Shall We Gather in the Kitchen?

THE kitchen has been the center of most family life since the first pioneer settlers erected log cabins in the wilderness. The red- or blue-checked tablecloths and curtains, geraniums blooming on the windowsills, a fireplace, the warmth and smell of good food cooking—all these have been spoken of and written about by generations of country people.

They talk about the special times of the year: Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, Easter eggs, fried chicken and homemade ice cream on Independence Day, and the birthday celebrations which almost always originated in the kitchen. They recall how the family gathered there in times of sorrow, in times of trouble, or to visit with each other. They remember how the children sat at the table doing homework while mother cooked dinner. Often, in looking back, they realize how that big, warm kitchen knitted the family together. It was warm enough to welcome, cosy enough without being too crowded, and conducive to private talks or family councils. Family rooms in modern houses have never quite succeeded in replacing the kitchen in the hearts and memories of the family.

I read the other day that a cook in an old-time country kitchen walked at least 350 miles a year preparing three meals a day. My mother, grandmother, and Granny Brock, as well as other women in the Appalachian Mountains, probably walked three times that dis-

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tance as they scoured the garden rows and hunted the hills to get food. They did not have cash to buy much, and the corner grocery was miles away. They did not own a cookbook among them, just ancient knowledge and skillful hands, and an instinct born out of desperate need to feed their hungry children.

Families ate what they grew on the place or found in the hills. Busy from dawn to dusk, buying nothing that could be raised, cooked or handmade at home, Mother worked as her mother and grandmother worked before her. Father did outside chores, using handmade tools and methods that Grandpa and his father used.

In the years before and during the Second World War, the hills had plenty of huckleberries, blackberries, raspberries, elderberries, mulberries, strawberries—until timber and coal companies came and stripped the land. There were both orchard-grown and wild fruits: apples, plums, grapes, persimmons, and pawpaws. The trees in the mountains produced black and white walnuts, hazelnuts, beechnuts, and hickory nuts. Father hunted rabbits, possums, coons, squirrels, and groundhogs. He brought in wild ducks, geese, grouse, and quail. There were rock bass, trout, catfish, and other varieties of fish in the streams and rivers. Wild bees swarmed and settled, reswarmed and settled again, until numerous colonies were to be found in hollow trees. The honey was taken for use on the table, the bees put into new bee gums to start all over. The men planted cane and made molasses. They raised crops of white and sweet potatoes, squash, pumpkin, corn, and beans.

Each little homestead had its cornfield, its patch of cane, and its bee gums (hives). Somewhere along the creek there would be a watermill where corn was ground into meal. And somewhere in the hillside thickets there would be moonshine stills where corn was bottled, sold, and drunk.

The kitchen has been central to my life as a mountain woman. I

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was born and raised in Appalachia—on Stoney Fork in southeastern Kentucky. Straight Creek, one of many creeks and small rivers in eastern Kentucky, has its beginning on Pine Mountain near where Harlan and Leslie Counties join. For thirty miles or more it is fed by smaller streams and gets deeper and wider before it is lost in the Cumberland River at Pineville. Stoney Fork is one of the little creeks running into Straight Creek. From where it merges with the latter up to its headwaters at Peach Orchard, Stoney Fork is about ten miles long.

Sol Saylor—my grandfather—brought Susie, his new bride, to the head of Stoney Fork during the first decade of this century. He built a house and cleared land for crops. He set out fruit trees and built a barn, coursed wild honeybees to their trees and brought them home to domesticate in bee gums he had made ready. Susie worked in the house, garden, and cornfield until she got pregnant with their first child, my father, who was born August 12, 1911. She bore two other sons and then the charm was broken (as we say) and she had a girl. After resting a bit, she bore two more boys and another girl in the next half dozen years.

