

## Mr. Botsford's car

No. 11

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Connecticut)

TITLE: Connecticut Clockmaker (Botsford)

WRITER Francis Donovan

DATE 1/13/39 WDS. PP. 6

CHECKER DATE

SOURCES GIVEN (?) Interview

COMMENTS

W15096

"Living Lore in N.E." Series

Francis Donovan

Thomaston, Conn.

Jan. 13, 1939

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Mr. Botsford's car has been returned to him today by the garagemen. He explains that new rings have been put in, carbon has been scraped out, oil changed and so forth, and that he is just about to "take her out for a test." He invites me to accompany him. The little coupe climbs sturdily over Plymouth Hill, and Mr. Botsford is highly pleased. "Didn't even have her down to the floor," he says. "Look at that--" pointing to the instrument panel--" she isn't even heated up."

Ensnconced once more in his Morris chair by the kitchen stove, Mr. Botsford expatiates at length upon the virtues of his car. "Six years old," he says proudly, "and never had the bottom off'n her yet."

"I always take her up to Pederson's," he continues. "Pederson ban always done my work and he understands the car. Charges a mite high, but I figger it's worth it. That feller keeps right up with the latest improvements. He has to buy books every year and read up on 'em. He studies all the popular cars. Tell you where any part goes in a minute.

"He takes my car apart, and throws the nuts and bolts in a box and by God he can scramble 'em all up and take 'em out one by one and put 'em in the right places. I couldn't do it, and you couldn't do it. Pederson gets paid for what he knows, and it's worth what he charges.

"He gets a lot of work because he's a damn good mechanic. I like to stand there and watch him. He says the only car he don't 2 like to work on is a Ford. Says they are too damn hard to take apart and put together.

"And say," Mr Botsford gets up and goes into the "front room."

"Speakin' about cars," he says, returning with a faded catalog which he thrusts into my hands, "look at that. Found it while I was lookin' over some junk the other day. I saved it because I thought you might like to see it."

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The booklet announces the “First Annual Automobile Show, Waterbury, November, 1920.” It is remarkable for the large number of makes which have since been discontinued, the ungainly box-like styles of the 1920 models, and the prices, which in view of the values offered today seem ridiculously exorbitant. The youthful industry, just beginning to flower into lusty growth, was faced with an unprecedented demand which had created a shortage on the open market, according to the program. Potential customers were advised to place orders at once in order to obviate a long wait for delivery.

“That's quite a souvenir, ain't it?” asks Mr. Botsford. “Look at all them cars they don't make any more. The Pilot, the Dort, the Briscoe, the Haynes, the Apperson, the Chalmers, the Oakland. Funny looking, ain't they?” They were, undeniably, funny looking. Mr. Botsford takes the catalog, replaces it in one of his cupboards, and resumes his seat.

“What was we talkin' about yestiddy? Cats, for one thing, wasn't it? You ever see them go for catnip? I had a catnip mouse for my feller, here, but the cat next door took a greater fancy 3 to it than Nigger did. He used to come over and fool with that thing, roll on it and bite it. He tore it all up in no time.

“Used to be some catnip growin' up back of the house here. I took catnip tea, many a time when I was younger. The cats used to go up there and play in that stuff--they dug it all up in no time.

“We never did talk about herbs, did we? ‘Course I don't claim to be no authority on it. There's lots of folks perhaps even today knows more about it than I do. All I know is what my father taught me, and he got it from his father before him, and so on. But it's kind of dyin' out now'days. You see, in the old days, they lived so far from doctors, some of them, that they had to know simple remedies for their ails. Note Herbs

“And I think that's what Nature grows them herbs for. They was put on earth for man to use. The animals have an instinct for ‘em. That's why cats go for catnip.

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"We used to go out and get a lot of different things. They was spearmint, and mountain mint and horse mint. Lot of that mountain mint used to grow up on Cedar Mountain. Then there was balsam and boneset, for colds. I got a bag o' boneset here now." Mr. Botsford goes into his pantry, emerges with a bag from which he draws a few yellowish, crumbling leaves. "Taste it," he says, handing me some. I comply, not without trepidation, but the result is not unpleasant. "Bitter ain't it?" he asks. It is.

