

Sunday, August 20th. In camp in the home-mead of Borg.

**W**E turned out of the parlour as soon as we had had our breakfast according to agreement, and pitched our tents in the tún which is separated from the house by a sort of yard as often here. It was a fine sunny morning though the wind thus early was still rather cold. It is a church-Sunday to-day and the people soon begin to drop in and wander about, or sit happily on the green turf walls, and there is a good deal of kissing all round: the men look like great big school-boys in their wide trousers, short jackets and low-crowned rough beaver hats.

While the bell was ringing the people in to "confession" (the ante-mass service, to which, by the way, nobody but women seemed to go), I turned away, and mounted the "Burg" under which the house stands, a straight grey cliff grass-clad at top, sloping gradually down toward the lower land on one side. There are plenty of flowers in the grass at the top, clover and gentian chiefly, and I sat there in excited mood for some time; of all the great historical steeds I had seen this seemed to me the most striking after Lithend; yet for some reason or other I find it hard to describe: southward lay the firth, quite calm and bright, those great mountains

## Borg

reflected in it with all detail, and over their shoulders the bright white jokuls are to be seen from here: the great circle of mountains is very awful and mysterious under a beautiful peaceful sky: they come nearly to the firth-side at the mouth of it, but from their outmost buttress a long low spit of land runs out into the sea, and beyond this is a line of skerries, beyond which one can see the surf breaking at the deep sea's end; a creek runs up from the firth toward Borg and a little stream falling through the rock ledge, of which this cliff is the highest end, goes into it. Eastward the country, ending with the low hills broken by Baula, looks little different hence to what it did from horseback, the plain somewhat flatter and the hills somewhat higher, that is all. Burgfirth, I may mention in case you forget it, or are hazy about your saga geography, is one of the great centres of story in Iceland: Egil lived at Borg, and his son Thorstein, father of Helga the Fair; some way up the river<sup>1</sup> is Gilsbank (Gilsbakki) Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue's house: and between that and this is Deildar Tongue, where Odd of the Tongue lived; a little north of that is Thverar Lithe, the dwelling of most of the folk in Hen-Thorir's Saga, and finally, Reykholt is hard by (to the south-east) where Snorri the historian lived and died.

When I came down from the Burg I find that mass proper has begun, and most of the men are gone into church, Magnússon among others; I looked in at the door and saw him sitting in state by the altar, and so retired not wanting to be caught and set down there: there were candles burning on the altar, and the priest was dressed in chasuble and was intoning the service in Icelandic in doleful key enough: altogether it seemed a dry reminiscence of the Catholic mass and rather depressed me, though I am glad they have kept so much ceremony for their amusement too; I am told they really do like sermons if they are flowery enough in style.

So then I lay in the tent till church was over, the end of which brought most of the worshippers in front of our tents for a stare; there was about a hundred of them, and if they

<sup>1</sup> Whitewater. Ed.

“came out for to see men clothed in fine raiment,” they must **Borg**  
have been sadly disappointed, for dirty and worn we were by  
that time.

After that came dinner and then for me a wandering about  
on the creek sides and up on to the **Burg** again: the rest or  
something made me homesick again, and I turned over scraps  
of verse that came to nothing, and felt low till I met Mag-  
nússon wandering about shooting, and we came in together,  
and it was supper and bed presently, a calm warm night,  
rather cloudy.