



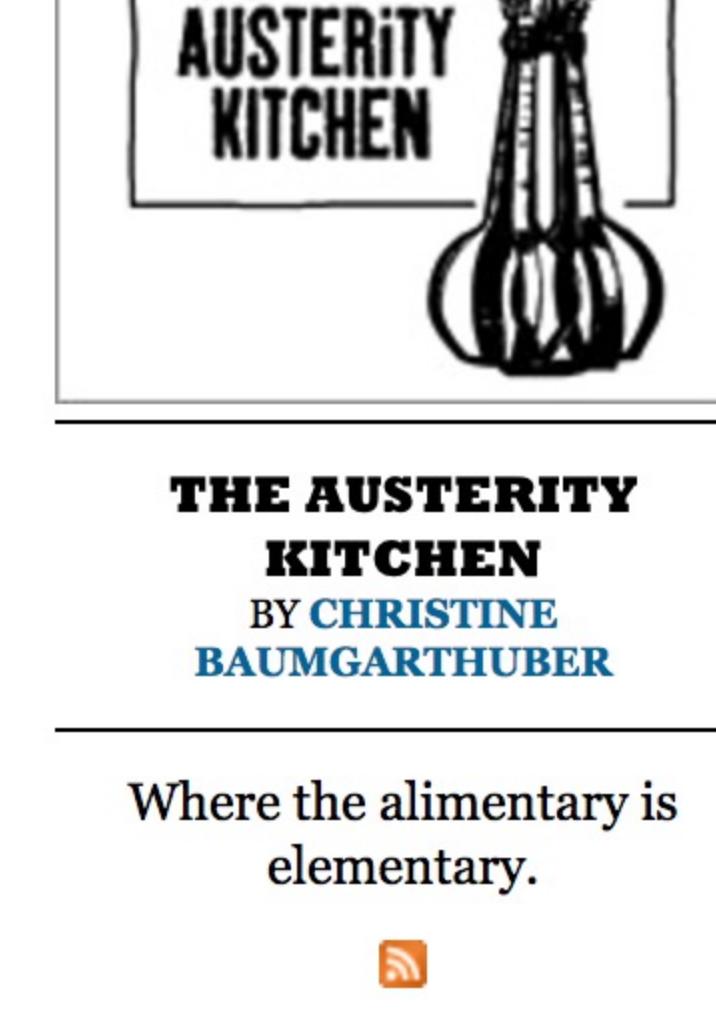
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THE AUSTERITY  
KITCHEN  
BY CHRISTINE  
BAUMGARTHUBER

Where the alimentary is  
elementary.

