CHAPTER II. FROM REYKJAVIK TO BERG­
THORSKNOLL AND LITHEND.
Monday, July 17th. In camp at Bolavellir.

We woke to a drizzly unpromising-looking morn­
ing, but our guides came early to us and we were to start if possible: they (the guides) are Eyvindr and Gisli: the first a queer ugly-looking fellow, long, with black eyes and straight black hair, and as swart as a gipsy; the second short, merry-looking, with light hair and blue eyes, the most good-tempered of fellows as he afterwards turned out—and also one of the laziest: we made a call of ceremony on the Governor as soon as we could: he was very civil to us and talked French: I was not glib in replying in that tongue, as the Icelandic got mixed up with it. Then we went back to the packing; during which Faulkner went and collared the smith to try to make the lock work: many a time the smith looked up cheerfully and said it was all right now: many a time Faulkner tried it, found it all wrong, and so sat down with that look of reprobation past words which I myself have winced under before now: however at eleven or so the guides brought up the pack-horses, and began to load them,
lock or no lock: they were very handy over this job and amused me vastly: we had intended starting at noon, and the weather had quite cleared up by now; but it was obviously quite impossible, and the time went on very fast; till at last when I had got on my breeches and boots, and was trying in vain not to swagger in them, it was three o'clock and dinner time. Finally the riding-horses were brought up to the door, the pack-horses were driven out into the road, Magnusson strapped on my mackintosh to my saddle-bow for me, and I tied on my tin pannikin and mounted my little beast, & we all scrambled off somehow, following the lead of the rather irregular pack train, the horses not yet being used to go together; Magnusson's wife and sister-in-law, and their brother-in-law, Helgi Helgason a schoolmaster here, and a young lady friend mounted also to see us on our way, and there we were off at last; I looking about the street over the queer light-coloured mane of my little poney with great contentment. From the high ground above the town we could see the bay now, and the "Diana" lying there still, and her sister vessel the "Fylla," which is still in the service, steaming up the bay even as we look: we are up to the pack-horses here, and they are well together now and going a good round trot, we after them. I find my poney charming riding and am in the best of spirits: certainly it was a time to be remembered; the clatter of paces and box-lids, the rattle of the hoofs over the stones, the guides crying out and cracking their whips, and we all with our faces turned towards the mountain-wall under which we were to sleep to-night. Always though, throughout the whole journey, the start, whenever we made it (to-day it was a quarter to five in the evening) was a fresh pleasure to me, yet certainly never quite as exciting as this. Most strange and awful the country looked to me we passed through, in spite of all my anticipations: a doleful land at first with its great rubbish heaps of sand, striped scantily with grass sometimes; varied though by a bank of sweet grass here and there full of flowers, and little willowy grey-leaved

1 "The most noteworthy being a large purple cranesbill." Note book. Ed.
plants I can't name: till at last we come to our first river that runs through a soft grassy plain into a bight of the firth; it is wonderfully clear and its flowery green lips seemed quite beautiful to me in the sunny evening, though I think at any time I should have liked the place, with the grass and sea and river all meeting, and the great black mountain (Esja) on the other side of the firth. On thence to the place where the roads branch, one going north to Thingvellir, and one (ours) east toward the Landeyjar: a little beyond this we come to a stead named Holmr; it is the first real Icelandic stead I have seen near: our Icelandic friends tell us it is a poor stead, but it pleased me in my excitement, with its grey wooden gables facing south, its turf walls, and sloping bright green home-field with its smooth turf wall: there the bonder and his folk were haymaking, or rather standing rake in hand to stare at us, and the guides went up to them to buy fire-wood for our camp this evening. Meantime we got off our horses, and sat down in a pretty grassy hollow, and the Icelanders brought out champagne and glasses to drink the stirrup-cup, for they were going back here: so in half an hour's time we said good-bye for six weeks, and they mounted and turned back west, and we rode away east into a barren plain, where the road had vanished into the scantiest of tracks, and which was on the edge of the lava: soon we came on to the lava itself, grown over here with thick soft moss, grey like hoar-frost: this ended suddenly in a deep gully, on the other side of which all was changed as if by magic, for we were on a plain of short flowery grass as smooth as a lawn, a steep green bank bordering it all round, which on the south ran up into higher green slopes, and these into a great black rocky mountain: we rode on over the east side of the bank, and then again a change: a waste of loose large-grained black sand without a blade of grass on it, that changed in its turn into a grass plain again but not smooth this time; all ridged and thrown up

\[1\] A few miles further back I had seen the wooden gables of one a goodish way off, and took them for tents as they showed among the dark grey slopes.

Bolavellir into hummocks as so much of the grass land in Iceland is, I don’t know why: this got worse and worse till at last it grew boggy as it got near another spur of the lava-field, and then we were off it on to the naked lava, which was here like the cooled eddies of a molten stream: it was dreadful riding to me unused, but still as I stumbled along, as nervous as might be, I saw the guides galloping about over it as they drove the train along, with hard work, at a smart trot: for me, I didn’t understand it at all, and hung behind a good way in company of Faulkner: but we were getting near our camping ground now, and the peaked mountain-wall lay before us, falling back into a flat curve just above our resting place: streams of lava tumbled down the mountain-sides here and there; notably on one to our north, Hengill by name; on whose flank its tossed-up waves looked most strangely like a great town in the twilight we were riding through now. Well, Faulkner and I pushed on as well as we could, and at last saw the lava end in the first green slopes of the hill-spurs, where Magnússon stood by his horse waiting for us; we rode gladly enough on to the grass, and, turning a little, cantered along the slope and down into a plain that lay in the bight under the hills, in the middle of which I saw the train come to a stand: so riding through a moss at the slope’s end we came into a soft grassy meadow bordered by a little clear stream and jumped off our horses after a ride of six hours and a half. It was a cold night though clear and fine, and we fell hard to work to unpack the tents and pitch them while the guides unburden the horses, who were soon rolling about in every direction, and then set to work diligently to feed: the tents being pitched, Magnússon and Faulkner set to work to light the fire, while Evans and I went about looking for game, about the hill-spurs and the borders of a little tarn between the lava and our camp: it was light enough to see to read; wonderfully clear but not like daylight for there were no shadows at all: I turned back often from the slopes to look down on the little camp and the grey smoke that now began to rise up, and felt an excite-
ment and pleasure not easy to express: till I had to get to my Bolavellir shooting which I didn’t like at all; however I shot two golden plovers and came back to camp with them, where I found Faulkner rather dejected over his fire, which was sulky: but we soon got it into a blaze, boiled our kettle and made some tea, for we had brought some cold mutton from Reykjavik and did not want any other cooking: so we eat our supper, and then heated more water for grog while the guides lay about watching us, till they having a dram from us went off to a little hut of refuge near the tarn-side, and we wriggled into our blankets and so ended our first day of travel.