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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LETTERS TO HIS WIFE MARY BORROW ***

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LETTERS TO HIS WIFE MARY BORROW

BY
GEORGE BORROW

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LETTERS TO HIS WIFE

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LETTER I.

VENICE,
October 22nd, 1844.

MY DEAREST CARRETA,

I arrived this day at Venice, and though I am exceedingly tired I hasten to write a line to inform you of my well-being. I am now making for home as fast as possible, and I have now nothing to detain me.

Since I wrote to you last I have been again in quarantine for two days and a half at Trieste, but I am glad to say that I shall no longer be detained on that account. I was obliged to go to Trieste, though it was much out of my way, otherwise I must have remained I know not how long in Corfu, waiting for a direct conveyance. After my liberation I only stopped a day at Corfu in order that I might lose no more time, though I really wished to tarry there a little longer, the people were so kind. On the day of my liberation I had four invitations to dinner from the officers. I, however, made the most of my time, and escorted by one, Captain Northcott, of the Rifles, went over the fortifications, which are most magnificent. I saw everything that I well could, and shall never forget the kindness with which I was treated. The next day I went for Trieste in a steamer, down the whole length of the Adriatic. I was horribly unwell, for the Adriatic is a bad sea, and very dangerous; the weather was also very rough. After stopping at Trieste a day, besides the

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quarantine, I left for Venice, and here I am, and hope to be on my route again the day after tomorrow. I shall now hurry through Italy by way of Ancona, Rome, and Civita Vecchia to Marseilles in France, and from Marseilles to London, in not more than six days' journey. Oh, I shall be so glad to get back to you and my mother (I hope she is alive and well) and Hen. [7]

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I am glad to hear that we are not to have a war with those silly people, the French. The idea made me very uneasy, for I thought how near Oulton lay to the coast.

You cannot imagine what a magnificent old town Venice is—it is clearly the finest in Italy, although in decay; it stands upon islands in the sea, and in many places is intersected with canals. The Grand Canal is four miles long, lined with palaces on either side. I, however, shall be glad to leave it, for there is no place to me like Oulton, where live two of my dear ones. I have told you that I am very tired, so that I cannot write much more, and I am presently going to bed, but I am sure that you will be glad to hear from me however little I may write.

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I think I told you in my last letter that I had been to the top of Mount Olympus, in Thessaly. Tell Hen that I saw a whole herd of wild deer bounding down the cliffs, the noise they made was like thunder. I also saw an enormous eagle—one of Jupiter's birds, his real eagles, for according to the Grecian mythology Olympus was his favourite haunt. I don't know what it was then, but at present it is the most wild, savage place I ever saw; an immense way up I came to a forest of pines; half of them were broken by thunder-bolts, snapped in the middle, and the ruins lying around in the most hideous confusion; some had been blasted from top to bottom and stood naked, black, and charred, in indescribable horridness. Jupiter was the god of thunder, and he still seems to haunt Olympus. The worst is there is little water, so that a person might almost perish there of thirst: the snow-water, however, when it runs into the hollows is the most delicious beverage ever tasted—the snow, however, is very high up. My next letter I hope will be from Marseilles, and I hope to be there in a very few days.

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Now, God bless you, my dearest. Write to my mother, and kiss Hen, and remember me kindly to Lucy and the Atkinses.

G. B[ORROW].

LETTER II.

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53A PALL MALL,
Saturday [1854].

DEAR CARRETA,

I am thinking of coming to you on Thursday. I do not know that I can do anything more here, and the dulness of the weather, and the mists, are making me ill.

Please to send another five pound note by Tuesday morning. I have spent scarcely anything of that which you sent, except what I owe to Mrs. W., but I wish to have money in my pocket, and Murray and Cooke are going to dine with me on Tuesday.

I shall be glad to be with you again, for I am very much in want of your society. I miss very much my walks at Llangollen by the quiet canal; but what's to be done?

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Everything seems nearly at a standstill in London on account of this wretched war, at which it appears to me the English are getting the worst, notwithstanding their boasting. They thought to settle it in an autumn's day; they little knew the Russians, and they did not reflect that just after autumn comes winter, which has ever been the Russian's friend.

Have you heard anything about the rent of the cottage? I should have been glad to hear from you this morning.

Give my love to Hen, and may God bless you, dear.

GEORGE BORROW.

Keep this.

LETTER III.

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TENBY
Tuesday, 25 [*August*, 1857].

MY DEAR CARRETA,

Since writing to you I have been rather unwell, and was obliged to remain two days at Sandypool. The weather has been terribly hot, and affected my head, and likewise my sight slightly. Moreover, one of the shoes hurt my foot. I came to this place to-day, and shall presently leave it for Pembroke on my way back. I shall write to you from there. I shall return by Cardigan.

