

clouds in busy progress over the heavens. The air is warm, but there are many swells and ruffings in the clear river as I rest on the old stone bridge half-way to Ilminster. How cool those tufts of comfrey look, hanging out their white and lilac bells with the curious dark stain on the petals, over the thick dark leaves from which they sprout. I should rarely like to find the "spotted comfrey or cowslip of Jerusalem" of which old Parkinson speaks, but "of that I told," he says, "in my former booke," and how can one house hope even to contain more than one of the delightful works of the communicative gardener of the seventeenth century? The water under the bridge flows on so silently, just as it did when the old coaches thundered over it long ago in eager rivalry. A noble old woman of more than eighty summers told me, the other day, with sparkling eyes looking more at the past than at me across the basin of peas she was shelling, about the old days before the canal was dug, when there were only two houses in the lower village and the common was not enclosed. Her father kept geese on the common and no doubt turned many an honest penny by means of it. When she was a maid she had to run out and stop the great coach as it thundered past and sell some of the geese to the coachman. How well she remembered hearing how one day two rival coaches would neither let the other pass, and dashed along for a mile abreast at a head-long pace, the gay ladies on the top shouting with laughter though in imminent danger of an overturn. The two cottages sent out their inmates to watch the race, and for once the geese were forgotten. No doubt as the winning coach rolled over the bridge where we are resting, there were merry shouts of triumph, but those gay folk are scattered long ago, and the highway is nearly turned to a by-way.

The last day of July is come. It is early yet and the morning mist lies on the garden in little puffs of down, indeed, as Keats fancifully says the—

"Finely tapering stems,  
Had not yet lost those starry diadems  
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn."

As the sun mounts in a blue sky the air grows warm. Those yellow-and-white water-lilies under the bridge beyond that red cottage look very cool as we bicycle past them on our way to visit a lovely old stone manor-house. There is already a threat of autumn in the bright red berries of the arum peeping from the ditches, but the elderberries are still quite green, and the young oak leafage is still fresh enough to recall the spring. The red in the oak-leaves is as lovely still as when Chaucer noted the

"Branches broad  
That sprongen out ayen the sunne  
shene,  
Some very red, and some a glad light  
grene."

The large pink patches of rest-harrow with its woody little stems which do not speed the plough, look very gay against the strips of camomile daisy which grow wherever the turf has

been taken up. When we bend into the by-lane, we find the darker pink of the red barzia in among the sweet spikes of the yellow agrimony. Another lovely pink flower is the wood-betony; it is very common about here, and the vivid blossoms peeping from the soft leaves are so much brighter than most of the dead-nettle tribe that they are worth learning, though not quite easy at first to distinguish from wound-wort or stachys. Hampered as we are by town ignorance, these hedge-row friends are too dear not to deserve at least an effort to find their Christian names. We get farther and farther from frequented paths as we pass that cottage which is edged all along with white and pink garden mallows in a gay fringe. The road bends and brings us near a great withy field deep in summer green. The old stone bridge over the river gives us a peep of a deep bay of true bulrushes. Their swaying green forms and black plumes, the moist dark hair waving in the sea seems to us an embodiment of the water-spirit. Beyond them stretches a high bank, all motley with wild mallow, with its darker veins in the transparent pink, and great masses of wild parsnip, with its graceful leaves and soft-spreading yellow flowers, "red loose strife and blond meadow-sweet among." One more turn and we have reached the old stone gables of the midwater homestead, once a court where generations of a good old county stock lived out contentedly their quiet lives. How gay the roses are in the half quadrangle that faces the road. The kind inmates allow us to step into the cool panelled hall, where we admire the richly-wrought iron fire-back with the ducal crown, and look at the dark oil picture over the fire-place, let into the panel and stained with age, but still distinguishable as a hunting-piece of some reckless Nimrod of the past, who would hunt on Sunday while the devil showed him the way as he sat horned and hoofed in a tree hard by. But step with me through the low stone door into the rare old red-walled garden beyond. What a presence there is of Sir Roger de Coverley under that ancient speckled holly with all the stiffness vanished owing to the unpruned luxuriance of years. The young tufts grow straight upwards, quite pale lemon-white, with spots of red in the centre, out of the sloping green branches. It is a lovely tree, and our hostess tells us it makes sad work when the gales come and toss the branches about. On this still day—for the breeze has fallen—there is nothing to disturb those downy yellow-and-black guinea-fowl chicks nestling in the old pail tilted against a graceful tall stone column with a ball at the top, which is covered with roses. There are other columns further on, part of some stately colonnade of the past, but the garden can never have looked lovelier than it does to-day when random nature has decked it out, and not some gardener with ruthless scissors and broom.

