

A DOUBLE PLOT.

A Post Office Story.

By Malcolm Thackery Ross.

CHAPTER I.

Silvanus Plummer was and had been for more than thirty years the postmaster of Crouchville, a town whose greatness possibly lay in the future, but certainly did not exist in the present. Silvanus, or old Sill as he was universally called, had been appointed forty years before, and had contrived to hold on to his office through all the political changes which had taken place. The postmaster of Crouchville took his color from the times, and made it the study of his life to range himself on the strongest side, a peculiarity which exposed him to many sarcastic observations.

"The old sucker," said Captain Pipes, as he blew a great cloud of tobacco smoke away, "jest sticks like a limpet to a rock. It is nothing short of public robbery to keep him there."

"It's my opinion," said Captain Pipon reflectively, "that he'll stay. He's been buried up and forgotten like a fossil and nobody at Ottawa knows anything about him."

The views thus expressed may be said to have represented the average

opinion of Crouchville which was mostly hostile to the postmaster, at all events behind his back. A rural postmaster usually receives more open flattery and more underhand abuse than most men, and Silvanus Plummer was no exception to this rule. Almost every one found it to his interest to be very civil and even deferential to him for if so disposed he had it in his power to delay or even to make way with important letters without the injured party having much chance of redress. But when the postmaster's back was turned his faults were not forgotten. It was darkly whispered that he was in the habit of opening all the letters, especially love letters, that he could contrive to read and there were even tales told of money letters being missing which had never been accounted for.

Silvanus Plummer had originally been a small man and age had not increased his size. He had a decided stoop, a weazened face and a pair of sharp little eyes with a singularly fox-like expression. His voice was sharp and shrill and generally pitched in a high key. But his great weakness was an inclination to gossip. He was consumed with curiosity to get