

THE POSTMASTER

"Wait!" I interrupted. "Business fust, and pleasure afterwards. I'm here to pay my debts."

"Debts?" says he, wonderin'.

"Yes," I says. "Did you get a hat from me four year or so ago?"

He laughed. "Yes, I did," he says. "I wrote you that I did. I knew I should win that bet. You couldn't stay idle to save your soul."

"There was another bet, too, if you recollect. A bet with a five-year limit on it. The limit won't be up till next fall, so here I am — and here's the other hat."

I set the leather box on the table. He stared at it and then at me.

"What do you mean?" he says, slow. "I don't remember. . . . Why, yes — I do! You don't mean to tell me that you're —"

"That's the hat, ain't it?" I cut in. "You're a man of judgment, Mr. Pike, and any time you want to set up professionally as a prophet I'd like to take stock in the company."

He was beginnin' to smile.

"Then —" says he — "Why, then this must be —"

I cut in and stopped him.

"Hold on," says I. "Hold on! I'm prouder to be able to say it than I ever was of anything else in this world, and I sha'n't let you say it fust. Mr.