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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER, ANN BORROW

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**LETTERS
TO HIS MOTHER
ANN BORROW
AND OTHER CORRESPONDENTS**

BY
GEORGE BORROW

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1913

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**LETTERS TO ANN BORROW
AND OTHER CORRESPONDENTS**

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**LETTER I.
To ANN BORROW.**

SPAIN,
[Post-mark February 9th, 1838.]

MY DEAR MAMA,

As I am afraid that you may not have received my last letter in consequence of several couriers having been stopped, I write to inform you that I am quite well.

I have been in some difficulties. I was selling so many Testaments that the Priests became alarmed, and prevailed on the government to put a stop to my selling any more. They were likewise talking of prosecuting me as a Witch, but they have thought better of it.

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I hear it is very cold in England. Pray take care of yourself. I shall send you more in a few weeks.

God bless you,
My Dear Mama,

Letter II.
To A Correspondent.

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OULTON,
LOWESTOFT,
SUFFOLK.
August 11th, 1843.

MY DEAR SIR,

Many thanks for your interesting and kind letter, in which you do me the honour to ask my opinion respecting the pedigree of your island goblin, *le feu follet Belenger*; that opinion I cheerfully give, with a promise that it is only an opinion; in hunting for the etymons of these fairy names we can scarcely expect to arrive at any thing like certainty.

I suppose you are aware that the name of Bilenger, or Billinger, is of occasional though by no means frequent occurrence both in England and France. You have heard of Billings-gate, and of Billing-ham, the unfortunate assassin of poor Percival. Likewise of Billing-ton, all modifications of the same root: Belingart, Bilings-home or Billing-ston. But what is Billinger? Clearly that which is connected some way or other with Billing. You will find *ger*, or something like it, in most European tongues—*Boulanger*, *horologer*, *talker walker*, *baker*, *brewer*, *beggar*. In Welsh it is of frequent occurrence in the shape of *ur* or *gwr*—*hinur* (an elder), *herwr* (a prowler); in Russian the *ger*, *gwr*, *ur*, *er*, appears in the shape of *ik* or *k*—*Sapojnik*, a shoemaker, *Chinobuik*, a man possessed of rank. The root of all these, as well as of *or* in Senator, victor, etc., is the same as *ker* or *kir*; which means, Lord, master, maker, doer, possessor of something or connected with something.

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We want now to come at the meaning of Beling or Billing, which probably means some action, or some moral or personal attribute. *Bolvile* in Anglo-Saxon means honest, Danish *Bollig*; *Wallen*, in German, to wanken or move restlessly about; *Baylan*, in Spanish, to dance, connected with which are to whirl, to fling, and possibly *Walloon* and *Fleming*.

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Belenger therefore may mean a *Billiger* or honest fellow, or it may mean a *Walter-ger*, a *whirlenger*, a flinger or something connected with restless motion.

Allow me to draw your attention to the word "Will" in the English word "Will of the wisp." It must not be supposed that this "Will" is the abbreviation of William; it is pure Danish, "Vild," pronounced "will," and signifies wild, "Vilden Visk; Vilden Visk," the wild or moving wisp. I can adduce another instance of the corruption of the Danish "vild" into "will." The rustics of this part of England are in the habit of saying "they are led will" (*vild* or *wild*), when from intoxication or some other cause they are bewildered at night and cannot find their way home. This expression is clearly from the old Norse or Danish. I am not at all certain that "Bil" in *Bilinger* may not be this same "will" or "Vild," and that the word may not be a corruption of *Vilden*, old or elder, wild or flying fire.

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It has likewise occurred to me that *Bilinger* may be derived from "Volundr," the worship of the blacksmith or Northern Vulcan.

[GEORGE BORROW.]

LETTER III.
To MARY BORROW.

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Constantinople.
September 16th, 1844.

MY DARLING CARRETA,

I am about to leave Constantinople and to return home. I have given up the idea of going to Russia. I find that if I go to Odessa I shall have to remain in quarantine for fourteen days, which I have no inclination to do; I am moreover anxious to get home, being quite tired of wandering, and desirous of being once more with my loved ones.

This is a most interesting place, but unfortunately it is extremely dear. The Turks have no inns, and I am here at an English one, at which, though everything is comfortable, the prices are very high. To-day is Monday, and next Friday I purpose starting for Salonica, in a steamboat—Salonica is in Albania. I shall then cross Albania, a journey of about three hundred miles, and get to Corfu, from which I can either get to England across Italy and down the Rhine, or by way of Marseilles and across France. I shall not make any stay in Italy if I go there, as I have nothing to see there.

