

to every detail of the petty tittle-tattle which passes current in every rural community. It was this curiosity which originally caused him to apply for the position of postmaster and which under his management had made the post office a sort of news exchange where all had the opportunity of hearing the worst things possible about their neighbors.

The postmaster of Crouchville was a bachelor, although it was said he had been in his time a suitor for the hand of several young ladies in the town. By becoming postmaster he contrived to put himself in the way of having his feelings lacerated many times a week for every letter which his fair ones received was of course a love letter and written by some successful rival. Much wrestling with adverse circumstances of this nature had made Plummer prematurely old. He found it every year more wearing on him to keep the run of the love making, gossip and scandal of the town, but he persevered with undiminished zeal.

The post office of Crouchville comprised an outer room for the public and an inner room for the postmaster himself. Few were ever admitted into this sacred apartment, for it was there that in some mysterious fashion Silvanus contrived to become possessed of the secrets of his neighbors. Long practice had made him extremely skillful at the work of opening letters and closing them without leaving any trace of the process to which they had been subjected. A long thin knife, sharper than any razor, a little gum arabic mixed with alcohol and a fine camel's hair brush were all the tools he required to effect his purpose and

unlock the treasure house of knowledge. The postmaster was wary enough to keep these implements hidden away and to do his work in private. Even his most trusted cronies Jeff. Burton and Tom Coy although often permitted to enter his inner sanctuary and regularly informed as to what was going on never were told how the postmaster's knowledge was acquired. They all argued that in point of smartness Silvanus was "jest extraordinary."

Silvanus Plummer, like other prominent men, had enemies who plotted his destruction. The most persevering of these was Jack Halsey a thriving trader of the place, who had become impressed with the idea that the postmaster had opened one of his business letters, and obtained therefrom some information which enabled a rival trader to forestall him in an important operation. The rival trader was the postmaster's friend Tom Coy. Halsey vented his wrath in a number of forcible expressions and awaited a chance "to get even with old Sil," as he expressed it. As a preliminary step he carried round a paper addressed to the Postmaster General asking that a change be made in the Crouchville post office. This received many signatures and went on to Ottawa in due course.

Jack Halsey was a bachelor of thirty-five, who avowed his intention of never entering into the holy state of matrimony. When he was eighteen he had fallen in love with a woman ten years older than himself, and being disappointed in his wishes at that time, had recorded a vow against the married state. So in spite of the many sweet female smiles that were wasted on him, he went on his own