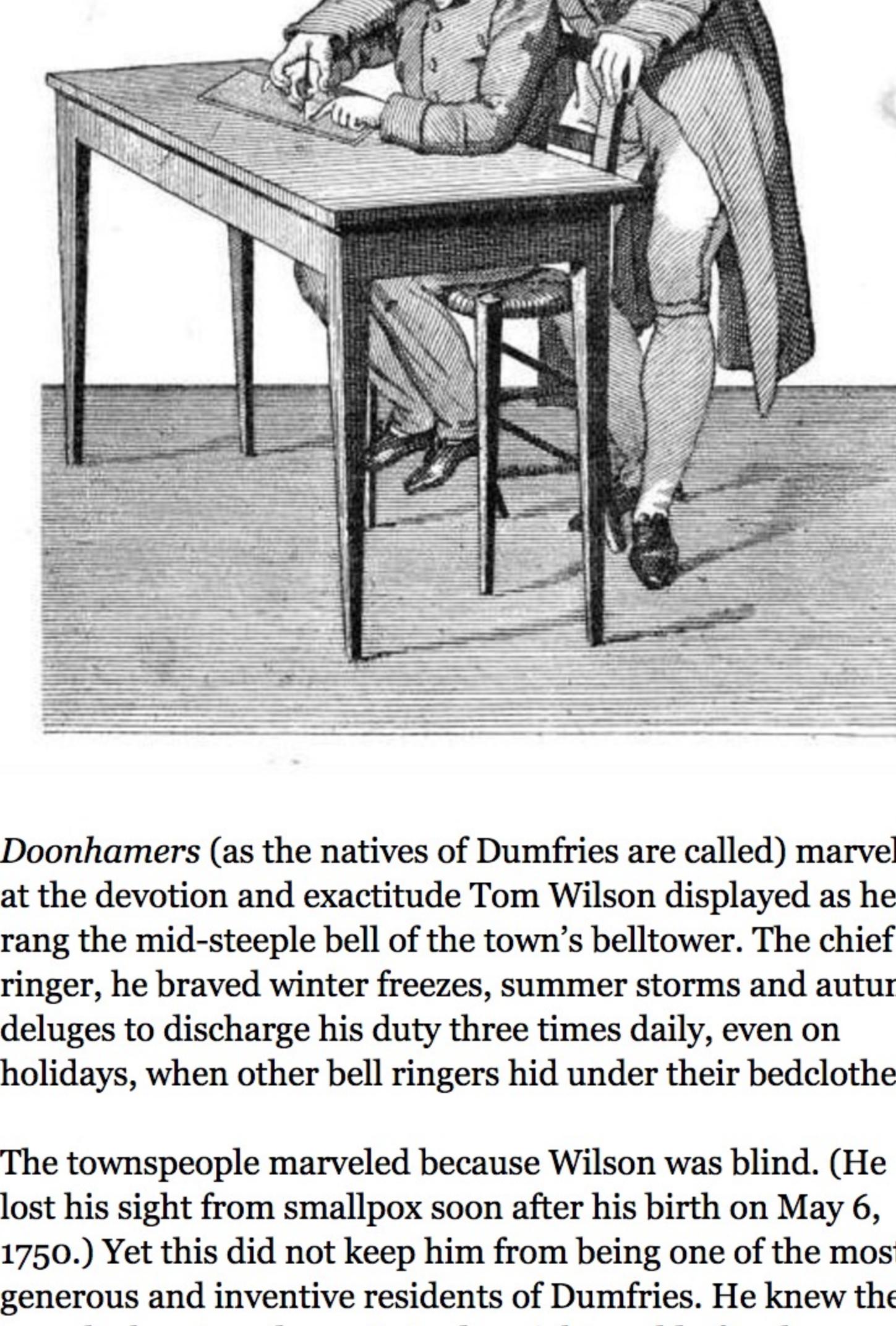


## Blind Ambition

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

PLATE IV.—FRONTISPICE.

LEARNING TO WRITE.



August 22, 2012

Illustrations from *An Essay on the Instruction and Amusements of the Blind* (1894)

