

way, making a great deal of money at his business, but remaining single. It was said indeed that Halsey was the richest man in Crouchville, and perhaps he was. At all events, he was rich enough to maintain a fine establishment and to support a wife in handsome style.

Halsey lived in a spacious mansion, a short distance from the village, and his mother kept house for him. Mrs. Halsey was more than sixty years of age and, as Jack was her only son, she was naturally very proud of him. But she was totally opposed to his anti-marriage policy, and did not hesitate to speak her mind freely on the subject.

"Jack," she would say to him, "don't be a fool; go and get yourself a wife. I do not care who you marry; and your wife when you get her can just come in here and take charge of things as quickly as she likes. I won't be jealous for I'm tired of keeping house, that's the truth. I would sooner you married Annie there the help out of the kitchen, than to go on in this heathenish fashion. What's going to become of you when your old mother dies if you don't get a wife now?"

Mrs. Hasley would frequently go on in this fashion at Jack to the great discomfort of that good natured but somewhat obstinate individual. He loved and respected his mother very much and with good reason for she had been his best friend at all times, but he was not willing to give up his foolish notion of single blessedness. So when matters reached this stage Jack, instead of continuing an argument in which he was certain to get the worst of it, would take himself out of the house and seek the companion-

ship of his friends of the male sex.

Dr. Whitney and Lawyer Nevers were Hasley's most frequent and most trusted companions. Like himself, both were comparatively young and both were unmarried. There was another bond of sympathy between them, in fact that they had a grievance against the postmaster, and were bent on making that functionary suffer for his curiosity. If Mr. Plummer could have heard all that the three friends said about him his ears would have felt very warm indeed.

"It is no use talking, boys," said Dr. Whitney on one occasions when the three met, "we must do something to expose this old rascal Plummer. It is really not safe to put an important letter in the office."

"That's so," responded Lawyer Nevers, "as I know to my cost; but what's to be done? What do you say, Halsey?"

Jack Halsey had acquired considerable reputation as a practical joker and had filled the town with merriment on several occasions by reason of his exploits in that line. Jack therefore felt when he was thus appealed to by Nevers that something weighty and final was expected of him.

"What do you say," he suggested, "to a fictitious correspondence? Get up a lot of letters, for instance, that are all a sham, keep them a dead secret from everybody, and when their contents get out, we will be able to trace the reports to the postmaster and run the old villain down."

"A good idea," said Nevers.

"First class," responded Dr. Wilson.

"The best plan" continued Jack, "would be for us to get up three sets of correspondence and let each keep