

"FLESH AND BLOOD."

HE was at once confidential. Perhaps there was some pathological reason not unconnected with the influence of potent spirits on the mind to account for this. I am no judge of such things, and I make it a rule to take men as I find them. This one I found to be not only confidential but loquacious. He occupied a corner seat in a third-class compartment of a South-bound train. His destination, I found out later, was Carstairs. He introduced himself to me in what might be described as a roundabout way.

A clerically-collared gentleman who threatened to invade our privacy was the immediate cause of the introduction. "All seats engaged," thundered my friend in the loudest and most menacing voice I have ever heard, whereat the ministerial one backed out unceremoniously and slid along the corridor as if escaping from sin. It was here that the introduction took place.

"Ministers!" my friend continued, this time addressing me: "ministers are a' right in their place, but that's the pulpit. To sit in a compartment frae here to Carstairs wi' a minister's mair than flesh and blood could stan'!"

I ventured to say there might be something in it.

"There is," he went on: "ye see it's like this; they're awfu' crampin'; ye canna cough or dae onything like that without sayin' 'excuse me'; an' it so happens I hae a piece in my pocket I want to eat afore I get to Carstairs, an' that's no' to speak o' a wee hauf. Well, ye canna dae thae things wi' a minister glowerin' at

ye. No' that I care. A' the same ye're better without them—except at christenings, an' marriages for that maitter. Forbye, I lost my job yesterday an' I'm no' exactly in what ye wad ca' a religious mood."

"Serious business, that," I remarked.

"Ye've said it!" he replied: "an' that's the wey I didna want ony ministers in here; I canna guarantee no' to swear afore I get to Carstairs. Ye see I had been in the job a year, a year come Monday, that's to say, and I thoct I was entitled to a rise. So I dichts my face wi' my bratt, an' I sails up to the boss—ye see I was working in a bonded store. Talk about politeness! Ye never heard the like o't.

"Well, Gourlay!" he said superior-like—ye see Gourlay's my name. Oh, a perky ane, the boss; they ca' him the Managing Director; worked himself up frae the ranks; motor caurs an' a' the rest o't! They're a' the same, the kind that work themselves up—I'm up an' you're doon, an' I'm gaun to be up and you're gaun to be doon—that's their creed, if ye can ca' it a creed. So I says to him, says I: 'Weel sir, I was jist thinkin' it was about time I was gettin' a rise.'

"A rise!" he says very polite-like as if he didna understand the meanin' o' the word. But I was ready for him.

"Yes," I says. 'A rise, in ither words an' increase o' pey.'

"Oh!" says he: 'hoo long have you been here?'

"A year next Monday," says I.

"An' when you came here," says he, 'you were quite pleased to get the job?' I said I was. 'An' what do you want a rise for?' he then asks me. Noo, Mister, I put it to you, is that no' mair than flesh and blood

could stan'? Whit dae I want a rise for!!! For fun, I suppose. It fair got my goat, so I opened oot on him. 'Hoo dae ye expect a man to keep a wife an' four weans on twa pound five a week,' I says.

"'I ken nothing about yer family affairs,' says he: 'Naw, but I dae,' says I, 'an' you canna expect weans to honour their faither and mither, especially when their faither's pey'll no' keep them in claes and meat.' Wi' that he starts oot on his high horse, so I gie'd him tit for tat. He ca'd me an ungrateful fellow. Mind ye that—'an ungrateful fellow!' Well, to mak' a long story short, I ca'd the feet frae him as the sayin' is—no violence, naething like that; but whit I said to him ye canna find in print—ye see, I couldna hae telt ye the hauf o' this if that minister had been in—the up-shot o' it was that I telt him to keep his bloomin' job. For twa curdies I wid hae gi'en him a dunt on the jaw, but he's only a hauffin, an' he has a wife o' his ain at hame tae; an' there's naething mair humiliatin', as they say, than for a man to be brocht hame to his wife, especially if he looks as if he had been struck by a steam road roller. No, sir," my friend continued philosophically, "I'll tak' their pey, but I'll tak' nane o' their cheek. I'm darnt if I will. 'Keep yer bloomin' job,' I says, an' wi' that I tak's aff my apron an' throws it in his face."

I ought to have explained earlier that we were not alone all the way. At Motherwell a stout lady of the bien practical type came in. It was her privilege to hear part of my friend's dialogue, but she evinced little interest in it. Only at the end when the man of flesh and blood was describing the apron incident did she look in our direction, rather in *his* direction. It was a

nasty, scornful, withering look. Fortunately he did not see it. He proceeded with his tale: "Ye see I'm just gaun oot to a guid-brither o' mine's, to see if he can put me in the wey o' anither job."

At this point the stout lady exploded. The train was slowing into Carstairs. She addressed him.

"Do you know what *you* are?" she asked.

"Me?" the strong man responded.

"Yes, you!"

"Well, whit am I?"

"You're nothing but an auld blawn-up blether; a gasbag."

The strong man winced and made to retaliate, but she fixed him with her eye. He looked oncc, a sad, wistful look, then wearily took his way along the platform, muttering. It was obviously more than flesh and blood could stand.