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THE AUSTERITY
KITCHEN
BY CHRISTINE
BAUMGARTHUBER

Where the alimentary is
elementary.



Inspiration for this post comes
from Emil O. Peterson's "A Glimpse
of the Moonshiners" (1898)

"Too cheap are wine and love,"
complains the character Euclio in
Plautus' *The Pot of Gold* (ca. 195
BC), "if one in liquor and in love is
allowed to do with impunity
whatever he pleases."

N. Brock, "The Moonshiner's
Daughter" (1900)

Previously by
CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

Coweye Burgers and
Plastic Malts
Dinner with Caligula
A Contrary Image of
Steaming Excrement

Still Life

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

April 3, 2012

A photograph from Margaret
Warner Morley's *The Carolina
Mountains* (1913)

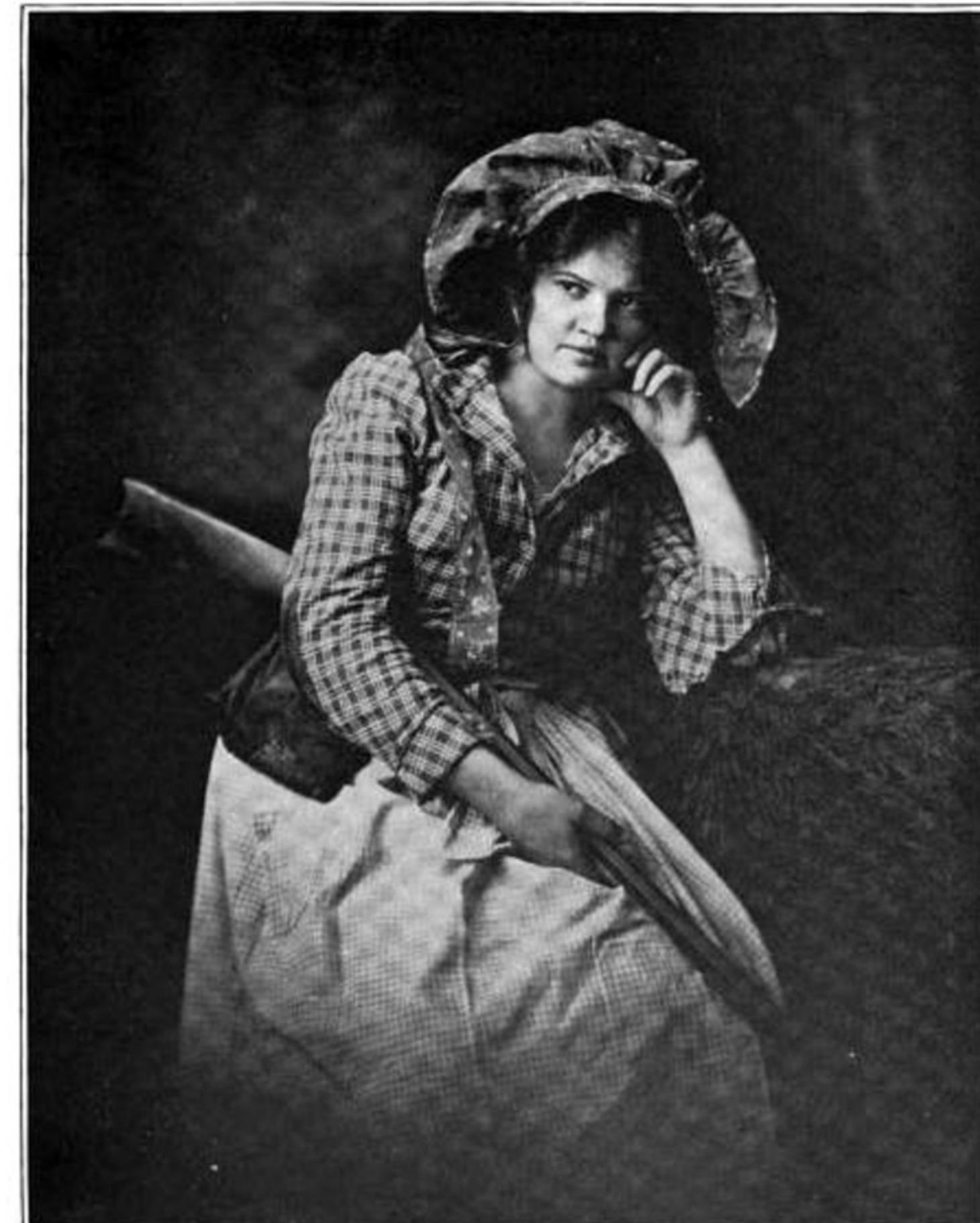


A MOONSHINE STILL

The moonshiner treats strangers with suspicion. Rarely do they visit his mountain shack, and rarely does he visit town. He isolates himself among mountain and valleys, which he leaves only once or twice a year. When a batch of corn mash has fermented, he distills it into "mountain dew" strong enough to make eyes water and throats burn. Barrels of this he packs in his wagon under hay and overripe apples (their scent masks that of the liquor) and winds his way over rocky, narrow paths to market.

Stashed among bushes, perched over a stream or lashed to the side of his shack, the moonshiner's still performs its mute alchemy. The clear gold it transmutes from dun grains reliably commands such healthy profits that it quickly becomes the single most important item in its owner's life. Indeed, an aggrieved moonshiner doesn't seek revenge on another moonshiner by attempting to injure that moonshiner or insult that moonshiner's wife. Rather, he reveals to the police the location of his rival's still. Revelation of this trade mystery invariably proves devastating. Financial ruin, and sometimes death, soon follow.

Occasional vendettas notwithstanding, moonshiners generally conduct their lives peacefully. At those rare times when folks pay him a visit, he plays the generous host. He delights in good company and lives in expectation of one great yearly festival: the season of camp-meeting. Held in various places from mid-August through October, this open-air revival sees all the moonshiners gather, with tents and families in tow, for a week-long jubilee. Each evening they gather around