

## Country Philosopher

### *The saints be praised*

by Amos Arthur Holmes

Although I was born in Washington, D.C., I have always considered myself to be a little old country boy. My father was born and raised near Marshall, Virginia and my mother grew up on a farm in Purcellville, Virginia.

My father was an avid, dedicated reader of anything pertaining to the War Between the States. He called it, The War of Northern Treachery. I do not believe, in all his life, he was ever convinced his beloved southland had lost that war. I can still see him in our dining room, thumping the table, and screaming, "SON, IT WAS LONGSTREET WHO LOST THE WAR AT GETTYSBURG." My father had a terrible, vibrant dislike for General Longstreet.

We lived in our city home exactly like we would have lived in the country. I always smile when blacks talk about soul food as being their very own. Gracious! I grew up on black-eyed peas and cornbread. My mother fixed breakfast under the false impression that we were going to thrash wheat all day. Each morning she had fried potatoes, fried apples, eggs, pork chops, and hot biscuits. Immediately after eating this huge breakfast I would not go out and thrash wheat, but sort of stagger away to school. It is no wonder that I flunked every subject I ever took.

My father and my brother were hunters. Our table at home was constantly graced with such succulent edibles as rabbit, squirrel, possum, quail, deer, and groundhog. This early introduction to wild game forges the appetite you carry through life. I have tasted many foreign delicacies but I still prefer a dish of hot biscuits and a bowl of squirrel stew.

This preference in food caused a funny occurrence at my home last winter. I had gone out on Saturday and killed a possum. I skinned him and put him in the refrigerator. I was having guests on Sunday and my wife had bought a huge roast for the occasion. My guests were going to be Tom and Marguerite Kelly. Both of these friends are very successful

writers and I was looking forward to their stimulating company.

"Honey" I said, "Let's have the possum tomorrow. I don't believe Tom and Marguerite have ever eaten possum."

"Perhaps they won't like it" replied my wife.

"Nonsense. They are mature enough, modern enough, to enjoy a southern delicacy."

My guests arrived early Sunday morning. We sat around discussing books and the hours simply flew. At two o'clock my wife called us to dinner. The table was beautiful. On the fine linen tablecloth was placed the elegant old china my mother had given us years ago. While everyone sat down I went into the kitchen and took the possum from the oven. I placed it on a large platter and it looked just wonderful. My wife had stuffed it with dressing and applies and had basted it in rich, brown gravy.

I entered the dining room and placed the possum on the table. I could see the happy expressions worn by Tom and Marguerite change into looks of bewilderment. They never took their eyes off that possum.

I bowed my head. "We thank Thee, Lord, for this bounty we are about to receive."

Tom looked at the bounty, and said, "Amos, I don't believe I've ever seen beef fixed in exactly this way before."

"It isn't beef" I said.

"Of course" said Tom, "how stupid of me. It must be a pork roast."

"Nope" I replied, "It's a possum."

Tom looked at his wife and they both turned pale.

"But" croaked Tom, "Isn't that the animal that eats dead things?"

"Yep" I said, "that's the one."

I had forgotten completely that Tom and Marguerite grew up in New York City. Their folks had come over here from Ireland and although they surely had partaken of many delicacies I could see that possum hadn't been one of them.

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I sliced off a piece of possum and placed it on Tom's plate. "Try it" I said, "You'll love it."

Tom picked up a small portion and had it almost up to his lips when he cried, "BY GOLLY... WHAT DAY IS THIS?"

Looking perplexed, I answered, "It's Sunday."

He put the possum back on his plate and apologized. "I'm so sorry, Amos. Marguerite and I cannot eat meat today."

"Why not?" I inquired.

"Well" said Tom, "Marguerite and myself are both devout Catholics and this is Saint Chaster's Feast Day. We would be excommunicated from the church."

They didn't eat anything at all for dinner. They only stayed a little while and then they hurriedly drove away.

As soon as they left I ran in and got out my encyclopedia. You know what? I must have a rotten encyclopedia.

I couldn't find Saint Chaster mentioned anywhere.