For fruit of neutral tint, such as pears, nuts, and greengages, on white china dishes, wreaths of nasturtiums make very pretty ornaments, in which case I would like a dark-green centre mat, and no foliage on the table. For a bright-colored Medlar, sepals and leaves are pretty decoration, some large bunches and graceful sprays being placed in tall vases in the centre of the table, others laid on the cloth outside the dishes of fruit. Brambles answer the same purpose, and seeding Clematis can be twined round the dishes; but it is a fancy of mine, probably not shared with anyone else, that poisonous berries, such as those of the bramble and nightshade, should never be found on the same table as fruits intended to be eaten.

September brings in a much richer natural scale of colour than even the summer months, and possibly at no time are striking effects so easily obtained as now, with the help of fading leaves.

The glorious colouring of the Virginia creeper, common in town and country, blends well with almost any tint of flowers, and particularly with white or pale dahlias, phlox, Japanese anemones, or lilac; and is admirably effective for a dinner-table if used alone, or with white clematis, trails of it in low glasses winding in and out round the bases of taller vases, in each of which are two or three pieces of fruit—apples, peaches, or pears. As a centre-piece, or a sitting-room ornament, a bunch, loosely arranged in any large piece of old china, particularly blue-and-white, never fails to please anyone.

With deeper-toned flowers paler leaves make a better contrast; such as those of the lime-tree, which now turn golden.

The feathery wild clematis, seeding now, and called by country people old man's beard, or traveller's joy, combines softly with the dark red leaves of its neighbour the hedge maple, or the bright crimson leaves of the wild rose, or, in a quieter key, harmonises with purple elderberries.

The leaves of the white bean turn at this season a deep purple, and with its red berries form a charming arrangement of old man's beard and pale lilac scabious, all gathered within a few yards of each other on the South Downs.

Trails of bays and with changing leaves and berries might take the place of the white beam with more brilliant effect.

Berries do not easily combine with flowers unless all are taken together direct from the hedgerow or common.

Gorse is in some places at its full splendour, and to country people supplies brilliant groups for their greening fern of late autumn. The weather still allows flowers to take the place of fuel, the hall, or other parts of the house where bright colouring is welcome, and where one is not likely to come unduly near the hearth.

Berries are of course natural congenial companion; but where the local background is light, a branch of fir will throw it into relief; and should the vase or jar containing them be high, a few branches may pleasingly drape themselves from the rim. Harmless are too fragile-looking to find a place in such a group; but in a room where a large piece of gorse forms the background of a number of harlebells, with fine grass, delicate ferns, and sprays of little woodland weeds, numbers of which are now turning red or yellow, may be fifty placed in a single vase, and in many a case of Heath, a bracken, and gorse are of course natural neighbours; but skilful cutting and handling, with some risk of torn fingers, are necessary to make them even in one dish. When achieved, however, the result is always popular, and has also the merit of lasting fresh a long time.

The bays and black-berried hawthorn which I mentioned in June may be charmingly dressed with small pieces of gorse, heather, and bracken, with the addition in the topmost holes of mountain ash—such as are removed from one's boxes. Large bunches of the latter also make good single groups, and small sprays of them and their pretty leaves may be introduced into a table decoration in the following manner:—But for the centre of a vivid green—such as the oak, the beech, or the mountain fern—into a pot of dark green, brown, or very dull red pottery; round that have four glasses with about eight inches high, holding each in a well-grown cluster of the berries, and one or two leaves just changing into scarlet; then between place small glass squares, or, still better, tiny pots of Devonshire or Vauxhall wax, holding harlebells and small fern leaves. To a long table this may be adapted by having six groups of berries in all, and a bunch of harlebells opposite each cluster of wine-glasses. The loose flowers, heather, and other umbelliferous plants, are useful for large decorative masses, and as they are never sold in shops, and therefore must be gathered by the artist, the little bunches of nothing may prove that other plants are plentiful in their vicinity, and will, therefore, probably assist to bring out their beauty in rooms. I mentioned last month how pretty fool's parsley went with pippins and dandelions, and this is only an instance of how these pale greenish-white heads of tiny flowers reline others of stronger colouring to colour it. This class of plant is marvellously complex and beautiful, and is often useful in wild arrangements where the flowers are hardly wanted.

Striking effects can be made this month with aquatics, combining, say, a few tall bulrushes, some scarlet-seeded iris pods, sedge, and large flowering grass. But I must say that the prevalent idea that such plants will last all through the winter; they will last, indeed, but as poor dead mummies, not as living beings; and nothing but the most neglectful hand could make this class of plant valuable. The foliage too, of this class of plant is marvellously complex and beautiful, and is often useful in wild arrangements where the flowers are hardly wanted.

There is a meaning in the tint and form of the least conspicuous vegetable, and even if we cannot discover what this is, we can at least be careful not to utterly falsify and destroy it.

A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE G. P. O.;

WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON LETTER-WRITING.

In this age of pens, ink, and paper, when letter-writing is no longer the privilege of the few, but the property of the many, what a small proportion of people, even those who have a knowledge of the wonderful and marvellous machine at work which takes antecedent and unreviewed care of all the multitudinous correspondence that pours hour by hour into the G. P. O. Let us see what becomes of all these letters, when, as we carelessly drop our portion of them into the letter-boxes, "the property of the Postmaster-General."

