

Country philosopher

One giant step



by Amos Arthur Holmes

When I was a young child I hated many things.

I imagine that castor oil was one of my major hates. My mother seemed to have had unbounded faith in the potential of castor oil.

If I complained about cramps in the stomach my mother would take a huge spoon filled with castor oil and thrust it down my throat. Even in my tender years I could understand this action. But it caused a degree of bewilderment when she also gave me castor oil to cure my sore toe.

I hated discipline when it embraced having the hell whipped out of me. My mother apparently never heard of the hickory stick. She was unfamiliar with the hairbrush or other normal aids to child enlightenment. What she used was a plank of wood.

She had me expose a very tender part of my anatomy and then violently smashed that plank against my flank. When she was in the process of murdering me she would always say, "This hurts me more than it does you." I trusted my mother implicitly but this phrase had a ring of hypocrisy.

I hated Easter. And I hated it because my mother always followed a ritual that was completely embarrassing. She would dress her children in their finest, hand them each a large Easter Egg basket, and take them to the Capitol Grounds to roll eggs. This excursion was terribly pleasant when I was five, mildly entertaining when I was seven, and grotesquely hideous when I was twelve.

My young peers, who had given up egg rolling at the proper age, would

gather on the corner each Easter to watch my family, and I, walk past with our Easter baskets. They were stunned and immobilized at seeing a twelve-year-old boy with an Easter basket but they always refrained from calling out inflammatory remarks. And this, of course, saved their lives.

My biggest hate of all was school. I must have been given an inherited stupidity because the only thing I ever learned in school was the fact that I was never going to learn anything in school. My interest was never directed to the verb in front of me but (much more pleasantly) to the blond in back of me. I always failed with that verb in front of me and I did equally as bad with the blond in back of me.

I struggled through years of schooling where I was exposed to a multitude of facts and figures. But I remained a dull and unteachable student.

I carried this vast ignorance into young manhood until it began causing a terrible embarrassment. I didn't like it when a child would ask me, "How much is two plus two?" and I didn't know the answer. I blushed when anyone asked me to name the first president of the United States, and I answered, "John Wilkes Booth."

So I started bettering myself. I built a fireplace and from the glow of burning logs I studied long and hard. I memorized both the dictionary and the encyclopedia. I took long safarries into darkest Africa and harpooned whales off the coast of Nova Scotia. And now, at the age of fifty-seven, I

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Amos

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have gained immeasurably in both intelligence and knowledge. I have gone from a dumb cluck to a fairly brilliant man. I can now stand up before the most scholarly audience and tell them that George Washington was the first President of the United States and that two plus two is five.

And that, my friends, is progress.