

the contents of his letter secret from the others so that the three attacks on the post master will be independent in a measure."

"Very good," replied Nevers, "but the subjects of the correspondence had better be settled so that each may take a different one. Let each of us write about something the most improbable that can be imagined. I'll open a correspondence with my friend Porteous in New York in regard to a lot of imaginary operations in Wall street."

"And I," said Dr. Whitney, "will buy on paper an orange grove in Florida from old Sands of Baltimore."

"But what had I better write about?" asked Jack.

"Take something nobody would suspect you of being engaged in; a series of love letters would be best," replied Nevers. "I'll lend you a complete letter writer so that you will be able to write the most thrilling epistles, but you must have some smart fellow that can write like a woman for a confederate."

"Only fancy me writing love letters," replied Jack, "but I'll do it if I only can get hold of a suitable correspondent to do the other part of the business."

This weighty plot against the peace and comfort of Silvanus Plummer being thus arranged the friends separated.

## CHAPTER II.

Jack Halsey felt in very good humor with himself and with the

world in general, and he walked home after this meeting. To a third party his little plot for the discomfiture of the post-master may have seemed crude and even absurd, but Jack himself thought it mighty clever. No small part of his satisfaction over his imaginary correspondence arose from the fact, that his mother would be certain to hear the reports about his fictitious courtship, and would be as much deceived as any one else. "The dear old lady," said Jack to himself, "will think her plans for marrying me off have come to something, but won't she be disgusted when she finds out the real truth."

To estimate the full weight of this last remark, the reader should understand that Mrs. Halsey had, by no means confined her efforts to change Jack's condition to admonition and advice. For ten years or more, she had seldom failed to have a young female companion in the house, for company for herself, as she affirmed, but as Jack fully believed, for the purpose of entrapping him into matrimony. As soon as one interesting young lady had taken her departure from the house Mrs. Halsey would immediately declare that the place was duller than a jail, and make arrangements to replace her by a new importation. As she had plenty of relatives, down to the most remote degrees of cousinship, and an abundance of acquaintances, and at her house was a particularly pleasant one to stay at, there were always agreeable young ladies ready and even anxious to visit her.

It was a wonderful proof of the tenacity with which Jack's mother clung to an idea that after more than ten years of this method of procedure