

Borrow George

**Letters to his mother, Ann**

**Borrow**



**George Borrow**  
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Letters to his mother, Ann Borrow and Other Correspondents:*

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# George Borrow

## Letters to his mother, Ann Borrow and Other Correspondents

### 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.

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,  
G. B.*

# Letter II.

## To A Correspondent

*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.

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*.

*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.

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

*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.

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 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.

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