

Thursday, August 3rd. In Dr Skaptason's house at Hnausar.


UP rather earlier on a cold grey morning, but not rainy as yet. I must say I should not have objected to another day's idling but on we must: so got away about 10 a.m. the bonder's son going with us to show us the way and to point out the historical steads: I bought two old silver spoons at starting from the kind old goody. Young Thorstein, the son, was a bright eager fellow & very well mounted, and the whole stead looked well-doing. We were all in very good spirits as we rode off down the valley, a great flat space between two high steep mountain-ridges with no break in them, and a clear river winding down it toward the sea, with only a little surrounding of shingle, in some places none at all, for there are no glaciers in this part of the North. The valley is not clear and smooth however, for knolls rise up in it that in some places run up into spurs that join the lower slopes of the mountain wall. The hero and "landnáms-man" of the vale is Ingimund the Old¹ and most of the steads Thorstein shows us have reference to him; at the first we come to Ás [where] lived Hrolleifr, the rascal he protected, and who slew him; it lies under two little knolls with a pretty tún

¹Vatzdæla Saga, *Origines Islandicae*, 275 et seq. Ed.

about it; under the turf wall of which grow great banks of wild hearts-ease for as cold as the weather is; we cross the river after this, and come upon a shut-in nook among the knolls, the second dwelling-place of Hrolleifr¹ and the witch Liot his mother: just before this Thorstein points out a sandy spit running into the river which is the traditional place of the deadly wounding of Ingimund: past the aforesaid shut-in nook we turn round a corner and come upon Ingimund's own stead lying on a wide slope of green. As Thorstein leads us up the road toward the stead he shows us how it is raised above the meadow instead of being sunk below it as is usual, and infers from that the antiquity of the stead; higher up than the house a low knoll rises from the slope, and this he calls the site of Ingimund's temple which names the whole stead (Hof). Thence we ride on along the slopes till we come to where a great buttress of bare basalt cliff thrusts forward from the mountain wall: on the slopes beneath this lies a handsome stead called Hvammr, where we make a call, and have the inevitable coffee and brandy: and then depart into the rain which has just come on again but not heavily: the call at Hof and Hvammr has taken us up very close to the mountains, we now ride down a little way nearer to the river, and see many steads on the other side; for the valley is populous and prosperous as indeed it always has been: tradition says too that it was once so well wooded, that standing in the middle you couldn't see the hillsides for the trees: we saw no wood at all here though there are some patches marked in the map on the west side. A little past Hvammr Thorstein brings us to a place where there is a sudden deep little dell quite round like an inverted cone sunk in the slope-side, and tell us that hereby fairs like our "mops" used to be held, and that the lads and lasses used to dance in this dell at these fairs: Midsummer-night I think being the time: the grass grows sweet and deep down it, and it looks a pleasant place enough to get out of the wind to en-

Through
Water-
dale

¹Apparently traditional, as, by the Saga, the couple only dwelt at As and were slain there by the sons of Ingimund. E.M.

joy oneself in. Now the buttresses have all sunk back into the great hills the crests of which rise higher as we get nearer the sea: down in the valley is a lake said to be made by a great slip from the hills, as I suppose it was, for little sand-knolls dot its shores: there is a traditional tale about this slip of a raven drawing the girl who used to feed him away from the danger one Sunday morning: it is told in Magnússon's book.¹ We go down into the valley a little more now, and presently come to a big fine-looking tún with a gate to it of some pretensions in Icelandic architecture, so—

 and Thorstein tells us it is Dr Skaptason's and accordingly riding out of it we are presently in front of the house, a smart newbuilt one; he is at the door in a twinkling and seems very glad to see us and all is arranged for our stay that night. I suppose it was about half past three by now, as our ride had been but a short one. The rain cleared off somewhat now, so I went out to see to my gun and look about me: there is a little tarn in the mead at the back of the house, from the shore of which the first slopes of the hills arise: I stood looking at the hills and wondering at how much bigger they look here than I thought at first they were: our horses, now feeding on a green slope, some third of the way up seem little bits of specks: a long way above them the sheep feed on the slopes of the steps that make the mountain, and its crest is all hidden in white clouds, those very clouds we came through the other day from Búðará: below the clouds is a goodish sprinkling of snow all along the eastern hill-sides of the valley. The air was quite full of sea-swallows sweeping about: I stood and watched them some while, and thought the whole place beautiful in spite of the ungenial day: then too we were come close to the northern sea, and to our turning point: all away from this was south and home again. I had seen to my gun (my brother's) which was rather a heavy charge all through the journey, wanting as much attention as a baby with croup; and then I wandered about the front of the house and played with a month-old tame fox cub, not so

¹ Legends of Iceland. Ed.

very tame either; a pretty little beast he was and really Hnausar
“blue.” The parlour of the house was smart here, and had a
stove in it (I wished it had been lighted that afternoon): our
bedroom was a queer little room in the old part of the house
with a six foot turf wall and four bunk-beds in it. I may men-
tion here that a legend sprang up about this bedroom, to wit
that C. J. F. was found in it when we were just come, having
his boots and breeches pulled off by a female Icelander, after
their ancient custom, he being resigned, owing to want of
knowledge of the tongue: take said legend for what it may
be worth.

After a little talk with the Doctor about the new Icelandic-
Norwegian company to which he belongs, dinner is brought
in to which we sit down without waiting for Evans, who is
gone out shooting, and who almost *never* is in time for vic-
tuals: in this case I thought it rather bad manners, but the
host didn't seem to care a bit and we had a very pleasant
dinner of the best Icelandic fashion: at the end of which came
in Evans empty handed to claim his share. Then we had tea,
then whist, and grog, and so to bed merry enough.