Father and his brothers all grew up, married, and moved into coves and hollows to establish their own families. Father married a Leslie County girl and moved her to Coon Branch, just across the hill from Grandpa's place. Uncle Squire married Mother's youngest sister, Mossie, and they lived on Ben's Branch in a flat meadow rimmed round with hills, a place which had been homesteaded years before by a man named Ben. Uncle Otis found his bride, Dellie, near Pineville and brought her to live on Stoney Fork. Aunt Dellie became an important person in my life because she introduced me to the world of books. Uncle Andrew and Aunt Betty stayed near the old home place but Willie B. and Laura, the baby of the family, moved away, Willie B. to Indianapolis and Laura to East Tennessee.

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Wilburn and Rachel, my parents, lived on Coon Branch until they had three children; I was the firstborn. When I was five they moved a mile below the mouth of Stoney Fork and the one-room school we children later attended. Father bought logs and lumber at Sonny LeFever's sawmill and built a house in the center of an old orchard near a sulfur spring. Pine Mountain rose up steeply from our back yard.

Pine Mountain is one hundred miles long, running through three counties in Kentucky and on into Tennessee. It is filled with limestone caves and covered with scrub trees. A footpath ran up in front of our house across the mountain to the Cumberland River side. A cliff hugged the highest peak near the footpath, and from a crevice a pine grew, gnarled and twisted from endless winds. I loved to stand or sit on the rock, feel the sun on my face, the wind blowing through my hair, and listen to the sound in the pine branches. Far below, Straight Creek was a crooked silver ribbon and the buildings seemed like doll houses scattered along the road. On the Cumberland side, the railroad played a steel counterpoint to the river. Long trains filled to overflowing with Harlan County coal shuttled along to Pineville and points north and east, blowing their whistles at every small crossing.

When the train whistle sounded clearly on our side of the mountain, Mother said, "Children, it's going to rain." Late that afternoon or early the next day it would cloud up and rain. I never questioned the relationship of the train whistle to the rain until I moved to Indianapolis in 1960. We lived near a railroad yard across White River in West Indianapolis. For the first week or so every time I heard a train I thought, "It's going to rain," but the rain did not come. Finally I stopped expecting rain every time I heard a train. Mountain customs die hard.

Mountain people are criticized for leaving the industrial cities

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where they live and work and heading home almost every weekend. What people who live in today's transient society don't seem to understand about us mountain folks is that it's possible to put one's roots down so deeply they cannot be satisfactorily transplanted anywhere else. People who have lost an arm or a leg complain that they still feel phantom pain. I used to fancy it was that way for us mountain people. Take us anywhere in the world and there will always be pain in the missing part buried so deeply in hillside soil. Mountain people have a strong sense of place; they know where they belong.

It is always a joy to me to leave cities behind, to travel through the Bluegrass section of Kentucky and on to the hills. As the mountains unfold for me I have a feeling of belonging, of being protected, of wanting to settle down and stay forever.

My friend Jane Wilson, an East Tennessee woman, says it well: "I can walk back home from just about anywhere." She and I both have a sense of place—a knowing that if all else fails, we can always walk back home and there will be space for us, and people who care about us.

Mountain food and how it is cooked is very much a part of this sense of place. Ask any displaced Appalachian what he misses most about being away from the mountains and he will probably talk about soup beans, cornbread, sallet greens, fresh milk and butter, eggs, country ham, "and homemade biscuits every morning of the world." Some will speak of the joys of hunting wild game and birds. The women talk of missing homey things; sitting on the front porch or in the yard after all the chores are done and listening to the night sounds, watching the moon come up, or going to a church supper. They may also talk about the kitchens back home, the feeling of warmth from wood-burning stoves, the smell of coffee simmering on the back and biscuits baking in the oven, and the family gathered around the kitchen table to eat and talk.

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Today I live in Berea, Kentucky, a small college town where the Cumberland foothills begin. I bake cornbread and cook other country-style foods when I want them, but there is still something special about going to Stoney Fork and eating with Mother or my sister Della Mae. Nobody can bake home-ground cornbread the way my mother can; Granny Brock baked the best sweet potatoes I ever ate; Aunt Betty's ginger biscuits have a unique taste that has never been duplicated in my kitchen.