What I want you to do is to write to me directed to the post office, Cardigan (in Cardiganshire), and either inclose a post office order for five pounds, or an order from Lloyd and Co. on the Banker of that place for the same sum. But at any rate write, or I shall not know what to do. I

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would return by railroad, but in that event I must go to London, for there are no railroads from here to Shrewsbury. I want, moreover, to see a little more.

Just speak to the Banker, and don't lose any time. Send letter, and either order in it, or say that I can get it at the Banker's.

I hope all is well. God bless you and Hen.

GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER IV.

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LAMPETER
September 3rd, [1857].

MY DEAR CARRETA,

I am making the best of my way to Shrewsbury (my face is turned towards Mama). I write this from Lampeter, where there is a college for educating clergymen intended for Wales, which I am going to see. I shall then start for Radnor by Tregavon, and hope soon to be in England.

I have seen an enormous deal since I have been away, and have walked several hundred miles. Amongst other places I have seen St. David's, a wonderful half-ruinous Cathedral at the western end of Pembrokeshire; but I shall be glad to get back.

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God bless you and Hen,
GEORGE BORROW.

Henrietta! Do you know who is handsome?

LETTER V.

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EDINBURGH,
Sunday [September 19th, 1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

I just write a line to inform you that I arrived here yesterday quite safe.

We did not start from Yarmouth till past three o'clock on Thursday morning; we reached Newcastle about ten on Friday. As I was walking in the street at Newcastle a sailor-like man came running up to me, and begged that I would let him speak to me. He appeared almost wild with joy. I asked him who he was, and he told me he was a Yarmouth north beach man, and that he knew me very well. Before I could answer, another sailor-like, short, thick fellow came running up, who also seemed wild with joy; he was a comrade of the other. I never saw two people so out of themselves with pleasure, they literally danced in the street; in fact, they were two of my old friends. I asked them how they came down there, and they told me that they had been down fishing. They begged a thousand pardons for speaking to me, but told me they could not help it.

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I set off for Alnwick on Friday afternoon, stayed there all night, and saw the castle next morning. It is a fine old place, but at present is undergoing repairs—a Scottish king was killed before its walls in the old time. At about twelve I started for Edinburgh. The place is wonderfully altered since I was here, and I don't think for the better. There is a Runic stone on the castle brae which I am going to copy. It was not there in my time.

If you write direct to me at the Post Office, Inverness. I am thinking of going to Glasgow tomorrow, from which place I shall start for Inverness by one of the packets which go thither by the North-West and the Caledonian Canal. I hope that you and Hen are well and comfortable. Pray eat plenty of grapes and partridges. We had upon the whole a pleasant passage from Yarmouth; we lived plainly but well, and I was not at all ill—the captain seemed a kind, honest creature.

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Remember me kindly to Mrs. Turnour and Mrs. Clarke, and God bless you and Hen.

GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER VI.

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INVERNESS,
Sunday [September 26th, 1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

This is the third letter which I have written to you. Whether you have received the other two, or will receive this, I am doubtful. I have been several times to the post office, but we found no letter from you, though I expected to find one awaiting me when I arrived. I wrote last on Friday. I merely want to know once how you are, and if all is well I shall move onward. It is of not much use staying here.

After I had written to you on Friday I crossed by the ferry over the Firth and walked to Beaully, and from thence to Beaufort or Castle Downie. At Beaully I saw the gate of the pit where old

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Fraser used to put the people whom he owed money to—it is in the old ruined cathedral, and at Beaufort saw the ruins of the house where he was born. Lord Lovat lives in the house close by. There is now a claimant to the title, a descendant of old Fraser's elder brother who committed a murder in the year 1690, and on that account fled to South Wales. The present family are rather uneasy, and so are their friends, of whom they have a great number, for though they are flaming Papists they are very free of their money. I have told several of their cousins that the claimant has not a chance as the present family have been so long in possession. They almost blessed me for saying so. There, however, can be very little doubt that the title and estate, more than a million acres, belong to the claimant by strict law. Old Fraser's brother was called Black John of the Tasser. The man whom he killed was a piper who sang an insulting song to him at a wedding. I have heard the words and have translated them; he was dressed very finely, and the piper sang:

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*You're dressed in Highland robes, O John,
But ropes of straw would become ye better;
You've silver buckles your shoes upon
But leather thongs for them were fitter.*

Whereupon John drew his dagger and ran it into the piper's belly; the descendants of the piper are still living at Beaully. I walked that day thirty-four miles between noon and ten o'clock at night. My letter of credit is here. This is a dear place, but not so bad as Edinburgh. *If you have written*, don't write any more till you hear from me again.

God bless you and Hen.
GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER VII.