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I shall be so glad to be at home with you once again, and to see my dear mother and Hen. Tell Hen that I picked up for her in one of the bazaars a curious Armenian coin; it is silver, small, but thick, with a most curious inscription upon it. I gave fifteen piasters for it. I hope it and the rest will get safe to England. I have bought a chest, which I intend to send by sea, and I have picked up a great many books and other things, and I wish to travel light; I shall, therefore, only take a

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bag with a few clothes and shirts. It is possible that I shall be at home soon after your receiving this, or at most three weeks after—I hope to write to you again from Corfu, which is a British island with a British garrison in it, like Gibraltar.

The English newspapers came last week. I see those wretched French cannot let us alone, they want to go to war; well, let them—they richly deserve a good drubbing. The people here are very kind in their way, but home is home, especially such a one as mine, with true hearts to welcome me.

Oh, I was so glad to get your letters; they were rather of a distant date, it is true, but they quite revived me. I hope you are all well, and my dear mother. Since I have been here I have written to Mr. Lord. I was glad to hear that he has written to Hen. I hope Lucy is well; pray remember me most kindly to her, and tell her that I hope to see her soon. I count so on getting into my summer-house again, and sitting down to write; I have arranged my book in my mind, and though it will take me a great deal of trouble to write it, I feel that when it is written it will be first-rate.

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My journey with God's help has done me a great deal of good—I am stronger than I was, and I can now sleep. I intend to draw on England for forty or fifty pounds; if I don't want the whole of it, it will be all the same. I have still some money left, but I have no wish to be stopped on my journey for want of it. I am sorry about what you told me respecting the railway, sorry that the old coach is driven off the road. I shall patronise it as little as possible, but stick to the old route and Thurton George. What a number of poor people will these railroads deprive of their bread. I am grieved at what you say about poor M. He can take her into custody however, and oblige her to support the children; such is law, though the property may have been secured to her, she can be compelled to do that.

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Tell Hen that there is a mosque here, called the mosque of Sultan Bajazet; it is full of sacred pigeons; there is a corner of the court to which the creatures flock to be fed, like bees, by hundreds and thousands; they are not at all afraid, as they are never killed. Every place where they can roost is covered with them, their impudence is great; they sprang originally from two pigeons brought from Asia by the Emperor of Constantinople. They are of a deep blue.

God bless you, dearest,
G. B.

LETTER IV.
To MARY BORROW.

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OXFORD.
February 2nd, [1846]

DEAR CARRETA,

I reached this place yesterday, and hope to be home to-night (Monday). I walked the whole way by Kingston, Hampton, Sunbury (Miss Oriel's place), Windsor, Wallingford, &c.—a good part of the way by the Thames. There has been much wet weather. Oxford is a wonderful place. Kiss Hen, and God bless you!

[GEORGE BORROW.]

LETTER V.
To MARY BORROW.

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TUNBRIDGE WELLS,
Tuesday evening.
[1846]

DEAR CARRETA,

I have arrived here safe. It is a wonderful place, a small city of palaces amidst hills, rocks, and woods, and is full of fine people. Please to carry upstairs and lock in the drawer the little paper sack of letters in the parlour; lock it up with the bank book, and put this along with it—also be sure to keep the window of my room fastened and the door locked, and keep the key in your pocket. God bless you and Hen.

[GEORGE BORROW.]

LETTER VI.
To MARY BORROW.

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Tuesday afternoon,
[1848]

MY DEAR WIFE,

I just write you a line to tell you that I am tolerably well, as I hope you are.

Everything is in confusion abroad. The French King has disappeared and will probably never be heard of, though they are expecting him in England. Funds are down nearly to 80. The

Government have given up the income tax, and people are very glad of it. I am not. With respect to the funds, if I were to sell out I should not know what to do with the money. J. says they will rise. I do not think they will; they may, however, fluctuate a little.

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Keep up your spirits, my heart's dearest, and kiss old Hen for me.

G. B.

LETTER VII.
To MARY BORROW.

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53A PALL MALL.
[1848]

DEAR CARRETA,

I hope you received my last letter written on Tuesday.

