

them came down through narrow ravines, and fell very precipitously into the plains.

About 2.15 P.M. we reached the banks of Eystri Rangá, a small rocky stream: beyond it lay before us a fine undulating country, covered with grass. Near the ford was a farm, at which we obtained a bowl of milk,—a most refreshing draught after the quantity of sand that we had swallowed in crossing the desert. Milk can be obtained at almost every farm, and no payment is ever expected for it.

After crossing the river, and riding three or four miles along its eastern bank, we reached Raudnef-stadr, our resting-place for the night.

We pitched our tent in the tún close by the house. When we had made our canvas home snug for the night, Olaver brought us from the farm a kettle of boiling water to make tea with, and we sat down to supper, using one of our travelling-boxes as a table. Our fare, though simple, was as good and substantial as we could wish. It consisted of cold mutton, skon-rock, which is a sort of rusk, and unlimited supplies of milk and butter. These last we obtained at the farm close at hand. The mutton was the remains of a sheep which we had bought at Selsund. We had paid for it four dollars (nine shillings), which, although it sounds cheap enough, is by no means a moderate price for an Icelandic sheep.

2. FROM RAUDNEF-STADR ACROSS THE LESS FREQUENTED DISTRICTS ON THE W. OF THE SKAPTÁR JÖKULL TO MARIU-BAKKI.

August 6th.—The farmer at this place is a well-to-do man, owning several hundred sheep and seventy or eighty horses. We were in want of two saddle-horses in addition

to those we already possessed. Every Icelandic traveller must (at least on a long journey) have a second horse for a change. We had not been able to procure the necessary number of riding-horses at Reykja-vik, and were anxious to supply the deficiency before we proceeded farther eastwards; for in this part of the country horses are to be had cheaper than anywhere else at the south. The farmer was quite willing to let us have one, but he hesitated to part with two. At last, however, he consented to let us have them, and he also, after some hesitation, agreed to accept their price in English gold. We had now each two riding-horses, and besides these we had three baggage-horses laden, and two extra baggage-horses running loose. We found that our newly purchased horses were out in the pasture lands, and that they had not only to be brought in, but also to be shod before starting. We therefore sent forward our baggage and loose horses, the slowest part of our cavalcade, under the charge of our fylgdarmadr,—we ourselves remaining behind to bring on our new horses. Whilst they were being caught, the farmer invited us into his house to take coffee. By the time that we had finished it, our horses had been driven up to the door, and the farmer at once threw off his coat and went to work to shoe them. Almost all Icelanders, from the priests downwards, are good smiths, and can put a shoe on well. The farmer of Raudnef-stadr was certainly no exception to the rule. I timed him as he was shoeing one of the horses. He pared the hoofs and fastened on all four shoes in twenty minutes,—no bad work! The shoes are always put on cold. They are generally each fastened with only four, though sometimes with six, nails; and although the work is more roughly done than that of an English smith, yet the shoes gene-

rally last well, and seldom hurt the horse's feet or cause lameness.

When our horses were shod and saddled, the farmer kindly volunteered to accompany us for a short distance, and put us in the right track, and soon after half-past nine we started under his guidance. After riding about a couple of miles, we came to a small stream of lava lying at the bottom of a steep barren hill. Here was the boundary of his pasture-grounds; and here, after bidding us a hearty adieu, and giving us full directions as to our route, he left us and turned back.

Our road crossed the lava stream, and ascended the hill above it. The ground of this hill consisted of shingle and small stones, all water-worn and rounded, and laid down on a substratum of sand, as smoothly and regularly as if the whole were the work of man. No macadamised road could have its surface more regularly laid. Everywhere the soil was quite bare. No vegetation of any kind could be seen, with the exception of patches of a bright green moss, which, growing here and there, marked the site of a spring or the channel of a water-course.

After a ride of about an hour and a half over this sort of ground we caught up our baggage-horses. Soon afterwards we came to a more rocky tract, where was a little more vegetation, though still it was very barren. We were now passing along the base of the Tind-fjalla Jökull, the lower glaciers of which appeared to be not more than an hour's walk from our path. In places these glaciers were much broken, and the bright colours of the ice shone out vividly in the sun; but on the whole, the rounded snow-slopes looked as if they would not offer much difficulty to an ascent. The top of the mountain, as seen from this side, appeared to be a flattened dome.