We peep into the cool dairy, with its great pans of sweet milk. It was once the kitchen where, no doubt, madam was once not too fine to superintend the brewing and baking that went on in the huge brewing corner and the immense bread-oven that are pointed out

to us. The library and drawing-room are low-ceiled and simple, but how pretty with their painted panels and corner-cupboards delicately gilded and ornamented with the family arms. No doubt its shelves were fragrant once with pot-pourri stored in old china, perhaps like Mrs. Tulliver's that her sisters found fault with "cause o' the small gold sprig all over them, between the flowers." We think of the awed words spoken, perhaps, those long years ago when news was brought of the snowy day in January and the deep groan that passed through the crowd when the king's head fell on the block. History and dates seem strangely real as we stand in these old rooms, reverently kept indeed, but dwell in no longer by the kinship who lived there in the past. The old house was alienated once for conscience sake, but the times changed and the old owner returned. We linger near the plum trees in the garden, and peep through the tall stone gate at the disused bowling-alley beyond, and think of the fair faces and old love-stories of the past. No doubt there was gay laughter here and sorrow too in this Cupid's alley of long ago.

"It may be one will dance to-day,  
And dance no more to-morrow;  
It may be one will steal away  
And nurse a life-long sorrow.  
What then? The rest advance, evade,  
Unite, disport and dally,  
Re-set, coquet and gallopade,  
Not less in 'Cupid's Alley.'"

No one seems to suit the low-ceiled rooms like Mackenzie's "Country Dowager." Do you remember that last century word-picture? "She had buried a beloved husband and four children. Her youngest, Edward," her beautiful, her brave, "fell in Flanders, and was not entombed with his ancestors. His picture, done when a child, an artless red-and-white portrait, smelling at a nosegay, but very like withal, hung at her bedside, and his sword and gorget were crossed under it." . . . Methinks I see her seated, her spectacles on, but raised a little on her brow, for a pause of explanation, their shagreen case laid between the leaves of a silver-clasped family Bible. On one side her bell and snuff-box, on the other her knitting apparatus in a blue damask bag. Between her and the fire an old Spanish pointer, that had formerly been her son Edward's . . . I could draw the old lady at this moment—dressed in grey, with a clean white hood nicely plaited (for she was somewhat finical about the neatness of her person), sitting in her straight-backed elbow-chair, which stood in a large window, scooped out of the thickness of the ancient wall. The middle panes of the window were of painted glass, the story of Joseph and his brethren. On the outside waved a honeysuckle-tree, which often threw its shade across her book or her work; but she would not allow it to be cut down. "It has stood there many a day," said she; "and we old inhabitants should bear with one another."

With this quiet old picture we may say good-bye to the old manor-house and our pleasant summer memories.

## "DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS."

By C. E. C. WEIGALL, Author of "The Temptation of Dulce Carruthers."

It is certainly in this bustling age of ours a far less remarkable thing to have travelled over many lands, and through many seas, than it used to be in the days of our grandmothers. So that no doubt an increased number of the girls who took THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, when first this excellent periodical started on

its career (and I shudder to think how long ago that must be, since I have been a subscriber from the very commencement) are either obliged to travel from choice, or encouraged to do so from inclination.

Our grandmothers. Why, the very name brings back the thought of slim domestic girls

in country gardens, busy with their *potpourri*, or their lavender bags, and content with their quiet reading of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, or the numberless stories of Miss Edgeworth, beginning with her *Purple Jar*. The very thought of crossing the channel was repugnant to the minds of our mothers' mothers, and