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INVERNESS,
September 30th, [1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

I write another line to tell you that I have got your second letter—it came just in time, as I leave to-morrow. In your next, address to George Borrow, Post Office, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, Scotland. You had, however, better write without delay, as I don't know how long I may be there; and be sure only to write once. I am glad we have got such a desirable tenant for our Maltings, and should be happy to hear that the cottage was also let so well. However, let us be grateful for what has been accomplished.

I hope you wrote to Cooke as I desired you, and likewise said something about how I had waited for Murray. Between ourselves that account of theirs was a shameful one, whatever they may say.

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I met to-day a very fat gentleman from Caithness, at the very north of Scotland; he said he was descended from the Norse. I talked to him about them, and he was so pleased with my conversation that he gave me his card, and begged that I would visit him if I went there. As I could do no less, I showed him my card—I had but one—and he no sooner saw the name than he was in a rapture.

I am rather glad that you have got the next door, as the locality is highly respectable. Tell Hen that I copied the Runic stone on the Castle Hill, Edinburgh. It was brought from Denmark in the old time. The inscription is imperfect, but I can read enough of it to see that it was erected by a man to his father and mother. I again write the direction for your next: *George Borrow, Esq., Post Office, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, Scotland.*

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God bless you and Hen.

Ever yours,
GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER VIII.

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FORT AUGUSTUS,
Sunday, October 7th, [1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

I write a line lest you should be uneasy. Before leaving the Highlands I thought I would see a little more about me. So last week I set on a four days' task, a walk of a hundred miles. I returned here late last Thursday night. I walked that day forty-five miles; during the first twenty the rain poured in torrents, and the wind blew in my face. The last seventeen miles were in the dark. To-morrow I proceed towards Mull.

I hope that you got my letters, and that I shall find something from you awaiting me at the post office. The first day I passed over Corryarrick, a mountain 3000 feet high. I was nearly up to my middle in snow. As soon as I had passed it I was on Badenoch. The road on the farther side was horrible, and I was obliged to wade several rivulets, one of which was very boisterous and nearly threw me down. I wandered through a wonderful country, and picked up a great many strange

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legends from the people I met, but they were very few, the country being almost a desert, chiefly inhabited by deer. When amidst the lower mountains I frequently heard them blaring in the woods above me. The people at the inn here are by far the nicest I have met; they are kind and honourable to a degree.

God bless you and Hen.
GEORGE BORROW.

Don't write again if you have written.

LETTER IX.

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INVERNESS,
November 7th, [1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

After I wrote to you I walked round Mull and through it, over Benmore. I likewise went to Icolmkill, and passed twenty-four hours there. I saw the wonderful ruin and crossed the island. I suffered a great deal from hunger, but what I saw amply repaid me; on my return to Tobermory I was rather unwell, but got better. I was disappointed in a passage to Thurso by sea, so I was obliged to return to this place by train. On Tuesday, D.V., I shall set out on foot, and hope to find your letter awaiting me at the post office at Thurso.

On coming hither by train I nearly lost my things. I was told at Huntly that the train stopped ten minutes, and meanwhile the train drove off *purposely*. I telegraphed to Keith in order that my things might be secured, describing where they were, under the seat. The reply was that there was nothing of the kind there. I instantly said that I would bring an action against the company, and walked off to the town, where I stated the facts to a magistrate, and gave him my name and address. He advised me to bring my action. I went back and found the people frightened. They telegraphed again—and the reply was that the things were safe. There is nothing like setting oneself up sometimes. I was terribly afraid I should never again find my books and things. I, however, got them, and my old umbrella, too. I was sent on by the mail train, but lost four hours, besides undergoing a great deal of misery and excitement.

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When I have been to Thurso and Kirkwall I shall return as quick as possible, and shall be glad to get out of the country. As I am here, however, I wish to see all I can, for I never wish to return. Whilst in Mull I lived very cheaply—it is not costing me more than seven shillings a day. The generality of the inns, however, in the lowlands are incredibly dear—half-a-crown for breakfast, consisting of a little tea, a couple of small eggs, and bread and butter—*two* shillings for attendance. Tell Hen that I have some moss for her from Benmore—also some seaweed from the farther shore of Icolmkill. God bless you,

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GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER X.

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THURSO,
November 21st, [1858].

MY DEAR CARRETA,

I reached this place on Friday night, and was glad enough to get your kind letter. I shall be so glad to get home to you.

Since my last letter to you I have walked nearly 160 miles. I was terribly taken in with respect to distances—however, I managed to make my way. I have been to Johnny Groat's House, which is about twenty-two miles from this place. I had tolerably fine weather all the way, but within two or three miles of that place a terrible storm arose; the next day the country was covered with ice and snow. There is at present here a kind of Greenland winter, colder almost than I ever knew the winter in Russia. The streets are so covered with ice that it is dangerous to step out. Tomorrow D. and I pass over into Orkney, and we shall take the first steamer to Aberdeen and Inverness, from whence I shall make the best of my way to England. It is well that I have no farther to walk, for walking now is almost impossible—the last twenty miles were terrible, and the weather is worse than it was then. I was terribly deceived with respect to steamboats. I was told that one passed over to Orkney every day, and I have now been waiting two days, and there is not yet one. I have had quite enough of Scotland. When I was at Johnny Groat's I got a shell for dear Hen, which I hope I shall be able to bring or send to her.

