

Monday, August 14. In the church at Ingjaldshóll.

**W**E got up to a most lovely morning, still, sunny, and warm, so that I can shake off the last remains of the depression that fell upon me in the North. We rode over the sands first from Skerðingstaðir, having with us a new horse that we bought last night; he looked so fat and sleek after our journey-worn nags that we called him Butter-tubs, which the guides took up at once and translated into "Stampa." We jogged on in high excitement (for Búlandshöfði was just before us, you will remember), and soon mounted from the sands on to a sort of low under-cliff, which kept rising till it too was high above the sea, but still with a high cliff landward off it, leaving some furlongs' space of smooth sward betwixt; these cliffs are quite full of gulls, especially in one place where they ran up into a peaked ridge: there are heaps of broken land at the cliff's foot, and huge boulders lie scattered about the gentle slope we ride on, some all grass-grown, some with their edges sharp and black as though last winter had brought them down.

Our path holds ever nearer to the edge of the sea cliffs, & the other cliffs draw ever closer in on us till at last we are at the end of the soft green slope, and there is nothing for our road but to pass over a rugged, steep mass of broken cliff that goes down sharp to the sheer rocks above the sea: this is Búlandshöfði, a headland that is thrust out by the tumbling mountains that fill all the inside of this peninsula; the steep slopes of this slip are all in grooves, as it were, in and out of which the path must wind, and above them rises a steep crest of this shape so common in Icelandic hills. We rode before the train as it was necessary to drive the horses, the laden ones at least, with some care, & we had gotten a man from the



last stead to help us in it; they are to drive the horses over in divisions of about five, tying them together nose and tail.<sup>1</sup> As for me, there I was presently on the dreaded pass, about which I confess I had been feeling serious these two days, and if you must know the truth, had pretty much made up my mind for the worst. After all I had discounted my fear, and was quit for a beating of the heart, not unpleasant, and a little trembling about the knees. Indeed, the path was narrow enough, but quite sound for some way; below us the hillside was not sheer, but so steep as not to be much short of it. It was broken rock, turf, ling, and here and there a little brush of birch-scrub, till you came to the brow of the unseen cliff, and there lay the sea below, bright green and dark blue at first, with a little white fringe here and there round a skerry, but softening off to light grey-blue farther out till it met the sunny haze of the horizon; the sky was cloudless except for some faint white lines high up, and there was no sail to be seen on the sea, and no wave breaking. I couldn't help feeling rather *light* on my horse every now and then, especially when, as I neared one of the *grooves* in the hillside, Magnússon, who rode before me, looked for all the world as if he were riding straight off into the sea, nor do I quite remember how I got round the corners myself. So we rode on a while, till turning round one of these places, we had before us a much steeper slope where the slip is recent and bare, a great heap of loose shale and stones; and certainly when one first came on it, it seemed hard to think how we were to get across. Magnússon bade me dismount here, which I did rather anxiously, tying the reins loosely on Mouse's neck, and then leaving him to come over as he liked best; Magnússon and C.J.F. also dismounted, but Evans rode across; I had, as was before arranged, Magnússon before me and C.J.F. after me; but after all I did not want any help, for when I got on the path, I found the foothold good on the loose stones though the

<sup>1</sup>There was talk of doing this, but I prevented it; an accident happening to one of the ponies so tied together might drag the whole train over the precipice. E.M.

Bulands-  
höfði

path was only about a foot broad; also the very steepness of the hillside above was a help, as I could steady myself against it with my left hand; so that altogether I didn't find this part, which is reckoned the dangerous part, so frightful as the smooth road. C.J.F. didn't improve my nerves though by kicking a loose stone or two over the path for the pleasure of seeing it shoot down the steep and over the cliff; about three parts over, Magnússon called out to us to look down below, where was a seal eating a salmon; and sure enough we saw the black head down in the green sea, dubbing away at a big fish.

The way got broader after about a hundred yards of this, and we were round the furthest head of the ness, and soon the slopes spread out and got flatter towards a wide shallow valley that the hills sweep round as at Grundarfirth, the furthest horn of them dropping down toward the sea, and ending in a kind of breakwater of low black rocks in the very sea; this valley seems only a bight in a bigger bay, the further side of which we can see beyond, its outermost horn ending in a huge pile of rocks; just below us on our right the land fell quickly toward the sea, and it too was broken at last into a row of sea-washed skerries.