"Hot boneset tea," he says. "Best thing in the world for colds. Old Doc Woodruff used to drink a cup of hot boneset tea every night before he went to bed.

"Then we used to get swamproot. That's just the root of a 4 skunk cabbage and hamp. The women used to take that hamp and steam the leaves and make kind of a plaster out of it. It was supposed to be good for takin' out inflammations, and it was, too. Then there was bloodroot and sumach berries--I can't tell you what all these things was used for, but I know they used to got 'em. And there was mellein mullein leaf tea. You take the leaves and boil 'em down with sugar and it made the finest cough medicine you could ask for.

"Pulverized bloodroot was supposed to be good for tonsilitis. They used to blow it down your throat with a tube. White oak bark flour they used to blow down your throat, too, if you had a long palate. Cured me of it, that way. Old Doc Goodwin was gonna cut me.

"Green horseradish leaves they'd make into something like a mustard planter and put on the back of your neck, for a stiff neck or the like o' that. Princess pine they used for old folks that had trouble passin' water.

"I remember one time my father got scratched by a cat. Made quite a wound in his arm. My mother heated a shovel right away, and sprinkled sugar on it. Hold his arm over the smoke. He prob'ly would have got infected, if she hadn't.

"They used to make poke-weed poultices for women who had sore or diseased breasts. I used to go out and get some of this stuff for old Doc Pease, that used to keep the drug

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store. He was what they called an eclectic doctor. The doctors now'days you know, they don't like any of that stuff. They won't give these herb doctors a chance. That's why they're dyin' out, and a lot of this 5 stuff is beginnin' to get lost. There's some could tell you more about it than I can.

“Blackberry roots is good for dysentery. My father had it one winter, had it bad. My mother made me go out in back and dig up the blackberry bushes. I cut the roots off, and brought ‘em in the house and cleaned ‘em and boiled ‘em and she brewed him a tea. Cured him right off. Blackberry brandy is the next best thing, if you don't use the roots.

“Slippery elm was used a lot for poultices, and just plain onions. Put the poultice on the bottom of your feet. You know that is the best place there is to draw stuff out. The bottom of your feet, the skin is tender, or somethin', and it draws out just as easy as can be.”

Mr. Botsford attends to his pipe, which he has been holding in his hand for several minutes. When he has it going to his satisfaction, he resumes.

“There's some funny things in this world, boy. Some funny things. There's a lot of knowledge that ain't been written down in books. There's a lot of things they don't know such about, too. What do you think of this telepathy? Note [Beliefs?]

“Tell you a story. Years ago there was a book down in the library, was in great demand. Everybody I knew was tellin' me to read it. I can't even remember the name of it now, but that ain't important, I asked two-three of them to tell me what it was about, but they wouldn't do it. Said it would spoil the book for me. Well, 6 I finally got it. I read two or three pages and I put it down. I knew everything that was goin' to happen in that book. I knew it just as good as if I had learned it by heart.

“How do I account for it? Why I read that book in their minds. That's how I account for it. I swear I never laid eyes on it before. Sounds funny, don't it? You heard of other things happenin' like that haven't you? Maybe not just the same. But you heard of people havin'

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a hunch or a warnin' or whatever you might call it, that somebody they cared for was in trouble, or maybe dyin' and havin' it turn out to be true.

“Did you ever play that game where people sit in a room, and all think of a certain object, and somebody is blindfolded, and he goes and picks that object up? Well, I have. I been blindfolded, and I picked up what they was thinkin' about. A good many people can do it every time.

“I ain't got no idea what causes it. Nobody has. Some of these scientists won't even admit it's done. But seein' is believin'.

“All this stuff ain't much use to you, is it? Well, come up anyway, anytime you're a mind to. Come up again.”

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