Perhaps part of it is sentiment, a longing for things to be the way they were; part of it is knowledge that one truly cannot go home again; all of it is what makes us the way we are. The earliest memory I have is the day when I was three years old. Mother was holding my hand as we came through the yard gate and climbed the steps to Grandpa's front porch and she said, "Today is your birthday; you're three years old and a big girl." I felt proud to be three but it was cold and wet and I was tired and hungry. The door opened and we were in the kitchen where Grandma was cooking supper. I do not remember anything else about that day, not what we did before we got to the yard gate, not what we ate, or what we did after supper—just that brief experience of being cold and wet, knowing I was three years old, and Grandma's warm kitchen with the smell of food being cooked.

Perhaps that memory is what has made my kitchen the most popular place in my house today. Friends come to visit and congregate there, to have coffee or other drinks. I have known some of them to stand (because there was no more room for chairs) an hour or more talking, telling jokes, laughing together. When my son Bruce comes home from college he heads for the kitchen, and when his brother, Wayne, visits from Indianapolis, he promptly sits down at the kitchen table for food and talk. My husband has a desk in his music studio and I have one in my study, but we both like to sit in the kitchen when there is a family crisis or other problems to work out, or

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when we need to plan trips, discuss menus and work schedules, make shopping lists, or simply talk over coffee.

Each person has different memories and different things from childhood he or she loves; feelings about food are part of those memories. I love my mother's boiled coffee, cornbread, and cooked green beans. There's an age difference of eleven years between my two boys; therefore each remembers something different about home life. When Wayne was small I lived on Stoney Fork, but Bruce was born and raised in Berea. Our life-style in Berea has been very different from Stoney Fork, which was an isolated community that had few modern conveniences. Wayne wants me to make chili, banana pudding and, if possible, molasses pie when he visits. Bruce wants hamburgers and pizza, baked potatoes, chicken and dumplings, and chocolate cake.

The following collection contains some modern adaptations of old recipes handed down through generations of my people. Some are given just as they were used in the old days. Some are recipes brought back from the outside world or found in magazines and adapted to the mountain way of cooking. I have not tried to trace them back to their origins—even if that were possible—but give credit to those who gave recipes directly to me. Some of the foods you will probably enjoy cooking and eating. For example, the Dried Apple Stackcake is a favorite of many people in Berea who have sampled it. Other recipes and methods will be curiosities to you. Perhaps you will enjoy reading about them anyway.

The foremost desire of every writer is to make his characters and settings seem real to other people. In putting together this narrative about real people and places, in sharing the way they prepare and cook their foods, it has been my strongest wish to show the mountain people as they really are.

Most of the old ways are gone now. Good roads lead to just about

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anywhere in the mountains; state parks and resorts bring in thousands of tourists (and their money) every season. There is television and inside plumbing on Stoney Fork, and country stores and supermarkets make shopping fairly easy for everyone—if they have money. Except for the extreme poverty remaining in some areas, it would be hard to tell most of the small towns and communities in southeastern Kentucky from rural America anywhere. Records and films, photographs, and oral histories document some of the bits and pieces of what is fast becoming history in Appalachia. The purpose of this book is to add to that history, to help preserve some of our heritage for generations to come.

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Beverages: Hot and Cold, Mild and Wild

CONTRARY to the stereotyped image of mountaineers drinking moonshine all day long—very few do. But mountaineers are good judges of corn—in the bottle, on the cob, and fresh from the popper! The most common beverages at our table were boiled coffee for the adults and milk for the children. Some families drank iced tea, sassafras tea, and hot chocolate; for special occasions they had eggnog, apple cider, and various other fruit drinks.

The following recipes for beverages have been collected down through the years—some from family and friends, others from acquaintances here and there. I have included both nonalcoholic and alcoholic drinks in this section.

