

Wednesday, August 9th. In the priest's house at Breiðabólstaðr on Skógar-strand.

DOWN in the tún below the house here is a round wall marked, which was once Olaf Peacock's temple; as I ought to have noticed before. We were on our journey again to-day, starting under the priest's guidance about eleven o'clock; we crossed the valley, and came first (over most beastly bogs) to a stead called Hornstaðir, where we

¹ "and is elf-haunted," the note-book says. Ed.

bought a silver quaigh from the bonder; then go on to Hauskuldstead, where they show us the site of the great hall in which Hauskuld (says Laxdaela) feasted eleven hundred men at his house-warming. Thence we turn up on the mountain-neck, and so over it into Hawkdale; a flat marshy plain with mountains round three sides of it, and Hwammfirth on the other side: just on the northern side of it is a slope going down to the water, which is the site of the house of Hrut, Hauskuld's half-brother. Then we go to a stead in the flat lands near the water called Lækjarskógr, for the priest is to leave us here, and we want a guide across the sands of this corner of Hwammfirth, which we are going to cross at low-water. So the bonder comes with us and we are off again, and are soon off the marshes on to the sea-beach, which is not bad riding here: it is a windy day, and the mountains on the north side of the firth are bright with the sun; but it is grey overhead, and the mountains on the south are hidden by low clouds: I was in good trim and spirits, and enjoyed hugely this clatter over the beach, with the waves breaking at our very feet; all the more as the whole train was together, which latterly had not been so much the case.

On the
sea-beach

To the north-west now we can see under a light strip of sky the faint outline of the mountains on the further shore of Broadfirth, and nearer the countless islands and skerries that stretch all across the mouth of Hwammfirth, so that you cannot see the water between them.

After a while we turn away from the beach to a place called Gunnar-stáðr, the house (I think) of Gunnar Hlifarson of the Hen Thorir's Saga. It stands a little way off the beach under a semicircle of low scarped cliffs, a sort of island on dry land, very strange to see. We bait here and go into the parlour, where we have some chaffer for old silver with the goodwife, in the middle of which the bonder comes in cursing and swearing because our horses are in his mowing-grass, which they are not: however, it turns out that he is drunk, and his anger soon turns into smiling friendliness, and I think he even wanted to kiss some of us, as he led us out of his tún.

We go down to the sea again, and ride along it for a little way, under strange gleams of a cold sun, but after a mile and a half or so, turn inland again; a little way from the beach I picked a horned poppy (yellow), the first flower of that kind I have seen in Iceland. We come now into a different and odd kind of country: barren ragged land, low ledges of rock like unfinished walls rising from scanty grass and bogs. We keep on mounting these walls or turning them over low slopes; now and then we dropped into gullies made by streams among them, which are walled in on either side by steep walls of rock, the grass growing long and sweet on the little flat banks by the water's edge: one such I remember particularly, where the stream fell into the gorge over a wall of rock, that having got it in, swept round it and its bright green little meadow till you couldn't see how it got out again; another time a sudden ledge of rock seemed to cut the open stream we were riding by clean off. Now and then these ragged walls broke away so that we could see the firth on our north, or steads up the country on our south, but the distant mountains on that side were clouded over. Nevertheless the sun shone bright as it grew toward setting, and we were drawing out of this strange country, going a good pace over a wide sandy road, after having had a great deal of trouble in driving our horses, who had turned off for the last hour or two at every bit of green that came in sight: they tried it twice in one place, where a long green valley went down toward the firth.

But this broad sandy way we are on now runs at the feet of high wave-like cliffs that sweep out of a wide sloping plain that lies between us and the sea and is all covered with birch-scrub, and is (I suppose) the Woodstrand (Skógarströnd) of the Eyrbyggja Saga. Under these cliffs we rode for some hour and a half till we began to turn round them and at last saw before us where a valley of grass cleft them, at our end of which lay a little church and a brand-new pleasant-looking house, the parsonage of Breiðabolstaðr, and our supper and bed; we were there presently, and found the priest away at the Althing (in Reykjavik), but his wife received us kindly, and we were

soon in bed, as we were to get up early so as to cross the sands of Swanfirth at the ebb to-morrow; the house was pleasant and comfortable inside, with its queer little lofts and ladders, all quite clean from being new; and I thought as I lay abed what an agreeable day's ride I had had more than on most days, though I scarcely knew why.