

August

Mid-Summer's Morning

There is something mystic about early morning in mid-summer. In the South, mid-summer can seem a slowly moving parade of hot, dry days decorated with occasional evening thundershowers, or even severe thunderstorms. The lingering heat and humidity of the day can make even quiet nights difficult for sleeping. On the other hand, those who sleep late miss the best part of the diurnal period – the sweet kiss of dawning.

At dawn, the land has rested and cooled in the darkness. It is ready to challenge again the summer sun. The sun takes its time harnessing fiery stallions to a flaming chariot before it pours down merciless heat while crossing the seemingly white-hot heavens. Southerners who once hand-labored in field and forest experienced the concept of apocalypse.

But the kiss of dawn is not a resignation. It is a vow to persevere.

When Al Jolson wrote “Carolina in the Morning” (1947), surely, he was thinking of the southern piedmont and mountains. The white of the bindweed flowers and shades of pink and blue morning glories along the roadsides, presenting beauty and fragrance destined to wither in the heat of mid-day, beg you to savor the moment. The lovely lavender of sensitive fern captures your eyes, but the flowers timidly retreat if you dare touch them.

Horses and cattle quietly grazing in pastures bathed in early morning dew gather themselves as if taking communion before the day's battle begins. Does with spotted fawns and hen turkeys with half-grown broods venture into grassy areas looking for plants filled with moisture or the insects that feed on those plants before retreating to the cool, deep shades of the forest.

Country roads, especially those not paved, have a pleasantly relaxed look as they lie quietly covered with long shadows flecked with early sun. There was a time when barefooted children walked sand and clay paths and roads feeling the pleasant morning coolness of surfaces that would be blistering hot by mid-afternoon. If those pathways or roads bordered a meandering stream, the experience took a quantum leap in pleasure. They still do.

The songbirds are not nearly as vocal in the early morning of mid-summer as they were a couple of months earlier when the males were making sure everyone knew the boundaries of their territories. Occasionally, you hear a crow call out to its comrades or maybe tenor voices of their fledgling babies begging to be fed. A mourning dove may coo for whatever reason. In the old days, the call of several male bobwhite quail advertising their desire to be a faithful husband would ring out across the land. But land-use patterns have changed all of that. Now to hear the two syllable “bob-white” alto in the mid-summer morning is so unusual as to be remarkable.

Looking back to my childhood, now far more distant than the “threescore years and ten”¹ of biblical promise for my natural longevity, I realize that I enjoyed my boyhood in those settings the most when I was alone. When childhood friends were present, we would be talking, planning, attempting various projects and adventures. But when alone, I felt the comfort of aloneness in a peaceful place even though the concept of “solitude” was not in my consciousness, much less my vocabulary.

The greatest depth of intimacy is a spiritual experience with those things inanimate. How does one touch a shadow, sunlight, moonlight, the wind, quietness, enfolding arms that cannot be seen? These things touch us, but we cannot reciprocate. Children growing up in nature, both wild and tame, feel

¹ Psalm 90:10, King James Version

that love and intimacy and accept it as a natural, but not particularly remarkable, happening. Being children, they usually lack the ability to comment in depth on such things, even if they might want to do so. Adults commonly have the vocabulary, but their highly developed skepticism and preoccupation with the “real world” have not only dulled their senses of deep intimacy with the inanimate but also their desire to express such foolishness.

**Of the mind of the child, Jesus said: “... of such is the kingdom of heaven.”²
Oh, if only Wordsworth would have been right when he penned: “The child is the father of the man.”³**

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² Mathew 19:14. King James Version

³ Wordsworth, William. 1802. “My Heart Leaps Up”