The streams from the Jökull came tumbling over the rugged rocks on our right in several pretty waterfalls. Two of them especially, not more than fifty yards apart, offered a beautiful contrast to each other. The one was broken and feathered in many a spray-spangled fountain, the other poured down in a broad, unbroken sheet of water. When we reached the N.E. side of the Jökull the scenery became of a very different kind; close before us lay a perfectly flat shingle plain of very large extent. The shingle in it was as smooth and regular as that on the hills which we had crossed in the morning, and the ground was quite as barren. On the other side of this plain, and rising immediately from it, were numberless mountains, one overtopping the other, as far as the eye could see. It was a fine scene. Every mountain seemed to have a peculiar shape and character of its own, and all seemed to be jumbled together in a wonderful confusion. Here, side by side, were tall pyramid-shaped mountains, and low round-topped hills; flat table-lands lying next to pointed aiguilles, and rocks riven and shattered by storms; here were gradual slopes close beneath precipitous cones which towered above them. Equally varied was their colour. There in the distance gathering clouds cast a deep shade over the hills, whilst here a golden gleam of sunshine lit up the yellow cliffs of a sand-coloured berg; and in another direction a volcanic hill showed its sides, as red in hue as a field of summer clover.

We rode on through a narrow defile with rocky sides at the end of this plain, into another valley which somewhat resembled it; and then, traversing a bare mountainous district, we reached the river Markar-fjot, which, although not very broad, was swollen and deep. After crossing the river, our road led us along the steep side of a ridge of hills completely covered with moss, and deeply

scored by numerous water-courses. In the valley, we came upon a number of very singular mounds of black sand, apparently washed down from the hills above; but they were so regular in shape that they looked like artificial structures, rather than the work of nature. The greater number resembled railway embankments, from 15 to 40 feet high, 100 to 300 feet long, and 30 to 40 feet broad at the top, and broader at the bottom. Descending from these mounds, and fording a small stream, a tributary to the Markar-fjot, we found ourselves close to Græna-fjall (Green fell), a solitary green hill in the midst of these barren tracts, in which, although we had been riding for nearly six hours, we had scarcely seen a blade of grass. A mournful bleat revealed to us a flock of sheep, feeding on this solitary oasis. Leaving Græna-fjall behind us, we again entered a barren desert, which must lie at a considerable elevation above the level of the sea, for we came upon several large patches of old snow, still unmelted.

Soon after four o'clock, we reached a small valley, named Fangil, where there was a little grass, and where it was our original intention to have camped for the night; but we found it very uninviting. The rain had for some hours been pouring down in torrents, and had completely soaked the ground. There was little chance of our being able to make a fire. The only fuel at hand consisted of the roots of dwarf willows, and even if we could have collected a sufficient quantity of these, they were too damp to burn. There was, besides, very little grass for our horses. Under these circumstances, we determined to push on into Skaptár-tunga, a district lying in the Skapta-fells-sysla, sixty or seventy miles due east of Hekla, where we hoped to reach a farmhouse. So, after stopping at Fangil three-quarters of an hour to rest our horses and let them feed,

we mounted again and proceeded eastwards. Almost immediately after leaving Fangil, we entered an extensive desert of black volcanic sand, called Mæli-fells Sandr, bounded on the north by the snow-covered hills that flank the Torfa Jökull, and on the south by the ice-fields of the Merkr Jökull. Its width is from two to three miles, and it is about fifteen miles in length. The ice-fields of the Merkr Jökull terminate in gentle rounded declivities, which come quite down to the sand. The Jökull rises very gradually towards the south, and for a long distance appears to be almost flat. A large extent of the lower part of the ice-fields was dusted over, and dirtied with black sand blown off the plain, along which the Jökull extends for many miles in almost a straight line. For an hour and forty minutes we rode over the desert at a smart trot, and at the end of that time we reached Mæli-fell, a barren mountain of considerable size, which, until we came close to it, seemed to block up the end of the desert. At 8 P.M. we reached the banks of the Holmsá. We had expected, from Gunnlaugsson's map, to find grass on the east side of this river; instead of it we found a country green, indeed, as it is painted in the map, but green with moss only. There was not anywhere a blade of grass for our hungry horses, and for more than an hour and a half we rode across moss-covered hills and dales. At length our road zigzagged down a steep hill-side, and we entered a fine grassy valley watered by the Tungu-fljot; half an hour after crossing which we reached Bulandsel, a boer about three miles to the west of Buland. It was now 10.30 P.M., and we found the farmer and his family retired to rest; but on our arrival they at once got up to offer us all the hospitalities that the farm could afford.

