

The Man in the Home

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Hugh S. Eayrs

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WHEN Thompson, the business manager of the Montreal "Weekly Dispatch," told his stenographer to let the sole applicant for the advertised vacancy of office boy come in, he did so abstractedly. The position of office boy on the "Dispatch" was not the sort of post to warrant much discrimination or anxious thought on the part of the man who had it to give away. Moreover, George Thompson was not like some men who insist that choosing an office boy is just as important as choosing an advertising manager at ten or fifteen times the boy's salary. A new boy had to come in, and his selection was not a matter for very careful forethought.

The boy came in. He was a curly-headed youngster of about twelve years with dark eyes always twinkling, and a nose that left no doubt as to his nationality. In one hand he held his cap, while the other grasped the lapel of a somewhat ancient coat, about three sizes too large for him. Thompson raised his eyes, looked at the boy for a moment, and said, "Ah, a Jew, eh?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "a Jew," and he hurried on, "if that means I ain't good enough, why I'll go right away."

He stopped awkwardly. Now George Thompson, business manager of the "Dispatch" did not love the sons of Israel. Why, he didn't know. Not many of us do know why we disdain the Jews so much.

"Did you say I was to go?" said the lad.

Thompson looked up. "No, I don't remember saying so. Come in. Close the door."

The boy did so.

"What's your name?" asked Thompson.

"Levy," was the reply.

"Levy what, or perhaps I should say, what Levy?"

"Harry Levy," said the boy. "You had an ad in the paper for an office boy, didn't you? Well, I think I could do the work. I'm quick, and I'm careful. Look at this suit, Mister! Had it four years, and he looks good even now," he ended.

Thompson eyed the lad sternly. "I don't remember that we were discussing suits," he said, dryly. "Ever been in an office before?"

"Once."

"Where?"

"Down in Wellington Street. I was in a coal man's office."

"How long were you there?"

"Two weeks."

"Why did you leave?" asked Thompson.

"Didn't like it," came the answer.

"The boss didn't like me anyway. Said a Jew never did turn out any good to anybody but himself."

"I suppose you took good care to get your money before you quit," said Thompson. Somehow, it didn't seem so funny after he had said it.

"Yep," returned the lad, laconically.

"Well, I suppose a Jew is as good as a Gentile after all. No reason why he shouldn't be. What money do you want?"

"Five dollars," came the quick reply, "and I want it regular."

"All right. Hang up your cap, and come with me."

And five minutes afterwards, the "Dispatch" had a new office boy.

The experiences of that boy in the newspaper office would make a bookful of good reading. On the Friday after he started, he went to Thompson and said, twirling the inevitable cap the while, "I won't be in to-morrow, Mr. Thompson."

"Why not?"

"To-morrow's our Sabbath. I gotta go to the Synagogue."

"Is this going to be a regular thing, Harry?"

"Yep, but I'll come down at eight in the morning all the other days to make up, if you like. You're not going to fire me, Mr. Thompson?" he concluded, anxiously.

"Well, I don't know. We must have a boy here Saturday mornings, to take copy up to the printers you know."

"Leave it to me, Mr. Thompson. I'll get someone to take my place. It'll mean fifty cents though," he added ruefully.

A few days later he was at Thompson's elbow again.

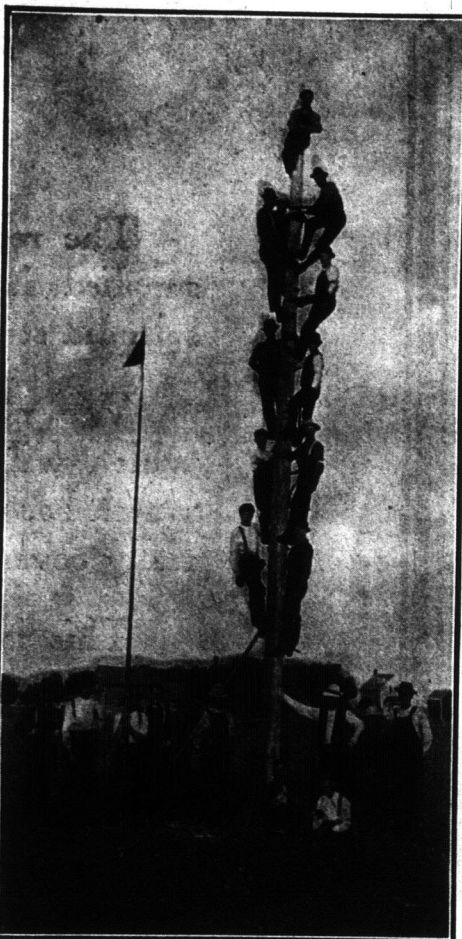
"I've been figuring, Mr. Thompson, that it would pay the 'Dispatch' to get a wheel for me," he advised with the utmost sangfroid.

