couldn't follow us because James Cook knew a quick, but dangerous passage between the rocks thanks to the accurate maps he drew during the last month. I turned my head and I saw the pirates' ship far away. It was the most terrifying night of my entire life ! We were very relieved when we finally arrived on the island and could repair the broken mast.

However, when we came back to the Sandwich Islands after that terrible night, we did not receive the same warm welcome. The relationships with the natives rapidly became tense and confrontational, so we decided not to stay long. On the night before the departure, the crew and the ship were ready to leave the island. It was the full moon. I said to James Cook to wait for me because I had one last thing to do. I heard the natives say they were going into the jungle for a secret ritual and I had to see that ! I walked through the forest. I was guided by the natives' songs and some smoke above the trees. After a few minutes, I arrived to a huge clearing that seemed to be a religious place. The tribe was gathered around a strange device : it looked like a big totem. There were burning torches all around. Women were dancing and singing while men were pronouncing incantations. All were wearing masks. While I was hiding in the forest, I could see a man standing next to the kind of totem. Suddenly, I saw another man, maybe a witch, approaching: he had a mask

bigger than the others. He was old because I could see grey hair under the mask. He was carrying a big staff and dancing and chanting ritual spells, arms raised to the sky. I had an idea. I caught a man who was walking past me, stunned him and hid his body in the forest. I took his clothes and his mask and walked out of the jungle to join the festivities. The witch took the man's hands and put them on the device. Now, I was closer and I could see the high column was composed of pieces of different metals and wet cloth piled up in a certain order – a drawing of the device will be enclosed with this letter. When the man touched the device, he convulsed : his muscles contracted very violently. I was so surprised that I screamed ! A little scream, but they heard me ! All the natives turned their heads in my direction. There was a minute of silence : we looked at each other. I was really scared and my heart beat very fast ! I screamed again and ran away ! They took some weapons and followed me. I was running through the jungle as fast as I could when suddenly James Cook appeared between the trees. I told him : « Run, run ! They're after me ! ». So, we ran, but James Cook tripped over a dead branch. I tried to help him up, but it was too late ... they stabbed him. I escaped and ran to the boat and I shouted : « They killed him ! They killed James Cook ! Let's go ! ». I only had time to get on board thanks to the crew who started shooting at the natives from the deck.

That's it. You know everything. I am sending you this letter because I think on that terrible night I did an important discovery in relation to your research on electricity. Maybe you are wondering : « But how does he know about me ? » The answer is easy. I was at the University with your little brother at the time when you started working on electricity following Galvani's research. Everyday, your little brother was telling me a lot of things about your research. I wanted to meet you, but then, James Cook asked me to join the Resolution for that fatal third voyage. That is

why I think you are the perfect person to share that discovery with. You will make science progress. Use that device for the good of humanity. But never say a word about my story...Oh, my god... I'm so ashamed... It was all my fault ! If I had not gone into that forest, nothing would have been the same... I did something wrong, and I regret my curiosity ! I am the only one responsible for James Cook's death. When you read this letter, I will be a dead man.

Yours truly,

Will Preston