I am glad that I came to London. I find myself much the better for having done so, I was going on in a very spiritless manner. Everybody I have met seems very kind and glad to see me. Murray seems to be thoroughly staunch. Cooke, to whom I mentioned the F. T. says that Murray was delighted with the idea, and will be very glad of the 4th of *Lavengro*. I am going to dine with Murray today, Thursday. W. called upon me today.

I wish you would send me a blank cheque in a letter so that if I want money I may be able to draw for a little. I shall not be long from home, but now I am here I wish to do all that's necessary. If you send me a blank cheque I suppose W. or M. would give me the money. I hope you got my last letter. I received yours, and C. has just sent the two copies of L. you wrote for, and I believe some engravings of the picture. I shall wish to return it by the packet if possible, and will let you know when I am coming. I hope to write again shortly to tell you some more news. How is mother and Hen and how are the creatures? I hope all well. I trust you like all I propose; now I am here I want to get two or three things, to go to the Museum, and to arrange matters.

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God bless you.

[GEORGE BORROW.]

Love to Mother and Hen.

LETTER VIII.
To MARY BORROW.

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58 JERMYN ST,
ST. JAMES',
[1848]

DEAR CARRETA,

I got here safe, and upon the whole had not so bad a journey as might be expected. I put up at the Spread Eagle for the night, for I was tired and hungry. I have got into my old lodgings as you see, those on the second floor. They are very nice ones with every convenience; they are expensive it is true, but they are cheerful, which is a grand consideration for me. I have as yet seen nobody, for it is only now a little past eleven. I can scarcely at present tell you what my plans are, perhaps tomorrow I shall write again. Kiss Hen, and God bless you.

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G. B.

LETTER IX.
To MARY BORROW.

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58 JERMYN ST,
ST. JAMES',
Wednesday,
[1848]

DEAR CARRETA,

I was glad to receive your letter, I had expected one on Tuesday. I am upon the whole very comfortable, and people are kind. I passed last Sunday at Clapham with Mrs. Browne, I was glad to go there for it was a gloomy day. They are now glad enough to ask me.

I suppose I must stay in London through next week. I have been invited to two grand parties, and it is as well to have something for one's money. I called at the Bible Society—all remarkably civil, Joseph especially so. I think I shall be able to manage with my own Dictionary. There is now a great demand for Morrison.

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Yesterday I again dined at the Murray's, there was a family party—very pleasant. To-morrow I dine with an old schoolfellow. Murray is talking of printing a new edition ^[25] to sell for 5 shillings. Those rascals the Americans have it seems reprinted it, and are selling it for *eighteen*

pence. Murray says he shall print ten thousand copies; it is chiefly intended for the Colonies. He says the rich people and the libraries have already got it, and he is quite right, for nearly three thousand copies have been sold at 27s.! There is no longer the high profit to be made on books there formerly was, as the rascals abroad pirate the good ones, and in the present state of copyright there is no help: we can, however, keep the American editions out of the Colonies, which is something.

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I have nothing more to say, save to commend you not to go on the water without *I*; perhaps you would be overset; and do not go to the bridge again, 'till I come. Take care of Habismilk and Craffs. Kiss the little mare, and old Hen.

[GEORGE BORROW.]

LETTER X.
To MARY BORROW.

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PENQUITO,
January 27th, 1854.

MY DEAR CARRETA,

I just write you a line to inform you that I have got back safe from the Land's End. I have received your two letters, and hope you received mine from the Land's End. It is probable that I shall yet visit one or two places before I leave Cornwall. I am very much pleased with the country. When you receive this if you please to write a line *by return of post* I think you may; the Tredinnock people wish me to stay with them for a day or two. When you see the Cobbs pray remember me to them. I am sorry Horace has lost his aunt, he will *miss her*. Love to Hen.

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Ever yours, dearest,
G. BORROW.

(Keep this.)

LETTER XI.
To MARY BORROW.

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PRESTYNE,
RADNORSHIRE,
Monday Morning,
[1854]

DEAR CARRETA,

I am just going to start for Ludlow, 18 miles, and hope to be at Shrewsbury on Tuesday night, if not on Wednesday morning. God bless you and Hen,

J. BORROW.

When I get back I shall have walked more than 400 miles.

LETTER XII.
To MARY BORROW.

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53A PALL MALL,
LONDON.
[1857]

DEAR WIFE CARRETA,

I arrived here at about five o'clock this morning. Since I saw you I have walked about 250 miles. I walked the whole way from the North to the South, then turning to the East traversed Glamorganshire and the county of Monmouth, and came out at Chepstow. My boots were worn up by the time I reached Swansea, and I was obliged to get them new soled and welted. I walked every inch of the way.

