

[Brass Mill Casting Shop]

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Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Conn.

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"I don't think they should let a mon stay in office more than two years, whether it's mayor or governor or president," says Mr. MacCurrie. "Let an administration stay in too long and you're bound to have trouble. What do you think of them here in town now?"

"I don't say they're crooked, exactly, but they may be a little bit out of line. I'll tell you what happened to me. I got a job workin' for the town when the depression first come along. I had no idea it would last so long. I'd a little money in the bank, but I was payin' ten dollars a week board and spendin' a little on the side, and the first thing I knew I was out of funds.

"So as I say, I went to work for the town. Well I hadn't been but a little while on the job when I breaks me leg. I was workin' doon in a gravel pit and some heavy planks fell on me, and me leg was broken way up above the knee.

"They took me doon to the Doctor's office in the town truck and they took me from there to the hospital. They X-rayed it and worked on it and X-rayed it some more, and they finally put it in a plaster cast. More than six weeks I laid in that plaster cast. And if it hadn't been that I was gettin' three drinks of whiskey a day I would have gone clean out of my head. I asked the doctor for something to drink when he was settin' my leg, and be dommed if he didn't leave an order for three drinks every day for me.

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"Of course I was in the compensation ward -- the insurance companies was payin' for everything, so you could have what you wanted, within reason.

"Well, sir, when I got oot I went up to the Selectman and I asked about compensation. He hemmed and hawed and put me off, and finally I got tired waitin' and I went to Waterbury to see the Compensation Commissioner. Dommed if the selectman wasn't doon there the same day I was. I found the two of them consultin' together. I had close to \$200 comin' to me. I needed some clothes and I wanted to get it. But they fixed it so's the town would get the compensation.

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"Claimed I was a town charge. Goddom it I wasn't no pauper, I was workin' for the town. And the way I looked at it I was entitled to that money. I told the compensation commissioner I wanted money for an overcoat, at least. Told him I needed \$35. The selectman say, "I can get him a coat cheaper than that.' I told him I didn't want no goddom coat off a dead man's back, but it didn't do any good. I didn't get the money.

"Well that was all right. But I watched the town report that year, and there wasn't any mention of that compensation money under reimbursements. I went in to the selectman and I raised hell. Asked him why it wasn't listed. He gave me some rigamarole about transfer to another department. Finally I asked him for a receipt for it, but he didn't want to give it to me. I hounded him until I got it, 3 though. He gave it to me at last, to get clear of me.

"I got it yet, up at the house. The town chairman come around last year, when I was sittin' in here listenin' to the radio, and he says to me 'Howr'e you votin?' I says, 'Not for your gang.' He says, 'What's the matter?' I says, 'I don't like the mon you've got at the head of your ticket' and I told him the whole story. I even went up and got him the evidence, and he promised to look into it. But he didn't do a goddom thing about it. I see him later, and he says he didn't have a chance. I asked him for the receipt, and he didn't want to give it to me. But he finally did.

"That's politicians for you. Every goddom one of them's crooked.

"I suffered with that leg. And what did I get out of it? Only the hospital bill and three drinks of whiskey a day.

"Even with the drinks, I thought I'd go crazy before I got upon me feet. Some of those young deevils doon in the ward used to stick lighted cigarettes between me toes. And me layin' there in a plaster cast, couldn't reach doon to got them oot.

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“Finally I got so I'd sit up in bed and hang one foot over to get the blood circulatin'. Then they took the cast off, and my knee was as big as three knees. Had no feelin' in it at all. I started rubbin' it doon myself and after a while it started to go doon. I says to the doctor, ‘Can I get up? (and he says, ‘Mon, don't be crazy.’ You've got to favor that log for a while yet.

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“But I hounded him so much, he says at last, ‘All right, if you're so dommed anxious to walk get up and try it.’ He thought I'd cave in, you see. But I fooled him, I got oot of bed and I held tight to the trapeze they had fixed for me with one hand and I held onto the mattress with the other and I stayed on me feet. I didn't try to walk. I Just got used to bein' on me feet for a couple days, and when they see I was strong enough, they give me crutches.

