

political or family. Still we like our few letters to be regarded with respectful reverence. But Harry, we felt sure, closely examined the outside of every letter that we received—his reason we could not make out. Newspapers sent by absent friends, received the same inspection. Every cast-off envelope was carefully and silently secured, for the sake, we thought, of studying and comparing the handwriting. We noticed, also, that, young as he was, more letters arrived for him than for us, the contents of which he never communicated. Strange!

Yesterday Emma's forbearance could hold out no longer. At the postman's rap, Harry jumped up as usual to get first to the door for the mail. This he always attempted to do. He returned with two letters, one half hidden in the cuff of his sleeve, while he devoured the direction of the other with his eyes. Emma could not stand this any longer.

"That is *my* letter, sir," she observed, sternly, "and for the future I wish my letters to be brought me directly, without being quite so closely examined. In my time, young people did not take such liberties."

"Because in your time—" stammered Harry, not daring to finish.

"Because why, sir? I insist on knowing."

"Because in your very, *very* young time, aunt, there were no such things as postage stamps. They are a magnificent invention of modern times. Here is the letter, but pray do give me the envelope."

"For what? What interest or right, sir, can you possibly have to inspect the postmarks of my correspondence. And, now you talk of correspondence, I should like to be informed what is the nature of yours. It may be all right and proper, and I dare say it is, but until you are one-and-twenty, and we are relieved of the responsibility of your guardianship, I may observe that your uncle and myself ought to be made acquainted with its nature, and to have some idea of the persons with whom it takes place."

Emma uttered this little lecture with all the dry decision she could muster, looking at me, at the close of her speech, to second the motion. Then, as she really loved her nephew, and was too kind-hearted to feel easy while administering reproof, she made a retreat and avoided further discussion by breaking the seal of her letter and becoming absorbed in its perusal. I said nothing, Harry blushed, not a guilty blush, but a blush as it were protesting against unjust treatment. He soon left the house—as he afterwards confessed, to make private arrangements with the postman.

During his absence, I went up-stairs to my room, to look out of the window with my hands in my pockets, as is my wont when anything occurs to puzzle me. His room door stood ajar, suggesting the possibility of finding a clew to the correspondence of which Emma disapproved. In a snug corner of his book-case was the well-worn ciphering-book, which would not have invited further attention but for its bloated appearance, so to speak. It had grown plethoric and fat. It seemed to have taken in more good things than it could well digest. It was filled to repletion, witness sundry cracks, in spite of the extra binding duly charged in the school bill. I took it down, really hoping to find a further triumph of my nephew's mathematical