great fires and sing hymns into the wee hours. During the day, men swap recipes for moonshine mash or tips for evading the law while their wives and daughters laugh and gossip, catching up on news from elsewhere in the region. The married among them show off their finest clothes while the unmarried keep an eye open for handsome bachelors or comely maidens. Young men drive around in two-horse wagons, scooping up the prettiest girls and trundling them off to nightly farmhouse balls. There they caper through cotillion exercises known as "twistifications" and refresh themselves with generous quantities of mountain dew.



THE MOONSHINER'S DAUGHTER, Copyrighted, 1900, by N. Brock.

The Boston Cooking School

Magazine (1911) contains this
recipe for squirrel pie: "Have the
squirrels carefully cleaned and
singed. Separate into pieces at the
joints, nine in all. Put these in an
earthen dish; add salt and pepper
and one pint of boiling water or
highly seasoned meat stock, cover
the dish and let cook in the oven
about two hours, or until tender.
Stir in two or three tablespoonfuls
of flour, half a teaspoonful of salt,
and half a teaspoonful of pepper,
mixed smoothly with cold water.
Continue stirring until the sauce
boils. Remove from the oven to cool
a little while the crust is made
ready. Roll the crust to fit the dish.
Have it one-fourth an inch thick, if
made of pastry, half to three-
fourths an inch, if made of biscuit
dough. Make a slit for a 'vent' in the
center and cut out a few figures
from the paste as ornaments for the
crust, when it is set in place. Brush
the edge of the dish with cold
water, set the paste in place, trim
neatly, brush the bottom of the
ornaments with cold water and set
them in place. Bake about twenty
five minutes. Serve hot with brown
or tomato sauce, to which
mushrooms may be added. Pass at
the same time celery salad and
quince or black currant jelly.

The rest of the year the moonshiner passes in comfortable quiet. Only one enemy has he: the revenue officer. Of this bogeyman he lives in mortal fear, and he stands ready to greet him with a shotgun loaded for bear. In the balance hangs his livelihood and his very life; the state can take his land should it see fit to do so. Many a standoff between moonshiner and revenue officer end in bloodshed. More than anyone, then, the moonshiner appreciates the only two certainties in life, death and taxes.



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