

Wednesday, July 19th. At the priest's house at Oddi.

GET up at nine and buy two horses of Thorgrímsson, a red (chestnut) pack horse which turned out very well, and a riding horse for me, which I hoped to bring over to England: he was yellowish grey with a huge hog mane; a very well made little beast, but rather young for a long journey, being only six years old: he turned out a very quick walker and ambler, and would have been an acquisition only his hoofs went wrong; he got contraction of said members and I had to bring him lame into Reykjavík, where however he sold for little less than I gave for him, his good qualities being obvious, and his defects I believe healable: his name was Fálki (Falcon) and I confess I regret him. The horses bought, we go in again pending breakfast, but presently Evans going out, comes in again shouting with laugh-

¹About 6 p.m.; we had been three hours full in getting over the river.

ter and says I am wanted: so out I go; and lo, my missing slipper carefully laid on the gate post of the garth, and beside it a little black-bearded carle on his poney, a grey mare, who has found it on the other side of the river, and ridden across to bring it to me: I am deeply grateful and the gift of three marks (about 1s. 2d.) makes him so also, and therewith I retire, escorted by laughter, in to breakfast, which was abundant and good: after that we wander about the stead a little while the horses are being brought up; it was a most beautiful morning with those light gleaming white clouds in the blue sky that make it look so distant; I went into the little grass-garth at the back of the house and watching the fowls scratching about, felt a queer feeling something akin to disappointment of how like the world was all over after all: though indeed when I lifted my eyes the scene before me was strange enough: Ingolf's fell, a great chest-shaped mountain, rose over the lower slopes that bounded the plain many miles to the north. Thorgrimsson pointed out to us a spot on the midst of its ridge which is called the howe of Ingolf the first settler: then further east and a long way off, rose the great cone of Hekla; east of that again, and much nearer, Three-corner, looking like a huge church with a transept; then east yet the hills ran up into the glacier ranges that trended south-east till Eyjafell ended them just over the sea: the whole plain dotted over with steads was quivering with mirage, that ran together and looked like trees at the feet of the hills, or nearer to us like sheets of water: over Ingolf's fell lay, just as if it were painted, a faint rainbow (though the day was so clear and bright) but the distant mountains were astonishingly clear.

We were called to saddle in a few minutes, and so set off, riding over sand sometimes, sometimes hard turf-covered ground, and along the seaside for some time; the beach was edged seaward all the way with toothed rocks and skerries on which the long swell broke and ran up into spires of foam, as calm as it looked out to sea: we were in high spirits indeed this morning, which I think was quite the finest we had in

Sand-
knolls
Ferry

Iceland; we raced where the ground was good enough, and talked and laughed enough for twenty: we stopped and got milk at a queer little stead off the road at one place, and a little after that our path turned somewhat north away from the sea, and we were going over a vast marsh, mostly dry now, but not everywhere, though the road was all good at this time of the year, as the worst places are bridged by causeways: the plain changed little enough for some hours' ride, till we saw some higher ground a little way ahead, and soon came on to Thurso-water, at a place called Sandhólaferja (Sandknolls' Ferry). Here Thurso-water, running a great pace over the flat land, meets a spur of low hills, and is turned south by them at a sharpish angle: we rode over shallow streams of the river and black sand till we came to a firm sand-bank opposite the ferry, which was under a series of tower-like rocks, beneath which the stream ran swift and deep: here we unloaded the horses, while another crank ferry-boat with a rather helpless sail came leisurely across to us: there was no need to tow the horses across here, the river not being wider than the Thames at London Bridge, and there being no wind against the stream to knock up a sea, so we simply drove them in, and they swam in a compact body right across to the landing-place, making a most prodigious snorting and splashing: then we ourselves packed ourselves somehow on the top of our baggage in the boat and came across safely: the river is a white one like Olfusá, and sprawls about among black sand, as most of the white rivers do. We had victuals and a rest under the rocks on the other side, and then rode away up to a farm house on the sand knolls and down thence to a desolate little red-stranded tarn, which we skirted till the road turned off among bogs bridged over by causeways; then we hit another stream at last, and rode right up the bed of it, threading its shallow waters some dozen times in the hour: Rauðalœkr (Red-brook) was the name of it; it was deep sunk between smooth green banks, that hid away from us both the dreary bogs and the distant ice-mountains; it was