I have seen wonderful mountains, waterfalls, and people. On the side of the Black Mountains I met a cartload of real Gypsies. They were in a dreadful rage, and were abusing the country right and left. My last ninety miles proved not very comfortable, there was so much rain.

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Pray let me have some money by Monday, as I am nearly without any, as you may well suppose, for I was three weeks on my journey. I left you on a Thursday, and reached Chepstow yesterday, Thursday evening. I hope you, my mother, and Hen are well. I have seen M. and C.

God bless you,
Yours,
GEORGE BORROW.

(Keep this)

LETTER XIII.
To MARY BORROW.

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TRECASTLE,
BRECKNOCKSHIRE,
SOUTH WALES.
August 17th, 1857.

DEAR CARRETA,

I write to you a few words from this place; tomorrow I am going to Llandovery and from there to Carmarthen. For the first three or four days I had dreadful weather. I got only to Worthen the first day, twelve miles, on the next to Montgomery, and so on. It is now very hot; but I am very well, much better than at Shrewsbury. I hope in a few days to write to you again, and soon to be back to you.

God bless you and Hen.

G. BORROW.

LETTER XIV.
To MARY BORROW.

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INVERNESS,
September 29th, 1858.

MY DEAR CARRETA,

I have got your letter, and glad enough I was to get it. The day after to-morrow I shall depart from here for Fort Augustus, at some distance up the lake. After staying a few days there, I am thinking of going to the Isle of Mull, but I will write to you if possible from Fort Augustus.

I am rather sorry that I came to Scotland—I was never in such a place in my life for cheating and imposition, and the farther north you go the worse things seem to be. And yet I believe it is possible to live very cheaply here, that is if you have a house of your own and a wife to go out and make bargains; for things are abundant enough, but if you move about you are at the mercy of innkeepers and suchlike people.

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The other day I was swindled out of a shilling by a villain to whom I had given it for change. I ought, perhaps, to have had him up before a magistrate, provided I could have found one. But I was in a wild place, and he had a clan about him, and if I had had him up I have no doubt I should have been outsworn. I, however, have met one fine, noble old fellow. The other night I lost my way amongst horrible moors, and wandered for miles and miles without seeing a soul. At last I saw a light, which came from the window of a rude hovel. I tapped, at the window, and shouted, and at last an old man came out. He asked me what I wanted, and I told him I had lost my way. He asked me where I came from, and where I wanted to go; and on my telling him he said I had indeed lost my way, for I had got out of it at least four miles, and was going away from the place I wanted to get to. He then said he would show me the way, and went with me for several miles over most horrible places. At last we came to a road where he said he thought he might leave me, and wished me goodnight. I gave him a shilling. He was very grateful, and said, after considering, that as I had behaved so handsomely to him he would not leave me yet, as he thought it possible I might yet lose my way. He then went with me three miles farther, and I have no doubt that, but for him, I should have lost my way again the roads were so tangled. I never saw such an old fellow, or one whose conversation was so odd and entertaining. This happened last Monday night, the night of the day in which I had been swindled of the shilling by the other; I could write a history about those two shillings.

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[GEORGE BORROW.]

LETTER XV.
To MRS. MACOUBREY.

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OULTON,
LOWESTOFT.
April 1st, 1874.

DEAR HENRIETTA,

I have received your letter of the 30th March. Since I last wrote I have not been well. I have had a great pain in the left jaw, which almost prevented me from eating. I am, however, better now.

I shall be glad to see you and Dr. MacOubrey as soon as you can conveniently come. Send me a line to say when I may expect you. I have no engagements.

Before you come call at No. 36 to enquire whether anything has been sent there. Leverton had better be employed to make a couple of boxes or cases for the books in the sacks. The sacks can be put on the top in the inside. There is an old coat in one of the sacks in the pocket of which are papers. Let it be put in with its contents just as it is. I wish to have the long white chest and the

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two deal boxes also brought down. Buy me a thick under-waistcoat like the one I am now wearing, and a lighter one for the summer. Worsted socks are of no use—they scarcely last a day. Cotton ones are poor things, but they are better than worsted.

Kind regards to Dr. MacOubrey.
God bless you!
[GEORGE BORROW.]

Return me this when you come.

* * * * *

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Footnotes:

[25] *Of The Bible in Spain.*

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER, ANN BORROW ***

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