THE HUMBLE ANNALS OF A BACKYARD: GOOD BEANS: BY WALTER A DYER

It was the Fourth of July and we were eating our first stringless beans for the season.

"My!" exclaimed the Lady of the House, "these beans are good!"

I was inexpressibly shocked. It was as though Eve had glanced appreciatively about Eden and said, "This is a nice little garden, Adam. Try one of these early apples." But I perceive that my state of mind needs explanation.

It was this way. I had been spending my holiday in the backyard in preference to the crowded excursion train or the vulgar bathing beach. In the forenoon the sun poured down such an insistent heat that the lettuce leaves curled up limply and the grapevine tendrils drooped. The silk was beginning to show on the corn where the ears were forming. The corn evidently liked the hot, dry weather, but I didn't. As I straightened up after working between the rows I fancied I felt a slight dizziness and I hastily sought a shady spot.

As I stood there hatless, leaning on my hoe, and enviously watching a sparrow disporting himself near my lawn sprinkler, it suddenly came over me what an extraordinary bit of creation this backyard of mine is.

There are lots of things I don't know about it, but I know enough to marvel at. In the beginning it was Chaos and black Night, like everything else. Then came the cooling and wrinkling of the earth's crust, and volcanic upheavals; and when this ages-long tumult had subsided, and the dry land and the sea were set in their proper places, my backyard was some fathoms below the surface of the deep.

One would have thought that its fate was sealed, and that it could never hope for a higher destiny than that of an oyster bed. But the great Craftsman had a nobler mission for it. Perhaps he had a divine vision of my lawn and garden and locust tree.

Anyhow, one geologic day a great ice river, miles and miles wide, came creeping down from the frozen North. Over hill and valley it came in its ponderous, irresistible flow, across Green Mountains and Berkshires, shearing off mountain tops as it came, and grinding them into pebbles and sand.

But the weather turned warm again, and the huge glacier met a torrid wave from the south. The battle with wind and sun was fought at the edge of the sea, and gradually the ice army was forced to retreat, leaving behind it the wreckage of war, huge granite boulders from Vermont, pieces of flint from Canada. And at the scene of the first great battle it left a heap of sand and gravel so great that when
it melted it spread out into the sea. Little water courses formed
and the sand pile was flattened and drained. Then the tides cut a
channel through behind the last bulwark of low hills, and left Long
Island and my backyard a dry desert of sand.

Meanwhile, all over the world, trees and flowers and all manner
of plants had been learning how to grow and be beautiful, and birds
and winds and hairy animals scattered their seed far and wide. Sand-
favoring grasses took root, and in due time Long Island became a
waving prairie. Then came the various soil-making processes of
growth and decay, and in a jiffy followed red man and white, and our
village, and the little white house wherein I dwell.

How complete it all seems to me now, as though the final con-
summation had been wrought for me and the Lady of the House,
that we might have a small spot of green for our souls to grow in.
Soil, seed and sunshine, all for us! Doubtless it seems the same to
the lowly and beneficent toad that spends his days beneath the
tomato vines. But I could not help wondering, as I stood there in
the pleasant shade, if this were not also a mere transition stage on
the way to something far more beautiful ages hence.

And so, as I say, I was shocked when the Lady of the House
lightly remarked, "These beans are good!"

"Madam," said I, after an impressive pause, "the Lord made
these beans."

But Madam had been canning peas and was not in my frame
of mind.

"If it hadn't been for the man who perfected this strain of seed,"
she retorted, "and if you hadn't fertilized that garden for three years,
and if you hadn't planted the seed at the right time and the right
depth, and if you hadn't kept out the weeds and cultivated during
the drought, I guess they would be a sorry mess."

Madam was right. It is inspiring to realize that we have some
part in creation, after all. To this extent, at least, the Doctrine
of Free Will holds. I can leave my backyard to the ragweed and
burdocks, or I can make it to blossom as the rose. So I trust I am
not irreverent or unduly prideful if I declare, "The Lord and I,
we grew these beans."