We intended to have attempted an ascent of the Kotlu-

gjá. A visit to that mountain would have been particularly interesting at this time, from the circumstance of its having been in a state of eruption in the previous year, 1860. We had, however, to give up this intention; for we found that on this side of the mountain there was no place from which we could make the ascent, with sufficient grass for camping out, and to have gone to the south-east of the mountain, and returned, would have taken up more days than we could well spare. We determined, therefore, to push on eastwards at once. Any future traveller who may wish to attempt the ascent of Kotlu-gjá, should do so, I think, from the south, where there are several farms not far from its base. The mountain was, some years ago (1823), attempted from this side, with considerable success, by an Icelandic priest of the name of Jón Austmann. A less successful attempt to reach the summit was made by Messrs. Olafssen and Povelsen, so long ago as the year 1756. But they were obliged to give up their attempt, as they were enveloped in snow and mist, and exposed to the rage of the volcano, which had been seen to emit flames only two days before.

August 7th.—We rode to-day only as far as Buland, and, the following day (August 8th), proceeded to Mariu-bakki, a little farm lying on the south side of the great Skaptár Jökull, half-way between the Jökull and the sea. The country through which we passed was very different from the deserts we had traversed two days previously between Raudnef-stadr and Bulandsel. The greater part of it was a fine undulating country, well covered with grass. In crossing it, you would never have supposed that you were riding within a short distance of the most destructive of Icelandic volcanoes, one which, not quite eighty years ago (1783), devastated the whole of the country around it for many miles, throwing out such masses of lava, that

the molten flood at that eruption from this single volcano was, it has been calculated, greater in bulk than Mont Blanc itself. Henderson (pp. 219—231) gives a most interesting account of this eruption, describing with graphic detail the phenomena that appeared day by day. I make no apology for quoting the following passage from his description of it. He says, writing in 1815 —

“It not only appears to have been more tremendous in its phenomena than any recorded in the modern annals of Iceland, but it was followed by a train of consequences the most direful and melancholy, some of which continue to be felt to this day. Immense floods of red-hot lava were poured down from the hills with amazing velocity, and, spreading over the low country, burnt up men, cattle, churches, houses, and everything they attacked in their progress. Not only was all vegetation, in the immediate neighbourhood of the volcano, destroyed by the ashes, brimstone, and pumice, which it emitted; but, being borne up to an inconceivable height in the atmosphere, they were scattered over the whole island, impregnating the air with noxious vapours, intercepting the genial rays of the sun, and empoisoning whatever could satisfy the hunger or quench the thirst of man and beast. Even in some of the more distant districts, the quantity of ashes that fell was so great, that they were gathered up by handfuls. Upwards of four hundred people were instantly deprived of a home; the fish were driven from the coasts, and the elements seemed to vie with each other which should commit the greatest depredations. Famine and pestilence stalked abroad, and cut down their victims with ruthless cruelty; while death himself was glutted with the prey. In some houses there was scarcely a sound individual left to attend the afflicted, or any who possessed sufficient strength to inter the dead. The most miserably emaciated tottering skeletons were seen in every quarter. When the animals that had died of hunger and disease were consumed, the wretched creatures had nothing to eat but raw hides, and old pieces of leather and ropes, which they boiled and devoured with avidity. The horses ate the flesh off one another, and for want of other sustenance had recourse to turf, wood, and even excrementitious substances, while the sheep devoured each other's wool. In

a word, the accumulation of miseries, originating in the volcanic eruption, was so dreadful, that in the short space of two years, not fewer than 9336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 head of cattle, and 190,488 sheep, perished on the island."

Immediately after leaving Buland we came to the banks of the Eld-vatn (Fire-water), a deep river of glacier water which flows down from the Skaptár Jökull in a channel of lava, and is divided into many streams by numerous lava islands. It owes its name to having first made its appearance during the eruption of 1783. We did not find much difficulty in crossing it, and having reached its eastern shore, we had before us a steep ascent up a high bank, up which our road lay by a zigzag path, and at the top of which we found a fine broad plateau of marshes and grass lands. After traversing these we came to a beautiful undulating country, lying amongst green hills, down the sides of which many a silver thread of water flashed in the sunlight, and here and there, in the far distance, we caught glimpses of the blue ocean. But even here, in the midst of this beautiful country and these grassy lands, has the fire-demon left some traces of his work. In the middle of a green plain we came upon an isolated hill, which was evidently of volcanic origin. It was in shape a perfect cone, and its steep sides were covered with scorix of a most brilliant red colour. From this last peculiarity it takes its name of Raud-holt (Red-hill). It is quite barren, and on every side of the same red colour, except on the south. On that side, near the top, is a patch of black cinders. The position of this hill is also very remarkable. It stands in a broad natural foss, which runs round it on three sides, cutting through and exposing the brown soil of the pasture lands to a considerable depth. On the other side it slopes down to the grassy plain at its base.