"Oh indeed. And why, my financier friend?"—this with elaborate sarcasm.

"Well, every time I go to the printers it costs me a dime. If you got me a wheel, it would soon pay for itself. Besides, a wheel's quicker'n a street-car."

Harry was duly accommodated with a wheel.

He was a queer young mortal, but everybody in the office grew to like him, for he was willing and energetic, and



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had a fund of quaint sayings. One day, I was waiting for the elevator to come down, and I heard a husky voice that I knew could belong to none but Harry say, "You're stuck on yourself because you make six dollars a week working for a butcher, but I work on a news paper. I'm in a regular business." I didn't hear the butcher boy's reply.

Bye and bye we noticed that Harry lengthened his lunch hour. It was usually about twenty past one instead of one o'clock when he got back now. Someone must have mentioned it to Thompson, for I heard him hauling Harry over the coals.

"It's only a few minutes, each day, sir, and I need them, Mr. Thompson," said the boy in his usual old-fashioned way.

"Why do you need them. What multifarious interests have you got, Mr. Levy?" asked George Thompson, with more of his sarcasm. "You are not attending too many board meetings, I hope."

Harry didn't answer at first. Then, "I'll try and be back at one o'clock. But it makes it so long for me to be away from them," he said, and without any explanation as to who "them" might be, he marched out of the office. "Thompson ain't such a bad head," he confided to me afterwards.

It was about this time that Harry was transferred to the editorial department altogether. His duties consisted in being at the editor's beck and call. The only thing he did now was to run messages for the chief, and then present himself at his post again. It took some getting used to. The first day he was sent to the printers. When he came

back, he ran pell-mell into Cooper's office, his cap still on his head, and his breath coming in gasps.

"Mr. Robinson said it was 'Rush,'" he whispered, handing a proof to the chief.

Cooper looked round. "How dare you disturb me when I am writing?" he asked majestically. Then, "Take that cap off your head when you speak to me, boy."

Very soon, however, Harry got to understand the chief, and found as we all had found that there was nothing of the bear about him except the manners. Cooper was the surliest of men to get on with, and the most inconsistent. But Harry learned how to handle him. Whether he was smiled at or sworn at, he gravely twirled his cap, and said nothing, as if to intimate that he simply could not think of quarreling.

He still took his extra twenty minutes at lunch time, and it gradually lengthened into half an hour. Cooper caught him one day.

"You're supposed to be back from lunch at one o'clock," he snapped. "Now I won't have you walking into my office half an hour late. If it happens again, you're fired. Understand?"

For a week or so after this, Harry was back punctually at one o'clock. But two or three days later he stole into the chief's office at twenty to two. Cooper looked up.

"Go and get your money, Harry," he said.

Harry went pale. "I'm not fired, Mr. Cooper?" he queried, and the tears came into his eyes.

"You quit this staff at one minute past one to-day," said Cooper. "Go and get your money."

Harry went.

About a month later I was at work upon an article dealing with the slum problem in Montreal. I went into the down-town section and saw the conditions. I was lucky enough to strike a young minister who was engaged upon settlement work, and I asked him to put me on the track of what I wanted.

"I've been called to a house in that little court over there," he said. "One of our workers told me there were two kiddies in a room there, and no father and mother to look after them. You'd better come along."

At the top of an old, ramshackled house, we found the room which we sought. The whole atmosphere was sordid. The house was filthy, and the people in it degrees more so.

"Hush," said the minister, holding up his hand, "I can hear a kiddie crying."

We opened the door, and went in. There in the corner of a bare, bare room, with a baby in his arms and crying bitterly, was—Harry.

"Why, Harry?" I said, touching him on the shoulder. "What is this. Who is the baby, and why are you here all alone?"

He dried his eyes, and told me his story. The reason why he had had that extra ten or twenty minutes at lunch time came out then. His mother was ill—dying. Harry's five per week was the only money they had. Harry, that youngster of twelve, had been the only support. As he said, he was the "man in the house." Every day at noon he had hurried home, and looked after his mother and washed the baby, and tidied the house.

"And the day after I was fired, my mother died," he said, and cried bitterly.

"And how have you existed since then?"

"The Rabbi was kind. He helped me. But it has been so hard," he said.

* * *

Harry is now financial editor on the "Dispatch." But every Saturday and Sunday and most every evening in the week, you may see him with a little dark-haired sister by his side, gravely taking his walks abroad. And sometimes he talks to her of the days in the little garret, and how he was fired because he had to be "the man in the house."

The subject of conversation was canine intelligence, and the American was speaking. "I once took a dog of mine to a station platform, when it suddenly stopped and pointed at a man by the bookstall. Struck by this curious action, I approached the man, and found that his name was Partridge!"