

Monday, July 31st. In camp at Búðará (by Arnarvatn).

GOT up late, and prowled about doing little or nothing for some hours waiting to see if the weather would mend, for it was raining hard and our journey was not to be a very long one to-day. In spite of the rain I was in good spirits since I had slept in a bonder-house without getting lousy, though Evans complained sorely of the fleas; later on I should have been surprised at the presence of a louse, but as aforesaid I had been stuffed full of travellers' stories on this point and was troubled thereon. About 2 p.m. the weather cleared and was bright and sunny so that we got ready for a start; I walked about the house a bit and found the home-mead green and fair though it lies so high up among these dreadful wastes: the house however very poor looking, just three heaps of turf without the usual boarded gables facing south. Still, here as in many places, there was a charm about the green sloping meadow and little bright stream running through it, that one would scarcely imagine could be attained to by such simple means. We got to horse no earlier than three, our host going with us to guide us through the great cave of Surtshellir* which lies on our

¹ The snow-filled crannies of the cliffs took queer shapes sometimes; the principal one seen from this window was just like a mediæval crucifix, the body hanging on the arms I mean: we saw it just the same as we returned weeks afterwards.

² Surt is the god of fire, [the demon of fire, about whom so much is said in the *Völuspá* of the Elder Edda as leader of the forces of destruction on the day of Judgement. E.M.]

way: we squeezed unwilling permission from Faulkner to have a candle-end apiece with us for that expedition. So, riding over a short "neck," we come into a long valley pleasant and grass-grown, with the Norðlendingafliót (Northfolks-fleet) an affluent of White-water, running all the way on our left: looking down we can see the valley widen, and wind somewhat to the north, and our guide points out White-water-side to us and the spot where Gilsbank, Gunnlaug's stead, lies, distant only some ten miles from us, though it will be three weeks at least before we are there, as we come back from the north. The slopes of this valley sink after a while and we are riding over a plain of ancient moss-grown lava dominated by the great mass of Eirík's Jokul, a mountain round in plan and



quite wallsided, deep black cliffs with a dome of ice capping them: and presently the guide leads us from the road and we let the train go its ways to await us at a certain place, while we ourselves go over the lava till we come to a steep-sided hollow which looks as if the lava had fallen in there after having been puffed up into a bubble, which indeed I suppose was the case: in one side of this hollow, all cumbered with great heaps of fallen stone, is the entrance to the cave: we tie our horses together at the entrance, and stumble over the stones and so come first into a ragged sort of porch, and then into a regular vaulted hall, with a ledge of stone running at a regular distance all round like a bench: the floor however is covered with great blocks and heaps of fallen stones, and ice lies between them very smooth but very uneven, and covered with water sometimes a couple of feet deep, all which makes it very bad going, scrambling with hand and knee in fact: and my big loose fisherman's boots are not good footclothes for such a job: this first cave is shortish and not very dark, for 'tis lighted by another defect in the lava bubble a few hundred feet further on; but getting past this it gets quite dark and we have to light up, and so go over worse floor still, the drip

"The abode of the land sprites in one of the stories," says the note-book. Ed.

Surtshellir from the roof sometimes putting our candles out: in spite of ice and all I dripped too—with sweat, and got quite done up, especially as the others in their enthusiasm kept well ahead of me, they all being tolerably good climbers; at last after about three-quarters of an hour I asked our guide how far we were, and he said encouragingly, “More than half way,” and a little after we came to another broken bubble, and there I must confess I gave in, and Faulkner kept me company; so we hauled ourselves out on to the moss-covered lava, and sitting down fell to a most agreeable pipe, I for one quite dead beat, while Magnússon and Evans went on with the guide: after a while they came back, not having got to the end of the cave, but so far as to see the great sight of it: a pillar of ice to wit that rises from floor to roof, and a frozen waterfall, which I having missed (to my great shame and grief now) by my lachesse, can say no more about: however they said that it was hard enough to get there, and Evans had an ugly fall on his knee which he felt for many days afterwards. Nevertheless, why didn't I try it.

So back we went over the top of the long air-bubble to our horses, take leave of our guide and ride along the plain after our train, with the rain again following on the heels of us: on a rock near the cave sat a great grey gerfalcon with the plovers twittering and screaming all round him. We had spent two hours in all over these caves. After an hour's ride or so we struck the Norðlendingaflíót again, an ugly stream here with wide banks of black sloppy sand: on a rock-strewn knoll on the other side of this our train was halted, so we galloped up in the middle of the now pouring rain, took our saddles off and turned them upside down, and then picked out the biggest stone to crouch behind and fell to victuals: which I mention because surely on that day Faulkner *did* distinguish himself: refusing to say a word, till cold mutton, Holstein cheese, black bread, Bologna sausage and raisins having disappeared, he lighted his pipe with a sigh and looked about him: to say the truth we were all very merry indeed, and when, in default of Falki, who refused to be

caught, I mounted a strong but rough-paced packhorse, I followed Evans at a great pace over rough and smooth. It did not rain so heavily now but we could look about us: the huge Eirík's Jokul rises always on our right, but between it and us the country has quite changed since we passed the river; it is all little valleys and low conical sand-heap-shaped hills overgrown with ling and scant grass, and almost every valley has its little lake in it, in one of which we saw two swans with their brood keeping cautiously in the middle. This waste is Ernewaterheath (Arnarvatns-heiði) of the Gretla, where Grettir dwelt so long as an outlaw.

The day, though still raining softly, got very wonderful as we rode on: the sun kept shining faintly through the thin clouds and seemed always ready to break out, and the whole sky was suffused with the light of it, as you may have seen it in a stormy sunset in England, only this lasted for hours instead of a few minutes: two wonderful rainbows came out as we rode; the second one of which was beyond everything of the sort I ever saw, we were loitering past a bank of deep grass with breaks in it through which one saw the black side of Eirík's Jokul, and the bow came strong against the black cliffs and white snow of it, and seemed quite close to us while the sun, very low now, shone out athwart all the shifting clouds from a strip of faint golden green sky in the northwest. All faded presently and we came at last down on to Ernewater about at half-past nine amidst a cold grey drift of rain. It is a big sheet of water, some seven miles square with low hills all round it, and between us and it a stretch of boggy land that runs at last in a long spit into the lake: this is Grettirs-head where he lived at the time he slew Thorir Red-beard his would-be assassin; it is a most mournful desolate-looking place, with no signs of life as we rode up but for a swan that rose up trumpeting from the lakeside: I had looked forward to camping on its side, but its swamps had no pasture for the beasts and no good camping ground, so we had to ride past it up a small stream called Búðará that runs into it, and dark now falling were beginning to get rather weary and impa-

Búdará

tient when Gisli, who is the great man now, and knows the country well, called a halt on a patch of smooth turf by the side of the stream. There we pitched our tents in a pouring rain; I more tired than I had been yet, owing I fancy to the stumbling about Surtshellir: however, once housed it hurts us not; we sup off cold mutton and cocoa made with the etna, for we are too lazy to look for rather doubtful fuel and light a proper fire, besides it was nearly dark, being half-past ten. After supper we found the rain had stopped; the moon had shone out, and though it was obviously growing cold, we looked forward to a fine day on the morrow for our last day in the wilderness, and talked of bathing in the clear Bú-
ðará.