

Thursday, August 10th. At Mr. Thorlacius' house at Styk-
kisholm.

WE got away about nine o'clock with Magnússon bad and bilious: we ride our best for some while along the cliffs of yesterday, but they fail presently, and we come into a valley where our way lies through a most awkward bog through which we straggle slowly and as best we may: this passed, we rise again, and ride along steep slopes, till we have the sea on our right, and after two hours' sharp ride from Breiðabólstaðr come to the headland at the mouth of Swanfirth (Alptafjorðr). Here we found that we had missed the ebb after all and that it would be half-flood by then we came to the proper ford, so we had to follow the firth up to its other end: a thing not to be regretted, as we were in one of the most "romantic" places I saw in Iceland: the firth is very narrow; there is no beach to it, but very steep grassy slopes rise up on both sides from the water's edge till at a great height up they are crested with bare rocks of basalt, sometimes jagged into peaks, sometimes as straight as a line, sometimes overhanging the slopes beneath them threateningly. As we lay on the grass waiting to hear about the tide we saw the water below us populous with swans: I counted a hundred and forty; but Mr. Thorlacius told me afterwards that in autumn, when the yearling cygnets are gathering to go away (south?) you may see the water all white with them.

So we go along the side of the steep slope, which must be very high, because when we were on the other side our path looked as if it were close to the sea, whereas when we were on it we seemed about half way between the sea and the bare crags above us: and how steep that hillside was! the very

Round the badger, who has his legs shorter on one side than the other
firth-head in consideration of such places, would have found it steep
enough. But it was a beautiful ride; when you come to the
head of the firth, the hills leave a flat green space, watered by
a winding river between them and the salt water, and then
sweep round in a beautiful curve at the same height as before,
and still crested with bare crags, and so shut in the valley from
the unseen but well-imagined wilderness beyond. We came
down on to the flat meads and crossed the river, and could see
the steads of Ulfarsfell and Karstead, two of the Eyrbyggja
places up the valley, then we rode down the other side of the
firth till we came to Vadil's-head where Arnkel the Priest,
the *good* man of Eyrbyggja, is buried: his house, now waste,
was among the slopes above us: down here also Thorolf
Lamefoot, Arnkel's father, was burned¹ and so partly got
rid of.

Then we rode away over the neck by our due road, for we
should have crossed the sands at the ebb to Vadil's-head, and
so into another valley, in a little hollow of which, sheltered
from the wind, which blows great guns to-day, we changed
horses and ate. We look on to a sea of peaked mountains
from hence, and one coming before the others (Drápuhlí-
ðarfjall) has a naked torn side of stones burnt red and yellow,
and waves of lava running through a cleft of it and down its
side, and stopping suddenly like the edge of a surf out in the
valley.

We got to horse and rode round the skirt of the torn bald
mountain-side, and so into a little valley, three parts filled
up with a tarn, from whence we can see a great flat plain, stop-
ped again by mountains that come down to the sea: this
valley with its steep sides and sudden breach that we rode out
of, was, I suppose, a crater at one time. When we are out of
it we are on the edge of the plain and still skirting the bald
slip: on our right the grey plain ends in the sea; there are
strange indents of water, and a strange hill that we are leav-
ing behind after a bit, and that I seem as if I ought to know,

¹ After he had been dead (and worse so than alive) for some time.

but Magnússon pushes on still; at last Evans who has studied the map deeply, and who really has a topographical head, calls a halt, and we talk over it whether or no we have over-shot our mark: there is a stead quite near us, so Magnússon rides thither, while we lie down in a little valley; he comes back presently to tell us that Evans is right, and points out to us a flat-topped basalt *island* in the plain which is the very Holy Fell standing near the neck of a peninsula where Hwammfirth widens into Broadfirth; so we ride down from the upper ground, and after a stretch of really flat land find our seeming plain to be pretty much the ledged country of yesterday: it is barren and unpromising enough; but the mountains we look back on, toothed and jagged in an indescribable but well-remembered manner, are very noble and solemn. As we rode along the winding path here we saw a strange sight: a huge eagle quite within gunshot of us, and not caring at all for that, flew across and across our path, always followed by a raven that seemed teasing and buffeting him: this was the first eagle I had ever seen free and on the wing, and it was a glorious sight, no less; the curves of his flight, as he swept close by us, with every pen of his wings clear against the sky was something not to be forgotten. Out at sea too we saw a brigantine pitching about in what I thought must be a rough sea enough. The day has been much like yesterday throughout, and is getting clearer now as it wears.

While we were riding through this intricate country, Holyfell has been hidden from us, except for a dip or breach now and then; but all at once, turning a corner of some dyke we come upon it: the front of that dry-land and island grey pillars of rock with green slopes breaking away from them, and in front of it facing east a stead and church. While Magnússon sees about shoeing a horse, and C.J.F. loafs about, Evans and I climb up to the top of the Holy Hill, and look thence over land and sea: as we have been going all along the firth these two days we have not gained much way south as yet: but Broadfirth lies all open before us now, and the

Stykkisholm

peninsula of Stykkisholm indented with little firths is as a map before us. It blew strong and cold up there, though as on yesterday the day is brightening towards its end; so after a long look south down we came again and went into the bonder's parlour. He came in while we were at our coffee, and presently asked us what time it was: we said about half-past four, which by our time was right: said he, "You are witless; it is half-past ten (p.m.); look at my clock then." We did and his clock was five; still however he held by his own opinion for a while and then suddenly agreed with us. I'm afraid he was drunk.

A two hours' ride hence over the same kind of country by a road winding among the little creeks of the peninsula brought us to the edge of the sea where is a trading-station, called Stykkisholm, from a little islet of pillared basalt that standing in the mouth of a bight here makes a little harbour. There are so many houses here that to our unaccustomed eyes it looks quite a town: they are mostly neat wooden ones with trim closes and gardens about them; we ride up to one of the biggest of them where is a sort of a yard, and store-houses, and Magnússon asks for Mr. Thorlacius, a kinsman of his wife's, who lives here: he is out; but while we wait about and unload the horses, a boat comes up to the little pier hard by, and he gets out of it and comes towards us, a tall thin man of some fifty-five years, nervous and gentle-looking like so many men here, especially the better educated ones; he welcomes us kindly and in we go and into his parlour, a pretty room enough, looking on to the yard and harbour. We talked and looked at books, sometimes with, sometimes without our host, who I found knew English though he wouldn't talk it: for he grinned sympathetically while I was haggling out a translation from an Eyrbyggja saga of the Wonders at Frodá to C.J.F. Dinner, or supper, seemed a long while coming meantime, but at last we were taken into a much prettier room opposite the first one, in which roses in blossom grew up with ivy over one end, and there, cages with birds in them hanging from the joists, along with guns

and a net, and small gear of boats: it was all quite neat too, Stykkisholm
and there was a view out of the window of those grand mountains, looking almost as if you could touch them in the clear bright evening. Also a *very* good supper was there, "and I, I was there" with my appetite of—well say eight hours' standing; a certain small delicate rock-cod quite copper-colour caught in the harbour here I may perhaps be allowed to mention.

So after long talk to bed, I in a little room leading out of the first sitting-room and over-looking the harbour, Evans and Magnússon going to another house.