A little further, and we lay down on the grassy slopes in great comfort, I for my part well contented that the danger was little or nothing, if a little ashamed that my imagination had made much of it, C.J.F. rather disappointed, I think, and Evans scornful of the whole affair: by which you may see, I suppose, that I ought not to have spoken of it as a perilous pass at all. It was pretty to look up and see from where we lay, the horses coming one by one over the steep brow of the headland, the loose ones grazing about anywhere where the hill became a little less steep, in the most unconcerned way.

So we rode down into the valley, which is quite flat for the most part, a mere sea-beach really, with scanty grass over it, and shallow pools one-third covering it, with plenteous sea-birds on them; but just underneath the mountains is a long

hog-backed ridge on which are two steads, the northern of which is Máfahlíð (Mewlithe) which plays a great part in the earlier half of Eyrbyggja; over a lower piece of the mountains one can just see the top of the double snowy peak of Snæfell. So, splashing through the pools of the flat, we came into a little valley over a neck, whence more of Snæfell shows far away and sharp, but looking small and near from the very clear air to-day, and from its own bright snow. Fróðá

Then over another neck we came into another valley something like the last, but with its surrounding hills cleft by a great gully from which runs a small river, that scatters over the plain and loses itself in a shallow backwater, divided from the sea, with which it is parallel, by a bank of stones and sand: the head of the valley, instead of the long ridge in the last one, has many small mounds scarped on the seaward side, and looking [like] pieces of some ridges that once ran at right-angles to the big hills: many of these have some sort of a stead upon them: we ride up to one of the innermost of these (while the train goes steadily along the bank of the backwater, the chord of the arc) and find a church standing in its churchyard hanging on the seaward side of the mound, but the stead, which is turned sideways of the mountains, is half ruined and deserted. This is the stead of Fróðá haunted once by those awful ghosts of the pest-slain and the drowned in Eyrbyggja: a little past the house we come on the river aforesaid, Fróðá (Frodi's-river): it runs between two ledges of rock like walls built to hold it in, but breached here and there; it is strange and awful to look up this channel filled with the rattling stream, and see the black rent in the mountains that it runs from. We cross the river and ride along at our best under the bounding cliffs to meet the train, and so come into a quite flat reach of land overgrown with rather scanty grass that lies between the cliffs and their broken pieces and the backwater. We halt when we come up to the train halted near the sea, the packs are taken off, and we settle down for a long rest, for we have heard that we shall not be able to cross the sands of Olafsvík Enni (the next bay) till eight o'clock, when the

## Olafsvík

tide will have been ebbing some while, and it is now only three; so Magnússon went to shoe a horse while the rest of us loitered about well pleased. We were on the banks of a little brook that ran down to the sea, and C. J. F. and I bathed in a little clear pool of it, and were in no great hurry to get our clothes on; whereby you may see that it must have been warm that day. Then we fell to meat hungrily enough: after which Magnússon proposed whist to which I agreed though I didn't want it. As we were playing a man galloped up who addressed himself to Magnússon, and said he hoped we were going to stay at Olafsvík; Magnússon returned his salutation in the shortest possible way and said no in that sort of tone that implies the addition of damn your eyes, and the man rode away again presently. I, who thought he had been very civil and very ill-used, asked Magnússon what he meant by it; who said that it was what the man was just worthy of: he was Jón Englendingr, the clerk of the Olafsvík merchant. After talk about his misdeeds,<sup>1</sup> we found our time running short: I wandered down to the beach just where the backwater joined the sea, and finding the fish rising there went back and told Evans, having a mind for sea-trout: he got two pretty good ones in a few minutes, and then we had to get to horse, and rode over the rough ground of the necks always somewhat near the sea into Olafsvík; in the last scoop before we came into that valley we crossed a strange stream, running between regular walls of rock over a bottom of flat slabs as if it had been paved, and falling after a straight course of a furlong below us right into the sea, its mouth some two feet above high-water-mark.

So we came into Olafsvík—just a narrow strip of land below high cliffs which run up into a peak at the further horn, and the strand of a wide deep bay, amidst which lay a small schooner, which no doubt was dealing with the merchant station. To this latter, a wooden house on the beach, we rode, and to my dismay were received there, and very politely too, by the very man whom Magnússon had snubbed

<sup>1</sup>He was only a bore, but one of a very marked type. E.M.

just now, for the merchant<sup>1</sup> was ill abed with rheumatic fever: **The Sands** moreover we found we should have to wait there a bit for we were still an hour too early for the tide. As we went into the house a very drunken man tried to push in with us, but Jón shouldered him out, and he avenged himself afterwards by taking up handfuls of small stones and throwing them up against the windows: but he waited till we were all sitting quietly in the parlour.

