Tuesday, July 11th. On board-ship "Diana," the Faroes astern of us.

I HAVE often noticed in one's expeditions how hard it is to explain to one's friends afterwards why such and such a day was particularly delightful, or give them any impression of one's pleasure, and such a trouble besets me now about the past day.

I woke up later than usual, about half-past six, and went on deck in a hurry, because I remembered the mate had promised that we should be at Thorshaven in the Faroes by then, and that we should have sighted the south islands of them long before: and now there we were sure enough steaming up the smooth water of a narrow firth, with the shore close on either board: I confess I shuddered at my first sight of a really northern land in the grey of a coldish morning: the hills were not high, especially on one side as they sloped beachless into the clear but grey water; the grass was grey between greyer ledges of stone that divided the hills in regular steps; it was not savage but mournfully empty and barren, the grey clouds dragging over the hill-tops or lying in the hollows being the only thing that varied the grass, stone, and sea: yet as we went on the firth opened out on

*The Faroes seemed to me such a gentle sweet place when we saw them again after Iceland.*
The Faroes one side and showed wild strange hills and narrow sounds between the islands that had something, I don’t know what, of poetic and attractive about them: and on our side was sign of population in the patches of bright green that showed the homefields of farms on the hillsides, and at last at the bight’s end we saw the pleasant-looking little town of Thors-haven, with its green-roofed little houses clustering round a little bay and up a green hillside: thereby we presently cast anchor, the only other craft in the harbour being three fishing-smacks, cutters, who in answer to the hoisting of our flag ran up English colours, and were, we afterwards found out, from Grimsby for Iceland. The shore soon became excited at our arrival and boats put off to us, the friends of our three passengers for the Faroes, and others, and there was a great deal of kissing on deck presently. Then came a smart-looking boat carrying the governor, and having eight oars a side, manned by the queerest old carles, who by way of salute as the boat touched our side shuffled off their Faroish caps in a very undignified manner. These old fellows, like most (or all) of the men, wore an odd sort of Phrygian cap, stockings or knee-breeches loose at the knee, and a coat like a knight’s just-au-corps, only buttoning in front, and generally open. The boats are built high stem and stern, with the keel rib running up into an ornament at each end, and cannot have changed in the least since the times of the sagas.

Well, the governor being gone, we had our breakfast, and then carrying big bundles of sandwiches set out for shore to amuse ourselves through the day, as we didn’t expect to sail till the next morning. Magnusson took us to the store of a friend of his, a sort of place like a ship’s hold, and where they sold everything a Faroese would buy, from a tin tack to a cask of brandy; we found nothing to buy there but Danish cherry-brandy, which was good and cheap. Then we went into the private house of the merchant and were kindly welcomed by his wife into a pretty wooden house very like a ship’s cabin, and, to me, still unquiet: it
was very clean, painted white and with roses and ivy in great pots growing all over the drawing-room wall (inside).

Thence we went out into the town, which pleased me very much: certainly there was a smell of fish, and these creatures, or parts of them, from guts to gutted bodies, hung and lay about in many places; but there was no other dirt apparent; the houses were all of wood, high-roofed, with little white casements, the rest of the walls being mostly done over with Stockholm tar: every roof was of turf, and fine crops of flowery grass grew on some of them: the people we met were very polite, good-tempered and contented-looking: the women not pretty but not horrible either, and the men often quite handsome, and always carrying themselves well in their neat dresses; which include, by the by, skin shoes tied about the ankle with neat thongs: the men were often quite swarthy, and had a curious cast of melancholy on their faces, natural I should think to the dwellers in small remote islands. We were to go a walk under the guidance of a Faroe parson to a farm on the other side of the island (Straumey), and so presently having gone through the town we met on a road that ran through little fields of very sweet flowery grass nearly ready for the scythe: it affected me strangely to see all the familiar flowers growing in a place so different to anything one had ever imagined, and withal (it had grown a very bright fresh day by now) there was real beauty about the place of a kind I can't describe. We were soon off these cultivated meadows however and in a long deep valley of the open fells, peaty and grass-clad, with a small stream running through it and not unlike many Cumberland valleys I have been in: up the hillside on the left we struck, and clomb the hill whence turning round we could see the sound we had come up this morning, the little "Diana" lying in the harbour with the boats clustered

