

Westman  
Isles

Friday, July 14th. At Reykjavik in the house of Maria Einar's-dóttir.<sup>2</sup>

**U**P at nine and on deck to find that we were just off Reykjaness round which we turn the corner into Faxafirth, the bay in which Reykjavik lies: it was a fine bright day, but rather cold. We were some time getting up the firth as the wind was now against us; but at last we sighted Reykjavik and were soon able to see what it was to be like: the shores of the bay are flat and dull except that

<sup>1</sup> They say that the Westman-islanders watch a waterfall under Eyja-fell, called Seljaland's foss, to know if 'tis safe to put a boat out for the mainland: they may do this if they can see the fall reach the sea; but if it is blown away before it reaches the sea, no boat can live.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Magnússon's eldest sister.

towards the northwest rise two great mountains, Akrafjall Reykjavik and Esja, of the haystack shape so common here, and black striped with green in colour; as we went on we saw another range of hills to the east, not very high but characteristic in shape, a jagged wall, with a pyramid rising amidst them; they are bare, and browner than the others, and come from the lava in fact. The town now lying ahead is a commonplace-looking little town of wood principally; but there are pretty-looking homesteads on some of the islands off it, and the bright green of their home-meads is a great relief to us after all the grey of the sea, and the ice-hills. At last we come to anchor and the boats pull off to us and the flags are run up to the flagstaffs of the stores on shore, and to the masts of the craft in the harbour, which include a French war-brig and gunboat, and several small Danish schooners and sloops: the Frenchmen are here to look after the interests of the 400 sail of French fishing vessels that do most of the deep sea fishing off Iceland: we saw several of them yesterday. We are boarded by several people now; Zoega the guide who was to buy our horses amongst others: he is a big fellow, red-headed, blue-eyed and long-chinned, like a Scotch gardener; he talks English well, and tells us he has done our bidding. Magnússon goes ashore with him, and is to come for us presently; meanwhile we go to dinner (it was about half past three when we cast anchor). A little after dinner he comes accordingly, and ashore we go and land in a street of little low wooden houses, pitched, and with white sash frames; the streets of black volcanic sand; little ragged gardens about some of the houses growing potatoes, cabbages, and huge stems of angelica: not a very attractive place, yet not very bad, better than a north-country town in England. Magnússon takes us to our lodging,<sup>1</sup> a very clean room in one of the little wooden houses, which stands back from the road in its potato and angelica garden, with a hay-field, where they are at work now, at the back. He tells us to come to dinner at a

<sup>1</sup> Lord! how that little row of wooden houses, and their gardens with the rank angelica is wedged into my memory!

Reykjavik certain hour, and then leaves us to our devices, so we go a little walk out into the country, hugely excited, most of all by the look of the ponies, which are much more numerous than the humans, and look delightful: here comes a string of them, about a dozen, laden with stock-fish, tied head and tail and led by a man who rides the first horse: two goodwives in Icelandic side-saddles (little chairs with gay-coloured pretty home-woven carpets thrown over them), riding with their man over stock and stone: a long-legged parson, in rusty black with a tall and stupendously bad hat, riding on a jolly round-sterned chestnut at the devil's pace; his reverend ragbagged legs going whack, whack, whack, to make you die: all these and more capped us, blessed us (*veri þer sælir! be ye seely!*), and went their ways. We went a little walk, looked at the blue bay we had just been so glad to come off,<sup>1</sup> and down into a marshy valley where the cotton-rush grew thick, and then back to our dinner: we had gone on a good made road so far; the country looked very barren here except just round by the sea, but there were pretty flowers and enough of them in the scant grass. To bed after dinner on the floor in our blankets, and were very comfortable.