BOILED COFFEE

7 tablespoons ground coffee
1 egg white
½ cup cold water
6 cups boiling water

Stir coffee into egg white and cold water. Add boiling water and let boil for about 10 minutes. Pour off liquid and serve hot. Use freshly ground coffee if possible.

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GROVER'S CAMPFIRE COFFEE

2 quarts cold water
1 cup ground coffee
1 egg, beaten
Dash of salt

Heat cold water in large pot. Mix coffee with 8 teaspoons beaten egg and 8 teaspoons cold water. Add salt. Stir this into the water when it comes to a rolling boil. Keep on high heat until it comes back to a boil, stirring occasionally. Turn off heat and pour in ½ cup cold water to settle the grounds. Let stand 10 minutes. Makes 8 mugs of coffee.

HOT CHOCOLATE

¼ cup cocoa
½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon flour
1 cup hot water
1 cup whole milk
¼ teaspoon vanilla
Pinch of salt
Marshmallows (optional)

Mix cocoa, sugar, and flour together in a saucepan, add water, and boil until somewhat thickened. Add the milk, vanilla, salt, and stir well. Let come near boiling point, but do not boil. Put a marshmallow in bottom of each cup and pour hot chocolate. Makes 2 cups.

The above recipe is very old. You may want to adapt it if you make hot chocolate this way. I use half milk and half cream, which makes the chocolate rich enough so that I do not need to add flour. I also make the hot chocolate in a double boiler.

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BIRCH TEA

Tap a birch tree in the spring. Combine the sap with an equal amount of water and heat to boiling. Sweeten with honey and serve hot.

MAPLE TEA

Use the juice from sugar maple trees. Mix with an equal amount of water. Sweeten with honey, maple sugar, or maple syrup, and serve hot.

CINNAMON TEA

5 sticks cinnamon
1 teaspoon whole cloves
½ cup sugar
Juice and rind of 1 orange
Juice and rind of 1 lemon
1 cup water

Combine and boil for about 10 minutes. Let cool and then strain. To 1 quart boiling water, add ¼ cup loose tea; let steep and strain. Mix cinnamon liquid with tea and serve hot.

MOTHER FARR'S SPICED TEA

3 quarts water
1 teaspoon whole cloves
3 sticks cinnamon
6 tea bags
Juice of 3 oranges
Juice of 3 lemons
1½ cups sugar
2 cups water

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Boil together 3 quarts water, cloves, cinnamon, and tea bags. Remove tea bags when mixture reaches desired strength. In separate kettle, boil remaining ingredients. When clear, add to tea mixture. Strain and serve hot.

PEPPERMINT TEA

Gather desired amount of peppermint leaves and tender stems. Crush them and pour hot water over them. Steep to taste, drain, sweeten if desired, and serve hot.

Mountain people believe there is medicinal benefit in spicewood tea and use it when someone is coming down with measles or chickenpox.

SPICEWOOD TEA

Gather small limbs and twigs from spicewood bushes; break into small pieces and boil in spring water. Strain and sweeten with honey, maple syrup, or molasses. Serve hot.

BIRCH BEER

Tap a birch tree and collect the sap. Mix sap with an equal amount of water. Add 1 gallon liquid to ½ gallon cornmeal and set in a warm place. It will take about 3 weeks for mixture to ferment. When fermentation stops, drain off liquid, chill, and drink.

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BLACKBERRY WINE

1 gallon blackberries
½ gallon water
½ pound sugar
Cask, jug, or stone jar
Thin muslin

Bruise berries with hands or potato masher and let stand overnight. Strain mixture, discard pulp, then mix liquid, water, and sugar. Put in cask and let ferment. Tack thin muslin over the top. When mixture stops "working" (when bubbles no longer appear on the surface), fermentation has ceased. Check daily, because fermentation time varies from batch to batch. Pour into containers and store in a cool, dark place.

