

Monday, July 24th. In the priest's (Sira Guðmundr Jónson's) house at Stóruvellir.

**T**HE morning breaks better than we had expected, though it is still raining fitfully: Evans and I are rather late up, and Magnússon, coming to us from the house presently, is rather lowering about Faulkner, who he says certainly can't go on to-day: so after breakfast (of chocolate, Bologna sausage and biscuit) we go into the house, and talk it over with Faulkner comfortably in bed: he is not at all low in spirits himself, says he don't feel ill, and is in no pain when he keeps quiet, so he probably will be all right after a rest: all things considered, therefore, we settle that Evans and I are to go on to Stóruvellir this evening, push on on Tuesday for the Geysirs, and wait there till Thursday, when, if Faulkner can't come, we are to have a message from him: Magnússon is to stay and dry-nurse him the while; in any case we couldn't move just yet, for the boy who was to watch our horses nodded in the night, and five of them are missing, Eyvindr and a man from the stead having gone after them.

The sheriff has gone off to a place about three miles hence, called Stórólfsvellir, to preside at a horse-fair, and Magnússon suggests we shall ride there, and so it is done: reaching a space where a knoll or two rises out of the plain under a shoulder of some low downs, we find a crowd of horses, men and women, gathered together, amongst them two Scotchmen who are buying horses: it is a simple and very dull affair as far as the buying and selling goes; the goodman or goodwife brings the horse up to the sheriff and the Scotchman names his price, and if the buyer says nay, goes off without a word: if he accepts, the money comes out of the Scotchman's bag and goes into the sheriff's (which is a glove,<sup>1</sup> by the way),

<sup>1</sup>A thumb-glove, understand.

the bonder's name is taken down, and the horse is driven into a pound: there is no higgling and no excitement: so naturally we soon get tired of the fun and ride off: we met our host of Bergthorsknoll here, smiling and pleased as ever; the ponies were all quite young, nice-looking little beasts,<sup>1</sup> but nothing particular, the price, about £2 10s., not being high. We found Faulkner sitting up in the parlour and quite merry when we came back; Eyvindr has come back with two of the missing horses, the three others not to be found yet: however, we decamp and get ready for going, and the good wife gets something ready for us to eat; meanwhile, who is this comes riding up the lane? a little black-haired bright-eyed woman riding astride one horse and leading two others, our runaways indeed: she has ridden thirty miles to bring them in for us, and we are proportionally grateful. Dinner of salmon-trout and potatoes and sweet soup after this, in which Faulkner plays a very respectable part, and the two halves of the expedition part, we leaving a sufficiency of horses of course, my own little red among them as the softest paced of the whole train.<sup>2</sup> It was seven o'clock and quite a fine bright evening when we started: the stead was a pleasant place if it hadn't been for the worry of wanting to get away, standing at the end of a long lane between the two halves of the home-mead at the foot of the hills which run up rather high and steep further to the north. Eastern Rang-river runs about three miles from it and a clear stream Fiská joins it: we rode down into the bed of Rang-river and crossed it, and so on through a not remarkable country to Keldur (the Springs—

<sup>1</sup>“They are bought principally for work in the coal mines: it seems rather too hard a fate for the spirited courageous little beasts,” says the notebook. Ed.

<sup>2</sup>The fifth horse we never saw again by the way: he was an old white pack-horse and was dead lame when we started from Reykjavik: he made off it seems to the stead he came from and reached it safely: it was near the Geysirs and about fifty miles off, with some half-dozen of the biggest rivers in Iceland to be crossed between it and Vollr.

**Knafa  
Knolls**

remember Ingiald of the Springs in Njala), there our guides are at fault, and riding home to the stead, fetch out the bonder, a very queer, stuffy old carle, who proposes to ride with us to Stóruvellir: Keldur is just on the edge of the great lava that has flowed from Hekla, and we are soon in the middle of it; it is a waste of black cindery rocks, with a good deal of sand about them, sometimes grown over with wild oats or a sharp-leaved dwarf willow: the road is very good, and we go along at a swinging pace, being anxious to reach Stóruvellir by times: Hekla is visible on our right all the way, and the rough ridges that lead up to it, which sink into the plain and are cut off from the Threecorner-Tindafell ranges: and we are nearer to it than we have been yet or shall be again: one can see the top of the cone all reddened with burning: the Keldur bonder names two other cones to me nearer than Hekla, to wit, Bjólufell and Selsundsfell: it is a sufficiently awful-looking district. As we ride on we come to two steep conical mounds close to our road, and the bonder points them out to me as Knafa-knolls, by which Gunnar saw the spears of his waylayers standing up thick before the fight by Rang-river: 'tis a goodish ride by the way, five or six miles to the nearest point of Rang-river. Soon after this we ride off the lava on to smooth rich meadowland, broken again presently by wastes of black volcanic sand also as smooth as a table, and hedged by steep grassy banks: thence again on to slopes of grass for a goodish way: the moon near her full we saw now luminous for the first time since we came to Iceland: the slopes led us at last down to the bank of Outer or Western Rang-river: deep flower grass went down right into the water on either side, making a shallow valley; on the further slope was a many-gabled stead: it was a beautiful night, about half-past ten now, I suppose, the twilight deeper than we had seen it yet, but all colours quite clear: something about the atmosphere of the place touched me very much as we rode down into the bright smooth river: the ford was very deep, but quite without danger, the bottom being so smooth. Hence we rode into the lava again, which was of a different kind to

the cindery stuff on the other side Rang-river, being more like a curdled stream (as it was), it was much overgrown with vegetation, and was full of treacherous breakneck holes: it was pathless, or nearly so, and we made slow way over it, and we didn't reach Stóruvellir, after what was to me a very pleasant ride, till nearly midnight, and I was more than half ashamed to knock at the door of the little parsonage, with Magnússon's letter of introduction in my hand: out came presently Sira Guðmundr, looking very like the ideal parson of the modern northern novelette; he held out both hands to us and said in slow English, "You are very welcome," then led me by the hand through the dark passages into the parlour: he became more genial still when lights were brought and he had read Magnússon's letter, for he took us at first for the Scotch horse-coupers it turned out: he roused the house to get us supper<sup>1</sup> and beds, and his son, a bright, well-mannered student of eighteen,<sup>2</sup> turned up and talked German with Evans; he himself essayed Latin with me, which I shied, preferring to stumble in Icelandic rather. The bonder from Keldur<sup>3</sup> had his glass of brandy with us, and then went back through the night some twenty-five miles, well rewarded according to his own idea with a dollar, and so after supper to bed.

<sup>1</sup>Supper, black bread, smoked mutton and salmon and ewe-milk cheese: bed, a bed that pulled out telescope-fashion for me, and the parlour floor by his own choice for Evans.

<sup>2</sup>Also named Guðmundr, now a district physician at Stykkisholm in the west of Iceland. E.M.

<sup>3</sup>On the way the old fellow hung back a good bit (we were riding very fast) and the guides had the bad manners to laugh consumedly at him, till at last his horse stumbled, and over his head he went to their great amusement: afterwards the old gentleman sidled up to me and said: "I'm seventy-seven, and can't ride as fast as I used."