*A good many though were white or black: the houses were pitched down with little order enough, and in fact the town was like a toy Dutch town of my childhood's days.*
round her, the little toylike looking town so small, so small, and beyond it the mountains, jagged and peaked, of another island, with the added interest of knowing that there was a deep sound between us and them: sea and sky were deep blue now, but the white clouds yet clung to the mountains here and there.

We turned away and went along the ridge of the mountain-neck and looking all up the valley could see it turning off toward the right, and a higher range above its bounding hill: and again it was exciting to be told that this higher range was in another island; we saw it soon, as we turned a corner of the stony stepped grey hills, and below us lay a deep calm sound, say two miles broad, a hogbacked steep mountain-island forming the other side of it, next to which lay a steeper islet, a mere rock; and then other islands, the end of which we could not see, entangled the sound and swallowed it up; I was most deeply impressed with it all, yet can scarcely tell you why; it was like nothing I had ever seen, but strangely like my old imaginations of places for sea-wanderers to come to: the day was quite a hot summer day now, and there was no cloud in the sky and the atmosphere was very, very clear, but a little pillowy cloud kept dragging and always changing, yet always there over the top of the little rocky islet, which was by no means very high. We turned now towards the end of the sound that looked openest, and began to go down hill, and soon were off the stony ground and walking over grassy slopes full of wild thyme and ragged-robin, and a beautiful blue milk-wort: how delicious it seemed after the unrest and grubbiness of the little vessel!

We could now, when we looked behind us, see a good stretch of our hillside, which sloped steeply into the sea, and showed the home-meads of two farms within sight; and on the hillside of the opposite island we could count three farms: all the islands, whether sloping or sheer rocks, went right into the sea without a handsbreadth of beach anywhere; and, little thing as that seems, I suppose it is this which gives the air of romanticism to these strange islands. We
turned another spur of the hills soon, and then the land on our side fell back, the long island afioresaid ended suddenly and precipitously, and there was a wide bay before us bound by the steep grey cliffs of another island: the hillsides we were on flattened speedily now, under steep walls of basalt, and at the further end of them close by the sea lay the many gables (black wood with green turf roofs) of the farm of Kirkiubœ (Kirkby), a little whitewashed church being the nearest to the sea, while close under the basalt cliff was the ruin of a stone medieval church: a most beautiful and poetical place it looked to me, but more remote and melancholy than I can say, in spite of the flowers and grass and bright sun: it looked as if you might live for a hundred years before you would ever see ship sailing into the bay there; as if the old life of the saga-time had gone, and the modern life [had] never reached the place.

We hastened down, along the high mowing-grass of the homefield, full of buttercups and marsh marigolds, and so among the buildings: the long-nosed cadaverous parson who guided us took us first to the ruin, which he said had never been finished, as the Reformation had stopped the building of it: in spite of which story it is visibly not later than 1340 in date, which fact I with some qualms stoutly asserted to the parson's disgust, though 'tis quite a new fault to me to find local antiquaries post-date their antiquities: anyhow it was or had been a rich and beautiful "decorated" chapel without aisles, and for all I know had never been finished: thence we went into the more modern church (such a flower-bed as its roof was!) which was nevertheless interesting from its having a complete set of bench-ends richly carved (in deal) of the 15th century, but quite northern in character, the interlacing work mingling with regular 15th century heraldic

1 Hestey (Horse Island) was the island opposite; the clouded rock N.W. of it was Koltur (the Colt); Sandey was the long island in the distance to the south. E.M.

2 "of buttercups, ragged-robin and clover," says the note-book. Ed.
The work and very well carved figures that yet retained in costume and style a strong tinge of the 13th century: the ornament of the bishop's throne, a chair with a trefoiled canopy, though I am pretty sure of the same date as the bench-ends, was entirely of the northern interlacing work.