EGGNOG

24 egg yolks
1 ⅔ cups sugar
8 ounces rum
10 ounces brandy
8 ounces whiskey
1 gallon cream
½ of a nutmeg, grated

Beat egg yolks until very light, adding sugar as you beat. Add liquor to eggs and beat well. Let stand 15 to 20 minutes then add all but a quart of the cream. Whip the remaining quart until it stands up in peaks. Stir this into the other mixture, a little at a time. Last of all, add nutmeg. Makes approximately 32 servings.

Recently I visited a continuing education class at White Oak, Tennessee, a small community in East Tennessee. It was an unpleasant March evening and only five class members arrived at the community center, so there was time to talk and get acquainted.

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Marjorie Malicote, a young mother and housewife, said she was collecting recipes in her community as a class project. After looking at her recipes, I asked permission to use some of them in this book. The recipe for elder flower wine was given to Marjorie by an old woman whom she spoke of affectionately as Aunt Cindy Davis.

ELDER FLOWER WINE

9 pounds sugar
3 gallons pure spring water
1 quart elder flowers
3 pounds raisins
½ cup lemon juice

Mix sugar and water and boil 5 minutes. Mix in elder flowers. Let stand until lukewarm, then add raisins and lemon juice. Pour into a crock and cover top with cheesecloth. Stir mixture every day until fermentation stops. This will take 5 or 6 days. Strain mixture and put in a jug with a firm stopper. Let stand at least two months before drinking.

Jane Wilson, a friend from East Tennessee who lives across the street from me, gave me her mother's remedy for coughs and sore throats. She calls her mother Granny Murr because, she said, that's what her daughters call their grandmother. "My Granny Murr always made this cough remedy in early August, in order to have it ready for the first cough or sore throat in the fall. It clears your throat wonderfully—in fact you feel so good after a few doses you don't mind the on-coming cold half as much," Jane laughs. "Sometimes Granny Murr uses rock candy instead of honey. But I like honey—preferably that just taken from the beehive. I think honey gives it such a delicate flavor. I like to use natural things—plants, herbs, roots, and such for aches and pains. I think honey used in anything is so much better for you than white sugar or candy."

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GRANNY MURR'S COUGH REMEDY

Fifth of Jack Daniels whiskey
Jar, crock, or cask
1 pint pure honey
1 dozen lemons, thinly sliced

Pour whiskey into container and add honey; stir well. Then add lemon slices and cover. Let stand for at least 6 weeks. Take out lemon slices and reserve for use in iced tea (makes iced tea taste simply wonderful!). You may pour the liquid into a large decanter if you wish, or put in jar and cover; store and use as needed.

The following recipe is for Kentucky Eggnog. It is a very potent concoction and only seasoned drinkers should be allowed much of it at any one time.

KENTUCKY EGGNOG

12 eggs, separated
2 cups sugar
1 pint light cream
1 quart milk
Fifth of 100-proof Kentucky bourbon
4 ounces brandy
Nutmeg

Beat egg whites until stiff peaks are formed, slowly adding ½ cup sugar while beating. Beat yolks until light yellow and thick. Add 1½ cups sugar slowly during beating process. Stir cream, milk, bourbon, and brandy into yolk mixture. Fold in egg whites thoroughly, cover container with foil and store in refrigerator for at least 12 hours. Sprinkle freshly grated nutmeg on top just before serving. Makes 30 to 40 small punch cups.

This eggnog is better served the second day after it is made. It will still be good on the third day but after that it starts losing potency and flavor.

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KENTUCKY TODDY

2 cubes sugar
½ glass spring water
¼ glass moonshine or Kentucky bourbon
Ice

Dissolve sugar in the water. Add the whiskey and 2 ice cubes. Drink.

The following recipe for a drink made of apples and ale was given to Marjorie Malicote by a woman in East Tennessee who was over a hundred years old.

LAMB'S WOOL

8 roasted or baked apples
½ teaspoon ginger
½ teaspoon nutmeg
1 quart ale
Honey

Put apples through a strainer or sieve. Add ginger and nutmeg and mix well. Add ale and stir. Then stir in honey until sweetened to taste. Let mixture come to a simmer over a hot fire, but do not boil. Serve hot.