In the afternoon we descended from the high ground upon the village of Kirkju-bær, and thence proceeded to Prest-bakki, over a rich plain, well stocked with cattle



RAUD-HOLT.

and sheep, belonging to the numerous farms scattered about it. Here we halted for half an hour to let our horses feed. We had scarcely dismounted when the priest, whose house was some little distance off, came out to us, although it was raining heavily at the time, and pressed us to come in and take coffee. We gladly accepted his invitation and followed him indoors. He talked Latin well (a compliment which I cannot pay to most of the Icelandic priests), and we had a long conversation with him in that language. He told us, that in the previous May, 1861, there had been, for several days together, a strong and nauseous sulphureous smell throughout the whole of this district, which he attributed to some volcanic disturbance having occurred farther eastwards. Dr. Hjaltelin, of Reykja-vik, and others, subsequently informed me that a sulphureous smell had

about the same time been prevalent in the houses at Reykja-vik, to such an extent as to be very disagreeable; and that in the district near the Vatna Jökull the sulphureous vapour had tarnished all the silver in the houses. This smell probably came from the Skeidarár Jökull, where (as I shall mention presently) there was undoubtedly some, though probably not a very great, volcanic disturbance at that time.

Coffee was handed round by a pleasant-looking woman, introduced to us by the priest as "Uxor mea." When we had finished and rose to depart, our host would not hear of our going without his riding with us a short way. So he ordered his horse to be saddled, and accompanied us, although it was still raining. Friendly as was his intention, we had soon reason to regret that he had come with us. He either imagined that we had acquired an Icelander's love for imbibing coffee, or he was very anxious that all his friends should have the opportunity of seeing us. We had scarcely ridden a mile when he pressed us to go and take coffee with his father, a clergyman living about a mile up the valley, and we had not ridden more than three miles farther, when he took us up to another house, which he said was his brother's. He went in and brought the owner out to us, and they both together pressed us so earnestly to dismount and take coffee, that it would have been discourteous to refuse. We were kept waiting upwards of an hour whilst the coffee was being prepared, sorely grudging the loss of time, and, to judge from my own feelings, in no very amiable mood. From some cause of delay, known only to the members of the culinary department, it took all that time to get ready. "Experientia docet." Always after this, when pressed to take coffee at a way-side house, we asked for milk, or cognac, or schnapps, instead; thus at the same

time neither offending against Icelandic ideas of courtesy, nor losing much time by delay. Reader! If you ever travel in Iceland, take my advice and do likewise.

When at length we had finished our coffee, we set out again; the priest accompanied us for a mile or two, and then, bidding us a pleasant journey, he turned his horse's head homewards. Between 7 and 8 P.M. we reached a field of lava, part of the immense flow which descended in 1783 from the Skaptár Jökull. Across this our road led us for some distance, and as it was now getting dark, the riding here became both disagreeable and difficult. Shortly before 9 P.M. we reached the Hverfis-fjot, a broad and rather deep river, in which, however, the stream was not very strong. The bottom is sandy, but in most places we found it firm, and we got across it without much difficulty. From the Hverfis-fjot we had a pretty good road to Mariu-bakki, which we reached shortly after 10 P.M. The people at the farm had all retired for the night; but, upon our arrival, they at once got up and provided us with all that we wanted for our supper.

3. PASSAGE OF THE SKEIDARÁ.—THE ORCEFA JÖKULL.— SOUTH OF THE VATNA JÖKULL TO BERU-FJÖRDR.

August 9th.—We were rather delayed in our start this morning by awaiting the preparation of an Icelandic dish, which Olaver had strongly recommended to us, but which turned out to be nothing more nor less than rice boiled in milk, with the addition of a few raisins. Whilst we were at breakfast, Olaver came up with a long face to tell us that the Nups-vatn was a very dangerous river, and that the farmer of Mariu-bakki was the only person thereabouts who could guide us over it and the Skeidará to Svina-fell; and