Outside too was a funny little white-haired boy with his little breeches buttoned down behind like in Richter's cuts; he was hugging the most ridiculous of cur-puppies, so Magnússon chaffed him and said we would eat his puppy and the like, whereon he ran away and shut himself up in an outhouse: but when his Mama came in with coffee and cakes he came in with her, but beholding our ferocious faces, shot underneath the table with a yell, and sat there nursing his beloved puppy till our visit was over.

Coffee done, we went into the store, whereby it seemed that the ship in the bay had taken and not brought, for the lack of all things was plenteous: candles we asked for, gloves, socks, plates, cups; to all of which askings a most cheerful and happy man said "no." Finally we bought some few horse-shoes and I a sixpenny knife (for I had lost three); there seemed to be nothing else there except two barrels of brandy, a cask of sugar-candy, a cask of biscuits, and various boxes of "Damp-Chocolate," whatever chocolate that may be.

And now for the sands to the gallop over which I had been looking forward to this hour: we rode through the little green tún of the stead, and there we were on them—ugh! the smallest grain of these sands was as big as the bowl of a wine-glass and the biggest was a huge boulder as big as a big four-post bed: as big as an arm-chair was a favourite size. Over these precious sands we toiled most painfully, principally on foot, I for my part not finding it easy even to lead my horse after me. Magnússon and I were ahead of the train, but C. J. F.

<sup>1</sup>Torfi Thorgrimsen. E.M.

who was with it, told me afterwards that Eyvindr got quite a bad fall, his horse and all tumbling head over heels into a crevice among the rocks, and all their legs being up in the air together. There were steep high cliffs above us made of earth and boulders mixed together; they were undermined with strange-looking cliffs, and at a regular height all along them water gushed out, running so plenteously sometimes as to make little waterfalls on to the beach. Magnússon was kind enough to tell me (halfway) that this beach was looked upon as a dangerous place because of the stones falling continually from these cliffs. At last however we found the cliffs drawing away from the sea and us, and after about an hour's ride or walk came on to smooth black sand over which we really had a gallop for a few rods, and then turned away from the sea on to a sandy plain that the cliff wall still bounds, going nearly at right-angles to its former course. It is getting quite dusk now, the west before us is orange still with a cloudless sunset, but the sky behind us at the back of the rock-wall is dark with night and haze, and the cliffs themselves are almost like a darker shadow upon it: I noticed this as we rode away along the plain, and then, turning presently, saw it all darker still from the wearing of the evening and my having been staring at the bright west, but above the shadowy cliffs showed now two sharp white peaks, so much brighter than the sky, so much nearer-looking than anything else, that I started almost with terror as if the world was changed suddenly; but it [was] nothing else [than] the top of Snæfell again. As we rise higher, from the plain on to the slopes of a broken land, we see Snæfell clearer yet, but with the magic of it somewhat gone. Ahead now we can see a round hill with buildings on it, which are of the stead of Ingialdshóll, our lodging to-night, and we make towards it with good will enough. A waterfall tumbling over a rocky ledge was what I remember best seeing through the dusk a good way off, as I rode by myself driving a knot of horses while Eyvindr and Gisli were kept behind tying up our refractory bundle-burden to the one-pegged pack-saddle our old enemy, and the other three rode

on ahead: at last I saw their three outlines clear against the sky; Gisli and Eyvindr ran in on me with the rest of the train, and we all drove together up a steepish hillside on the top of which lay a comfortable-looking stead and a church bigger than usual, which was Ingialdshóll, the scene of the (fictitious) Víglundar Saga. The folk were abed when we came, but they all tumbled out in the greatest good temper when we knocked them up: then as the night was now well on, and gotten windy too, we asked leave to sleep in the church, in which all things were soon arranged while I sat by the kitchen fire to make cocoa and milk hot, all the household assisting: lo and behold in the middle of all this comes in the much maligned Jón Englendingr from Olafsvík, who has ridden after us to bring Evans a pair of gloves (as a present) to whom Magnússon was still obdurate.

So to bed on the tombstones of Icelanders dead a hundred and fifty years, within the screen much and prettily carved: the stones were hard, and there was a goodish draught through the church floor, but all that made little difference to me five minutes after I had settled my blankets.