The following drink, dating back to the 1920s, is from North Carolina. It is said you should give this concoction to a person who needs his strength built up. Some people refer to it as the builder-upper drink.

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NORTH CAROLINA DRINK

1 pint cream
½ cup fresh milk
½ cup sweet cider
½ teaspoon vanilla
½ cup sugar
Dash nutmeg

Chill all ingredients before using. When mixing drink, lightly beat cream and set aside. Mix milk, cider, vanilla, and sugar. Blend in cream and beat lightly to mix ingredients. Whiskey or brandy may be substituted for the sweet cider. A tablespoon of sherry may be added if desired.

We celebrated Christmas, New Year's, and the Fourth of July by shooting firecrackers and other kinds of noisemakers. For holiday dinners the women cooked whatever they had on hand. Some years, especially in earlier days of the community, there would be wild turkeys, venison, and so forth, but in my day it was more likely to be ham, or simply chicken and dumplings. Sometimes it would be just the family gathered around our table; at other times there would be six to eight guests.

The men and boys could not always afford firecrackers and larger fireworks with which to celebrate. On Stoney Fork, and in other communities, they made their own. They got baking-powder cans and punched holes in the center of the bottoms. After putting a few grains of carbide in the can they sprinkled in a few drops of water, pressed the lid down firmly, and held a match or the flame of a carbide lamp to the hole. The round lid in the center of the top (all baking-powder cans were made with a small round lid in the top) was blown off with a loud noise and flew five or ten feet away. They were careful not to aim the can toward any living creature.

The men enjoyed drinking, talking, playing cards, and shooting

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fireworks. Sometimes there would be a big shooting match. A hen, turkey, or ham was put up for prize, and the men would take turns shooting at a mark. The best shot got the prize for the day. There were shooting matches at other times of the year as well as on holidays.

Mother never drank a drop of whiskey in her life; neither did Grandmother nor Father's sisters. But Father's grandmother, my Granny Brock, loved hot toddies and moonshine whiskey.

The Christmas when I was twelve, Granny Brock invited our family to spend Christmas at her house. Granny's husband, Uncle Andrew, and his son Judge were there. Granny had prepared most of the food the day before and left it pretty much up to Mother to get the Christmas dinner on the table. She stayed by the fire in the front room talking with the men and drinking her special Christmas drink. I remember we had ham and baked sweet potatoes, a big kettle of shuck-beans, and applesauce, cornbread, and slaw. Granny had also baked a dried apple stackcake.

Granny Brock had fixed her special Christmas drink for herself and the men. Judge gave me some in a cup to drink and I thought it was wonderful. During the afternoon and evening I managed to sip several times from someone's glass or cup, but I had to be careful that Mother did not see me. Father and the men thought it funny, but Granny did not approve of my slipping around that way.

MOONSHINE AND ORANGES

3 oranges
1 cup sugar
2 quarts moonshine whiskey

Cut the oranges into small sections, rind and all, and drop them into a large jar. Add sugar and pour in moonshine. Stir until sugar is dissolved and let stand overnight before drinking.

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Father, his brothers, and Grandfather all made moonshine whiskey, primarily to sell for cash, but they also enjoyed drinking their own product. Mother grieved that Father made whiskey, drank it, and sold it to other people who got drunk. She felt he was breaking the laws of the land and the laws of God. But Father could make more money selling moonshine whiskey than any other way, and he needed cash. He could sell a bushel of corn for $2 or $3; he could take a fourth of that, turn it into mash and make a run of moonshine which would bring in around a hundred dollars.

The Saylor men (Father and the men in his family) all had good reputations as moonshiners. They did well during the years before and after World War II. It was said they made the purest and best tasting moonshine of anyone in Bell County.

Father's still consisted of two main parts—the top and the bottom. After he put mash in the bottom part, the top was sealed with a flour-and-water paste. He never sealed the top real tight because he wanted it to blow off if necessary. This was a safety measure in case his attention wandered and the fire got too hot and built up too much steam.