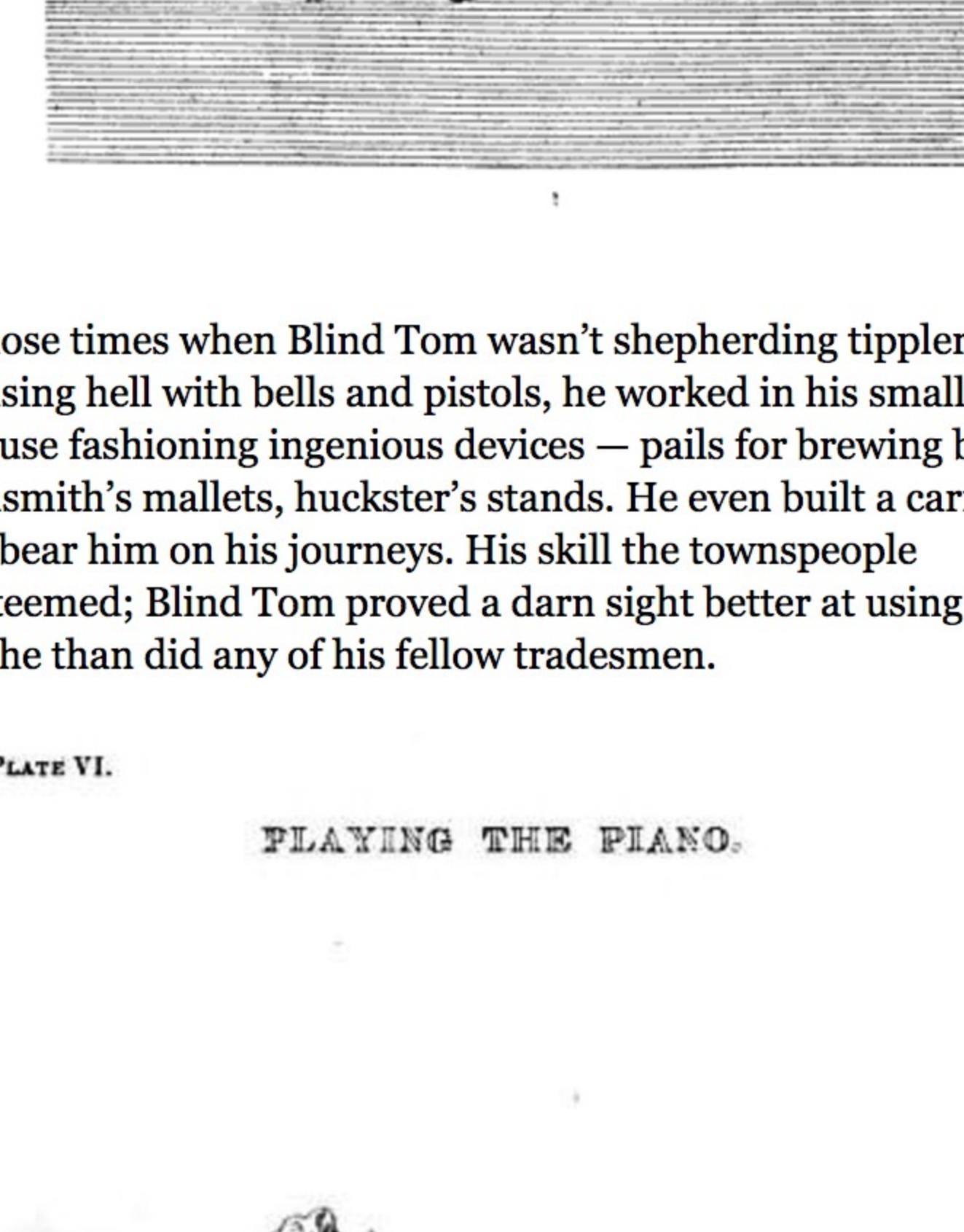
*Doonharners* (as the natives of Dumfries are called) marveled at the devotion and exactitude Tom Wilson displayed as he rang the mid-steeple bell of the town's belltower. The chief ringer, he braved winter freezes, summer storms and autumn deluges to discharge his duty three times daily, even on holidays, when other bell ringers hid under their bedclothes.

The townspeople marveled because Wilson was blind. (He lost his sight from smallpox soon after his birth on May 6, 1750.) Yet this did not keep him from being one of the most generous and inventive residents of Dumfries. He knew the town by heart, and on a Saturday night could often be seen guiding drunk residents home. He assisted lost strangers and contrived clever board games to play with the town's other blind residents. Music enchanted him. He attended concerts and joined music societies. Often ringing through the concert hall could be heard his laugh, which the others in attendance generally forgave out of affection for their "Blind Tom," as they called him. He loved his king, too. On mad George's birthday, he would ascend the steeple, point his pistol heavenwards and fire several celebratory shots into the air.

"For nine-tenths even of seeing  
men, daily, customary, life is a dark  
and mean abode. Unless he often  
opens the door and windows, and  
looks out into a freer world beyond,  
the dust and cobwebs soon thicken  
over every entrance of light, and in  
the perfect gloom he forgets that  
beyond and above there is an open,  
boundless, air." — John Sterling

PLATE VI.