It was after five o'clock on a spring evening that we made our way through St. Paul's Churchyard, on a visit to the G. P. O. of London. We had got an order to see the Telegraph Department and the great sorting rooms. It was a pity we could only afford a cursory visit to the former—that vast and wonderful place, with its hundreds of clerks busy night and day—for the offices are never closed. Ceaseless was the hum of the machinery as the first copies poured out in long lines, and was as readily translated to us by our guide—scrapes of news from all parts of the world, the latest electioneering triumphs, and the lust of the Book of Elisha—hopelessly intricate to the unintelligent all seemed. But our anxiety to get a peep behind the scenes over the way interfered with our desire for further information from the telegraph clerk.

We took our stand close behind the great receivers; through the slit one could see into the station mouth, and a crowd of eager officers pushing very way to deposit their letters, cards, and papers, which fell in one unceasing stream into the receivers, and were as quickly ready as possible by steps to the sorting room. A comical story was told us, illustrating the nervous haste which sometimes befalls late comers. One evening the clock was on the stroke of six, when an errand-boy was seen running breathlessly up the steps to reach the box before it closed; in one hand he had a pair of fowls, while in the other he held a document for post. The excitement was too much to accept the post with a churl; at the same moment the lid closed, and the poor youth was left staring disconsolately at his master's letter still in his hand. The first process with our letters, after taking them from the receivers, is called facing. Thousand are thrown on the tables, and with great rapidity of speed, i.e., the letters are put in order in each postoffice, each postoffice being at the right-hand corner of the letter. Those letters which have the Queen's head in any other position on the envelope are always sorted first, and are put in a separate packet. One always looks upon a badly-stamped letter as a vulgarity; but it would be well if people remembered that the postal officials when they put on stamps in irregular ways.

The "facing" is complete, the next thing is to deface the stamps. This is done very quickly.
A clerk takes a large packet of faced letters, draws them rapidly, one by one, under the post-office stamped, which at the same time places the stamp, and gives the postmark. Then he speeds up the machine, and the letter is on its way to the home, or how insignificant the little village in which we live; yet from the great heart in London, how remotely removed, how insignificant this life is felt in the very lowest habitation of our land. It conveys this life in a wonderful way through all the complex system of our nineteenth century existence.

Letter-writing is far from being a pleasure to all. Some have no facility, and consequent dislike to, writing letters; while others have more or less of a drudgery. To be able to write a good letter, to say the right thing at the right moment, to know the right gift, and to be greatly coveted. I believe that can be acquired, though without doubt "the pen of a ready writer" is bestowed by nature. But I do believe that the sins of emission into which those who "hate writing" so grievously fall can be avoided. When a letter of congratulation is received, or when it accompanies some present, it is useless to answer it at once; delay but increases the distance between us. Let us hope none of our young readers forget to acknowledge a gift, however small; be sure to send a letter of thanks later than expected. We write, I fear, far too many letters. No doubt the penny post brings in a large return to the Crown; but yet I think the incalculable courage of a prodigality of stamps and paper, and often the time thus wasted might be more usefully employed. However, the fact remains that a large part of our business or pleasure all our lives, and I think it would not be unprofitable if our readers gave some thought to a subject of very general interest.

What a vast variety of letters are written in the course of a year! The types and subjects of such letters would take a paper all to itself. Letters of congratulation—in this world pleasure and pain are closely intermingled—letters of censure or of praise, letters of business, letters of advice.

Then there are the different stages through which our correspondence gives us: first, the laborious effort of early childhood, penned in large round-hand to the dear father or mother, or the near one. The cause of anxiety is "What to say next."

A few years later comes the gushing period, when the bosom friends part; they vow to write often, and Her Majesty's mails carry rapture's epistles from "dear girl" to another. The words are usually deeply underlined, and often the touching request, the shadowed "burn this letter," is the best thing in the whole bundle. If it is to say the custom of underlining the words does not always pass away with this stage, which is usually got over in the 'teens,' for the habit of underlining is far too thorough. Used in strict moderation, underlining adds point and meaning to words, which might otherwise be lost; but beyond that it only serves to make the writer feel that the words have been received, and he is thought of. The writer has occasionally received letters, that, if read aloud with all the emphasis requested, the strain of voice and lungs would be quite senseless.

I will not now stop to speak of that large class of letters, which are few who have not written at some portion of their lives—"love letters," I mean. It is true that this section is by no means limited to the category of letters of courtship or betrothal; they are the experience of many in their married life. If one or two foolish letters are thrown into the Duke of Cambridge, who holds an official appointment—is excused.

Of one thing more I must speak, and that is the book which contains copies of curious addresses received from time to time, as well as some occasional strange and illegible handwriting. How cleverly it is done, and how decipher those extraordinary scratchs! Some of our most eminent men, known all over the world, have addressed letters, whose after a method such as no one except a master versed in the art of calligraphy can read. We thought the comical addresses in that book, and the ready wit of some of them, would afford "Mr. Punch" many amusing topics.