A copper pipe, called an "arm," projected from the top of the cooker and over to one side where it tapered down to about an inch and a half wide. It needed to be the same diameter at this end as that of another copper pipe called a "worm," which met it at this juncture. The worm was made by taking a copper pipe about fifteen to twenty feet long and filling it with sand, stopping up both ends, and wrapping the pipe around a fence post to make it coil. The sand kept it from kinking in the wrong places. The spiral was cleaned and attached to the arm in such a way that the rest of the coil ran down inside a barrel. The barrel was kept full of cold, running water. Father said it was best to have the water running in at the top and out an opening at the bottom of the barrel; this way it circulated around and over the copper worm.

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To make the moonshine, father took a peck of shelled corn and put it in a cotton flour sack. He poured warm water over the corn to wet it, then put the sack in a warm, dark place. Several times a day he wet the corn with warm water. In three or four days the corn sprouted but he let it get about two inches before he spread it out flat to dry. After the sprouted corn was dry, he ground it up in the meat grinder and added it to twenty-five pounds of cornmeal and twenty-five pounds of sugar. He boiled water and mixed the dry ingredients into a mush—which he called a mash. After letting the mixture cool down, he added one-third pound of yeast to a gallon of lukewarm water and poured this into the container of mash. Last of all he added water to make thirty gallons of mash. Fermentation could take up to ten days without yeast, so Father always added yeast and the process could be done in four days. When the mash had fermented and settled down it was ready to be run. At this stage the mash was very sour.

Father's moonshine still was always hidden in the hills near a clear running spring or stream of water. It was no easy job getting the still set up, the mash poured into the cooker, and a run of moonshine started. The fire had to be carefully tended all the while so that it did not burn too hot or too slow. The heat caused the spirit to rise in the vapor along with the steam. It went into the arm and then on to the worm where cold water caused condensation. This liquid was collected into a container.

The first run-off was weak and impure and had to be redistilled to rid it of water and oils. The cooker was cleaned out in preparation for the second run-off. The first run was then put back in and some water added and it was turned to steam, condensed, and collected again.

The first quart of the second run was always far too strong—about 200 proof; toward the end of the run it was too weak—about 10 proof. This was where the skill of the moonshiner was called for: to

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mix the two to make 100 proof whiskey. Father always knew when to stop a run: if a tablespoon of moonshine did not burn when tossed on the fire it meant there was not enough alcohol to burn and therefore not enough to be worth running again.

Father tested for the right proof by putting some moonshine in a quart jar, covering it tightly and tilting or shaking it a few times. If the bubbles rose and sat half above and half below the top of the liquid he had the right proof. After the right proof was obtained, Father, being a good moonshiner, always filtered his product through charcoal to improve the taste.

Moonshiners were not all as careful with their whiskey as the Saylor men were. Some very bad whiskey was made and sold in the mountains. Occasionally we would hear of someone drinking bad moonshine and getting deathly ill, or even dying. We knew this was why moonshine was illegal according to the laws of the land and also why revenuers were so diligent in catching moonshiners in the mountains. But somehow we felt we had the right, so long as pure corn whiskey was made, and we needed the money.

In addition to moonshine, some of the men in the community made a potent drink called homebrew—it could be made in anybody's kitchen. Uncle Otis gave me his recipe for homebrew.

UNCLE OTIS'S HOMEBREW

4 gallons water
5 gallon crock or wooden keg
1 quart store-bought malt syrup
5 pounds sugar
2 cakes yeast

Heat about a third of the water and pour into crock or keg. Stir malt and sugar thoroughly into hot water. Cool mixture down by adding the rest of water: liquid should be lukewarm to touch. Add yeast, stirring thoroughly.

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Keep in a warm place. The mixture will take about 3 days to ferment and work down. When it stops working and the foam goes down, it is ready to be put in jars.

I asked Uncle Otis what the next step was, thinking of sealing the jars and storing them. He replied, "Why, you drink it."

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