

Sunday, August 27th. In the same place.

**I**LAY abed while a light rain was falling on a warm morning, and listened to the ravens croaking and sweeping round our tent, wondering sleepily whether they would get our fish, that hung up on our tent-pole, as they brushed quite close to where we were lying, and croaked the while in an excited manner; however, when I got up presently I found the fish untouched, and the morning clearing and so we made our breakfast in great content. I had heard a report that the Anglican parson meditated church after the manner in Eng-

land, so, wandering about presently, I met him and Magnússon just come in from the Lögberg. I told the latter I was thinking of going across into the Great Rift: whereon the parson offered to ferry me across the Axewater by the washing-tub of a boat aforesaid; thereto I agreed, and C. J. F. went with me, and the parson went his ways back when he had seen us safely on the grass on the other side, and as I heard afterwards, straightway led the whiter sheep of his flock off to the little church where the ceremony ran its course.

All that had nothing more to do with us than that I thought it civil of him. C. J. F. and I went along this side of the Rift till we came on the mound that still marks Snorri's booth beside the steep road that leads into the Rift: between the two walls of which here the space is clear of rubbish and is smooth and grass-grown, and two or three of our own ponies are grazing hard by. When you are fairly withinside, the broken-down wall, though of course both lower and more irregular than the other side, does still nevertheless look like a wall; but on the other side the courses of rock lie square and regular as if a mason had built them, and their face is generally, not smooth exactly, but smoothly faceted; dark grey of colour they are, save that where anything sticks out, the flat top of it gets covered with heathy plants. The top of this wall is a crest of most fantastic shapes; a pillar here with a skull on the top, a slim pinnacle here carrying a huge stone, a row of stakes eaten into and crumbling: all manner of strange things. Looking down the Rift you can follow up its two walls till the sky is blocked up at last by Armansfell grey and heavy. The sun was shining brightly now, and as we walked on away from the lake we agreed that it was the hottest day we had had.

Some furlong's space from where we entered the Rift the way was blocked by Axewater, which, falling over the upper wall about three hundred yards higher up, brings down a wall of rubbish here, and at last cleaves a way for itself through the lower wall into the plain, though once I imagine it must have run all along the Rift till it reached the lake: however it

has now made for itself a clean breach of about six feet wide in the lower wall, through which it runs after having collected its waters together in a deep clear pool; so that standing on its splashed stones one can see, looking over the edge of the water between the gap, the plain below with its winding stream and the cows and horses feeding about, and the long line of the slope where the booths once stood. Thingvellir

The deep pool above mentioned was the place where they used to drown warlocks and witches in the later or mediaeval times, casting them down from the top of the Rift above it. Past this we came again on to a most soft and beautiful space of sward, and then we came to the falls of Axewater, the middle fall, that is, where after its first sheer tumble, it has to scramble out of the ruin of stones it has washed into the Rift. We both set about climbing over this but I found it rather too much for me and gave it up. C. J. F. went on without me right away to the foot of Armansfell, and told me afterwards that at first the Rift was yet clearer than before and very beautiful, but that as you got to Armansfell it got more blocked and kept on getting less and less open and defined. As for me, turning back, I climbed the lower wall near the breach aforesaid, and walked along its steep side till I came to the gap by Snorri's Booth, and so into the Rift again, with my face turned toward the lake now. This is the highest and most wonderful part of the Rift; it makes a slight turn toward the east a little way nearer the lake than opposite the gap by Snorri's Booth, and just there it sends out a huge bastion as regular as though it were really nothing else: this bastion the Reykjavik road climbs by a sort of broken stair, up which I went now, and came out on the great lava-plain which lies level with the lips of the Rift, ten paces from which you could have no guessing of the stupendous chasm, or of anything but some gentle wave in the once molten sea of rock. There were strange deep clefts in the lava up there that I looked into, low down, in which the ferns and meadow-sweet grew richly, though the snow lay yet at the bottoms of them. So I went a little further on the road and then sat down on a flat stone and

looked about: I was a little higher now, so I could see all across the great valley, and all the lake was spread before me with its winding bank of huge dark-blue mountains; and over the shoulder of the lower wall I could just see the stead and its bright green tún, and our own little camp beside the clear shallow water: it was a most lovely day like the finest of May days in England (when we get them fine) windless and warm but neither hot nor close. I sat there a long time and then slowly wandered back to the ferry, where I found the boat on my side, but mooning managed to drop first one, and then the other scull over-board, and there floated helpless till first a little girl tried to shove me over one of the sculls; second a boy came down to helper; third the priest tried to reach me with a salmon spear; and fourth Geir Zoega (whom I had 'nt seen for six weeks) stepped gravely into the shallow water, and pulled the little cockle-shell ashore. Then I went to the camp which I find, rather to my joy, deserted, and lay down and tried to write my journal, but could not, for a strange lazy sort of excitement that was on me, made up of half a dozen things. At last I saw the others coming, all save C.J.F., who was still in the Rift, so I set off again to the Hill of Laws and lay there a long while in the mossy grass, while the day grew fairer yet if it might be as it drew towards evening, and over the slopes of Armansfell lay one of those (to me) unaccountable flat rainbows or mist bows.

So at last I turned to go home<sup>2</sup> remembering that I had to cook the dinner, and just by the garth wall I found the Anglican parson, Evans, and one of the Cambridge men: the two latter were handling their guns and fidgetting about, so I asked them if they had taken them out to clean. Whereon they nodded and winked at me most mysteriously, and presently the parson turned his back and walked away, whereon my two fools ran like skirmishers down by the wall, trying to hide themselves and guns, pursued I must say by my indignant scorn, which was not voiceless. So they crossed the river and presently rose up a noise like the bombardment of a

<sup>2</sup> He sat about the rocks and ate blueberries till he could find no more, and then remembered about the dinner. Ed.

town,<sup>2</sup> for of course a very pop-gun fired off among these huge cliffs sounds tremendous: still however they seemed to think that the parson would not be the wiser if they came back quietly, which they did in about an hour, hiding their guns under their coat-flaps, and pulled out from their pockets three or four brace of ptarmigan. Excuse this stupid story but the undying respectability that these gentlemen had carried out to Iceland really did strike me at the time. Thing-vellir

So we fell to dinner, and it was growing dark when we had done; the evening had clouded over; strange heavy clouds hung above Hengil, mingling with the steam of the hot springs there; a soft wind blew from the south across the lake, and we went to bed expecting a wet day on the morrow.