From the church we went into the bonder's house which was very clean, and all of unpainted deal, walls, floor, and ceiling, with queer painted old presses and chests about it: he turned up with his two children presently, and welcomed us in that queer northern manner I got used to after a little, as if he were thinking of anything else than us, nay rather, as if he were not quite sure if we were there or not: he was a handsome well-dressed man, very black of hair and skin, and with the melancholy very strong in his face and manner. There we drank unlimited milk, and then turned back up the slopes, but lay down a little way off the house, and ate and drank, thoroughly comfortable, and enjoying the rolling about in the fresh grass prodigiously.

Then we wandered back to the ship; and as we passed by the above-said rocky island the little pillowy cloud yet dragged over its top.

We reached the "Diana" just in time for dinner, sat down not knowing whether we were to sail that evening or not; but in the middle of it, to my great joy, for I was impatient for Iceland still, bang went the signal gun that announced our sailing in an hour's time. The evening was very fine still, the sea was quite smooth, and the tide in our favour; so the captain told us we were going to thread the islands by the sound called the Westmanna-firth instead of going round about them; so as it turned out we had the best sight of the Faroes yet to see: going down the sound we had come up in the morning, we turned round into the sound we had looked down into from Kirkby that noon, passing close by the stead itself, and so into the Westmanna-firth, that grew narrower and narrower as we went on, though here and there

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1 I am sorry to say though, that I spoilt it for myself somewhat by making an imbecile sketch of the stead and its surroundings.
between breaks of the islands we could see the open ocean. The
At last we were in the narrowest of it; it was quite smooth
Faroe:
clear and green, and not a furlong across: the coasts were
most wonderful on either side; pierced rocks running out
from the cliffs under which a brig might have sailed: caves
that the water ran up into, how far we could not tell, smooth
walls of rock with streams running over them right into the
sea, or these would sink down into green slopes with farms
on them, or be clefif into deep valleys over which would show
crater-like or pyramidal mountains, or they would be splin­
tered into jagged spires, one of which single and huge just at
the point of the last ness before we entered this narrow sound,
is named the Troll’s finger; and all this always without one
inch of beach to be seen; and always when the cliffs sank you
could see little white clouds lying about on the hillsides. At
last we could see on ahead a narrow opening, so narrow that
you could not imagine that we could sail out of it, and then
soon the cliffs on our right gave back and showed a great
landlocked bay almost like a lake, with green slopes all round
it and a great mountain towering above them at its end, where
lay the houses of a little town, Westmanna-haven; they tell
us that the water is ten fathoms deep close up to the very
shore in here, and that it is as it looks, a most magnificent
harbour.

After that on we went toward the gates that led out into
the Atlantic; narrow enough they look even now we are
quite near; as the ship’s nose was almost in them, I saw close
beside us a stead with its homefield sloping down to the sea,
the people running out to look at us and the black cattle gra­
zing all about, then I turned to look ahead as the ship met
the first of the swell in the open sea, and when I looked astern
a very few minutes after, I could see nothing at all of the
gates we had come out by, no slopes of grass, or valleys open­
ing out from the shore; nothing but a terrible wall of rent
and furrowed rocks, the little clouds still entangled here and
there about the tops of them: here the wall would be rent
from top to bottom and its two sides would yawn as if they
The Faroes would have fallen asunder, here it was buttressed with great masses of stone that had slipped from its top; there it ran up into all manner of causeless-looking spikes: there was no beach below the wall, no foam breaking at its feet. It was midnight now and everything was grey and colourless and shadowless, yet there was light enough in the clear air to see every cranny and nook of the rocks, and in the north-east now the grey sky began to get a little lighter with dawn. I stood near the stern and looked backward a long time till the coast, which had seemed a great crescent when we came out of the sound, was now a long flat line, and so then I went to bed, with the sky brightening quickly.