getting late in the afternoon by now, but the day still warm and cloudless, and it was soft and pleasant down in the little valley of Red-brook: the green banks gave back sometimes into higher down-like slopes, and on two of these steads were pitched prettily enough: at last the valley took an elbow to the north, just where the banks ran up into a steep smooth-sloped hill that had a big stead with its many gables on the top of it right against the sky: against the sky, too, we saw the haymaking folk standing leaning on their rakes to watch us pass, and one man running back into the house to fetch others out to have a stare: all which was a pretty little play for me: at this place we turned sharp off east from the stream, and mounting somewhat, went over down-like grassy country whence we could again see the mountains, got much closer, the nearer ones of them, Three-corner to wit, and the neck which joins it to the Lithe, called Vatnsdals-fell. At last we go up a long hill on the topmost knoll of which a furlong to our right is the stead of Ægis-siða: Magnússon rides up to it to get us a guide across the ford, and presently we are over the brow of the hill looking down a broad clear river called Western Rang-river. Magnússon joins us with the guide on the river-bank presently, and we get ready to ford the first big river (fordable) we have met, I with some trepidation I must confess, as the Westman-doctor told us that Rang-river was dangerous just now: he was wrong however; the stream, as clear as glass, ran over hard smooth sand, and though it ran strong, and took us up to the girths, and the pack-boxes, to my anxiety, dipped a little into the water, yet there was really no danger at all: this ford was about as wide across as the Thames at Richmond-bridge, and the clear river running between grassy banks seemed quite beautiful to me after the wastes of Thurso and Olfus waters: we go up from the river across more of the down country, and pass a handsome looking stead on our right,¹ cross another river and mount from that on to a bleak boggy piece of ground, where

Western
Rang-
river

¹Selalœkr.

Oddi

Magnússon tells us we are close to Oddi, so we go ahead of the train, and gallop¹ over the last bit of way up to where there lies a low green knoll on the face of the grey upland which is at the back of the houses at Oddi, then turning a corner, we ride in through the lane² between the garth walls and into a little yard in front of a six-gabled house of the regular Icelandic type, turf walls ever so thick, and wooden gables facing the sunny side: these are Stockholm-tarred and have little white framed windows with small panes of glass in them: both walls and roof are just as green as the field they spring from; all doors are very low: I, who am but five foot six, used to bang my head about finely when I first came to Iceland: well, we went in and were welcomed by some woman-kind of Dean Asmundr, who told us the dean would be in presently; the Italian Dapples was here already, and had had his bedroom assigned to him; we sat in a funny little panelled parlour, where they brought us wine and biscuits pending the priest's arrival, who turned up presently, a little hard-bitten, apple-cheeked old man, of a type very common in Iceland: he was extremely hospitable and soon summoned us to dinner, or supper rather, for it was half-past nine by now; we had smoked mutton to eat, smoked salmon, Norway anchovies, Holstein cheese (like Gruyère) and ewe-milk cheese (*islandicé* mysu ostr), queer brown stuff and quite sweet, together with some plovers we had shot which they roasted for us: the dean was very gay, and kept on calling toasts which we drank in Danish brandy, though there was Bordeaux on the table too: altogether I have a keen remembrance of the joys of that dinner. Then the dean asked us into the parlour again and we sat there and wandered out into the

¹ My word, how we split along that evening! we were at the height of our excitement, and the ponies were fresh: I ride the little chestnut at Kelmscott now; how he would be astonished at that pace in these days.

² These lanes with the smooth flowery turf walls are particularly delightful, and give one a sense of comfort and habitation that one needs very much as one comes in from the bleak hill or bog.

home-mead. It was a beautiful evening still, and even the eastern sky we saw behind the great mountains of the Eyjafell range was quite red. Oddi lies on a marked knoll or slope, above a great stretch of boggy land through which Eastern Rang-river winds; the hills under Three-corner, and the long stretch of Fleetlithe gradually leading into the terrible gorges of the ice-mountains, girdle in these grey-green flats. It is a noteworthy place historically, for in fact the men who dwelt here or hereabouts still live in people's minds as the writers of most of the great stories and both the Eddas. I don't know if they actually wrote them; it was a mere guess (or tradition perhaps) of the seventeenth century that Sœmund the Learned collected the poetic Edda: but at any rate these three men, who all lived here at one time or another of their lives, Sœmund, Ari, and Snorri Sturluson, must certainly have been the great guardians of the body of Icelandic lore. Oddi

I walked round the home-field, which sloped gently down toward the marsh; the dew was falling like rain, as it always did after hot days here, and it was getting decidedly cold when I came in at last and went to a comfortable bed made up in the room where we had dined: for I needn't say that we five turned the house upside down with our requirements. That was the end of the day.