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I am glad to hear that you have got out the money on mortgage so satisfactorily. One of the greatest blessings in this world is to be independent. My spirits of late have been rather bad, owing principally to my dear mother's death. I always knew that we should miss her. I dreamt about her at Fort Augustus. Though I have walked so much I have suffered very little from fatigue, and have got over the ground with surprising facility, but I have not enjoyed the country so much as Wales.

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I wish that you would order a hat for me against I come home; the one I am wearing is very shabby, having been so frequently drenched with rain and storm-beaten. I cannot say the exact day that I shall be home, but you may be expecting me. The worst is that there is no depending

on the steamers, for there is scarcely any traffic in Scotland in winter. My appetite of late has been very poorly, chiefly, I believe, owing to badness of food and want of regular meals. Glad enough, I repeat, shall I be to get home to you and Hen.

GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER XI.

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KIRKWALL, ORKNEY,
November 27th, Saturday [1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

I am, as you see, in Orkney, and I expect every minute the steamer which will take me to Shetland and Aberdeen, from which last place I go by train to Inverness, where my things are, and thence home.

I had a stormy passage to Stromness, from whence I took a boat to the Isle of Hoy, where I saw the wonderful Dwarf's House hollowed out of the stone. From Stromness I walked here. I have seen the old Norwegian Cathedral; it is of red sandstone, and looks as if cut out of rock. It is different from almost everything of the kind I ever saw. It is stern and grand to a degree. I have also seen the ruins of the old Norwegian Bishop's palace in which King Hacon died; also the ruins of the palace of Patrick, Earl of Orkney. I have been treated here with every kindness and civility. As soon as the people knew who I was they could scarcely make enough of me. The Sheriff, Mr. Robertson, a great Gaelic scholar, said he was proud to see me in his house; and a young gentleman of the name of Petrie, Clerk of Supply, has done nothing but go about with me to show me the wonders of the place. Mr. Robertson wished to give me letters to some gentleman at Edinburgh. I, however, begged leave to be excused, saying that I wished to get home, as, indeed, I do, for my mind is wearied by seeing so many strange places. On my way to Kirkwall I saw the stones of Stennis—immense blocks of stone standing up like those of Salisbury Plain. All the country is full of Druidical and Pictish remains. It is, however, very barren, and scarcely a tree is to be seen, only a few dwarf ones. Orkney consists of a multitude of small islands, the principal of which is Pomona, in which Kirkwall is. The currents between them are terrible.

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I hope to be home a few days after you receive these lines, either by rail or steamer. This is a fine day, but there has been dreadful weather here. I hope we shall have a prosperous passage. I have purchased a little Kirkwall newspaper, which I send you with this letter. I shall perhaps post both at Lerwick or Aberdeen. I sent you a Johnny Groat's newspaper, which I hope you got. Don't tear either up, for they are curious.

God bless you and Hen.
GEORGE BORROW.

LETTER XII.

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STIRLING,
December 14th, [1858].

DEAR CARRETA,

I write a line to tell you that I am well, and that I am on my way to England, but I am stopped here for a day, for there is no conveyance. Wherever I can walk I get on very well—but if you depend on coaches or any means of conveyance in this country you are sure to be disappointed. This place is but thirty-five miles from Edinburgh, yet I am detained for a day—there is no train. The waste of that day will prevent me getting to Yarmouth from Hull by the steamer. Were it not for my baggage I would walk to Edinburgh. I got to Aberdeen, where I posted a letter for you. I was then obliged to return to Inverness for my luggage—125 miles. Rather than return again to Aberdeen, I sent on my things to Dunkeld, and walked the 102 miles through the Highlands. When I got here I walked to Loch Lomond and Loch Katrine, thirty-eight miles over horrible roads. I then got back here. I have now seen the whole of Scotland that is worth seeing, and have walked 600 miles. I shall be glad to be out of the country; a person here must depend entirely upon himself and his own legs. I have not spent much money—my expenses during my wanderings averaged a shilling a day.

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As I was walking through Strathspey, singularly enough I met two or three of the Phillips. I did not know them, but a child came running after me to ask me my name. It was Miss P. and two of the children. I hope to get to you in two or three days after you get this.

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God bless you and dear Hen.
GEORGE BORROW.

* * * * *

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Footnotes:

[7] Borrow's stepdaughter, Henrietta Mary Clarke, afterwards Mrs. MacOubry.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LETTERS TO HIS WIFE MARY BORROW ***

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