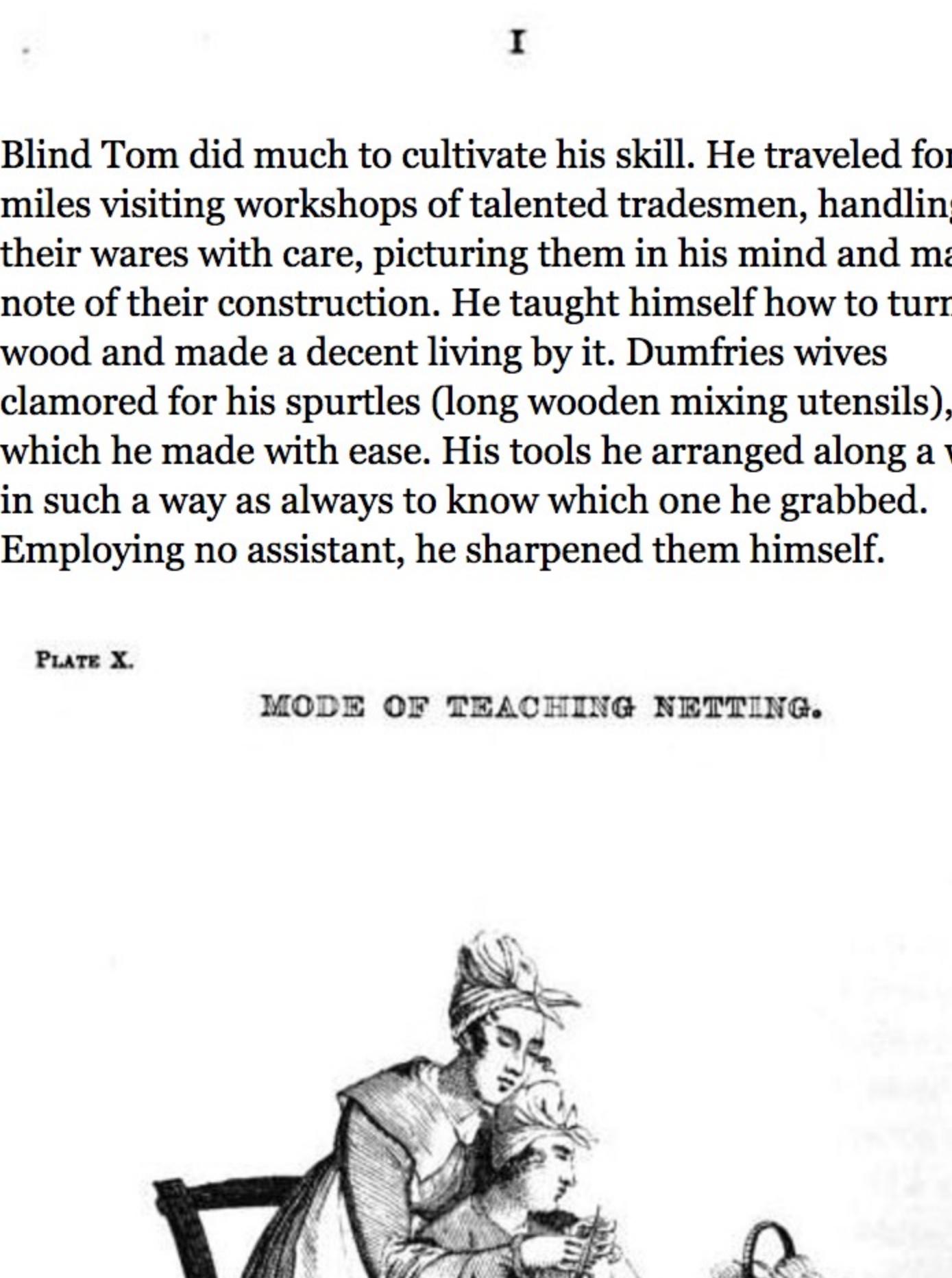
PLAYING THE HARP.



Those times when Blind Tom wasn't shepherding tipplers or raising hell with bells and pistols, he worked in his small, tidy house fashioning ingenious devices — pails for brewing beer, tinsmith's mallets, huckster's stands. He even built a carriage to bear him on his journeys. His skill the townspeople esteemed; Blind Tom proved a darn sight better at using a lathe than did any of his fellow tradesmen.

PLATE VI.

PLAYING THE PIANO.



"Blindness is a confinement, but  
also a liberation, a form of  
loneliness which propitiates  
inventions, a key and an algebra."  
— Jorge Luis Borges

"Oh! stranger do not pity me, / Nor  
pass me with a sigh, / Because the  
great and blessed light / Is hidden  
from mind eye; / What though I  
cannot see the orb — / I feel the  
warm sun shine, / My mind has  
conjur'd up a world / As beautiful  
as thine." — Joseph Edwards  
Carpenter, "Song of the Blind"  
(1841)

*Kirkcudbrightshire, Dumfriesshire, 1845*

*The New Statistical Account of  
Scotland: Dumfriesshire* (1845)

*The New Statistical Account of  
Scotland: Dumfriesshire* (1845)