

Tuesday, August 22nd. In the priest's house at Gilsbank (Gilsbakki).

BUT waking this morning it occurred to me that something amusing had happened, without remembering what it was at first, till at last it smote upon me and I fell a-roaring with laughter, as did C. J. F. no less and no later; so small a joke moving our little minds in those waste places—owing to the fresh air, I suppose.

Evans elected to stay here and nurse his cold this day, and meet us to-morrow at Reykholt, so we left him in very comfortable quarters with two or three Icelandic phrases for his help. Eyvindr and the greater part of the train stayed with him, and we went our ways with Gisli and the rest: the dean and his son led us on our way.

Just past the house they offered to show me a seam of coal that lay, they said, in the cliff-side above Northwater; but I in my hatred of coal was incurious and refused; I was rather sorry afterwards, for I heard that it was not coal but *Surtrbrandar*,¹ a sort of fossil wood that lies in certain places in Iceland (mostly in these same parts) quite unchanged in form amid layers of leaves, poplar, birch and alder.

The mountains over against Borg look from here, as we have turned round them somewhat, more still like a half-ruined crater of monstrous size.

We rode up the course of White-water, though not very near it, through that same ledged country, till after crossing Thwart-water (*Thverá*) the ledges grow bigger and run into long low hills, and on our left make *Thverá-lithe*, the chief scene of *Hen Thorir's* saga, which is a narrow [valley] shut in between the low hills: another range, bigger and higher

¹ *Surtr* is the God of fire (soot, *cocknice*, *sutt*). [*Surt* means *Swart*; he was a demon, not the god of fire. E.M.]

Gilsbank

and going right up to the Jokuls, is the north-west bank of White-water, whose south-east is the continuation of the mountains opposite Borg fallen into downs by now: a long way up the north-west bank (which is called White-water-side) is Gilsbank whither we are bound: some ten miles east of it at the very head of the valley lies Kalmanstunga, where we stayed some three weeks before though it now seems such a long time ago. We turn up into the valley presently and then the Stafholt folk leave us, and we jog on soberly by ourselves: the valley soon narrows so much as to bring our road within sight of White-water, and we are fairly riding along White-water-side. A monotonous and dreary valley it seemed to me that day, with its endless slopes of thin grass, dotted about however with steads here and there, and the lower part of all filled with banks of stones brought down by the rage of the river, and with the great white dome of Geitland's Jokul filling the valley at the further end. The wind blows strong and cold from the ice to-day too, and no winding of the valley seems to stop it: but the sun shines, and we were not unmerry when we stopped to eat our bait under a bank as much out of the wind as might be, which was not much. The valley bettered as we drew toward its closed end: the rubbish of stones ended, and we rode through green flat ground for a while near the river side, till before us rise the spikes and cliffs of an old lava all grown about with birch and deep rich grass, which birch turns out presently, as we ride along a clear stream that skirts the lava, to be the best wood we have seen yet. The hill side on our left is near us too, a great bold down here, which presently we see cleft by a deep ravine, through which runs the stream aforesaid; this ravine is the "Gil" from which the stead of Gilsbank once the house of Illugi the Black, father of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue is named. We turn aside to it, and ride up a bare bleak hill to a poorish house built high up the hillside, with the evening clear, but cold and even frosty. So cold that we found it hard work keeping warm even in the priest's little parlour.

It was not a very cheerful evening, for Magnússon had **Gilsbank** heard bad news again about the fever at Reykjavík and was naturally anxious, and I am afraid his long face infected me also. The old priest was at all events most kind and hospitable to us, and so at last to bed we went, Magnússon in the bed, C.J.F. and I on the floor in our blankets.