“Two weeks later I came home, and I was usin' a cane. The doctor said by God I had plenty of spunk. He was proud of the job he did on me. Used to bring the other doctors in to look at me. I was 69 years old then, you see.

“They figger if you're old, you don't get over those broken bones so good. A lot of it depends on yourslef, by God. There's old Joe Templeton, broke his leg when he was a log younger'n me, and he used a cane to this day.

“He was doon at the candy store havin' a sody one day and the doctor came in, and says, ‘Joe I'm goin' to take this cane, and if you want it again, you'll have to come over to my office for it.’ When he got through with his calls that afternoon, there was old Joe sittin' over in the office, waitin' for his cane. He was that stubborn. The doctor handed it to him, he says, ‘Here, take it Joe, I wash my hands of you. You'll carry it all your life.’

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This is easily Mr. MacCurrie longest delivery to date, and it is apparent that his hospital experience is one of the highlights of his latter years, and by the same token, one of his favorite topics.

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He takes a copious helping of Copenhagen snuff and subsides momentarily, the better to enjoy it.

The town hall clock says ten past four and the mill hands are walking homewards.

“The mill,” says Mr. MacCurrie, “is a pretty good place to work these days. But it wasn't always so. There was a time when they paid the hands a dollar and a half a day for dommed hard labor, and they cut it later to a dollar thirty-five and a dollar and a quarter. They were makin' money hand over fist and payin' big dividends. Then the war came along, and still they didn't raise wages to where they should be, and then they had the strike.

“Do you remember the strike? This Sheriff Turkington, he came doon from Litchfield and he deputized the whole fire department to go over there and put the trouble doon. I was workin' in Waterbury then, and so I got clear of it. Can they make you help a sheriff ott in a case like that? I'd hate to have to go oot and buck a lot of poor deevils tryin' to get themselves a decent week's pay.

“But the mill was a good place all durin' the depression and it's a pretty good place today. Young Morton broke his arm crankin' his car a few weeks ago, and he went into work the same day. He couldn't do much, but they let him work, you see. Now how many places would put up with that these days? They claim they were losin' money all during the depression, but they wouldn't lay any of the help off. They had a sinkin' fund, they were drawin' on, that tided them over.

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“The Old Mon (president of the concern) is a pretty liberal sort of a mon. He wasn't a good caster, though, I'll say that. I worked in the castin' shop when he worked there, and he wasn't so good.

“Old Mon Hendy was the caster. He came here from Wolcott to be boss of the castin' shop and before he was through he owned more stock in the company than Plume himself. They used to shut the castin' shop doon every Wolcott fair day.

“When George Didsbury came here from Wolcott, he started workin' in the castin' shop, too, and he bought a farm and when he got through workin' days, he'd go home and chop wood on that farm. Work by moonlight. It would have killed an ordinary lad.

But he was a big strappin' giant of a mon. They had a bunch of rowdies every year at Wolcott fair. These lads would try to break up the show, and sometimes they were successful. So one year, old Hendy got George to go over to the fair and stand outside one of the booths and look for troublemakers. He tossed them out as fast as they came in. A half dozen of them jumped on him at once, but still he threw them around. At last they got tired of it, and let him alone.”

“It's gettin' on time for supper, I see. I like to go home and get it over with early, and get back doon for a while. There's no use tryin' to sit around the house, with the landlady's three kids fightin' over the radio. It's a regular Bedlam. You got any kids? It's goddom hard to raise 'em these days.

“If you give one of them money for the movies, they've all got to have it. If you send 'em to the barber, they charge as much 7 as they would for a grown mon. When I came here you could get a haircut for twenty cents and a shave for a dime. For a dollar, they'd take care of you all month. Used to pay by the month in those days.

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“A mon with a big family is up against it now. Well, it's one thing I don't have to worry about.”