THE HUMBLE ANNALS OF A BACKYARD:
“MORNING CHAPEL;” BY WALTER A. DYER

AM not one of those garden enthusiasts who arise at beauty-sleep time and go out to work feverishly with trowel and hoe for an hour or two before breakfast. For one thing, waking up is a long and solemn rite with me, not to be hurried through thoughtlessly. If I get down by the time the coffee percolator is bubbling I feel quite sufficiently virtuous. And though I pride myself on being a conscientious gardener, I take my garden pleasures calmly and at such times as circumstances grant me leisure. I do not hotly pursue joy in my garden; I jog along comfortably with it.

But if by some lucky chance I beat the coffee percolator by five or ten minutes, I do enjoy a tour of the backyard while the dew is on the grass—a brief but unhurried tour of critical observation not unmixed with a sort of morning adoration. It seems to start the day.

In college days we were most of us opposed to compulsory worship on general principles, and yet I know that if a poll had been taken of the undergraduates, there would have been an overwhelming majority in favor of morning chapel. It was a traditional exercise that we would not have wanted to abolish if we could. Not that we felt the need so much of a daily religious service; morning chapel was rather a social observance. It got us together as a college; the ties were knit closer; the day was started as it should be in such a community.

And so now I like to foregather with my tomatoes and my beans, my Shirley poppies and my roses, before they and I actually buckle down to the day’s work that is appointed to us.

Already the shadows are shortening and the sun is pouring his vitalizing beams upon all the growing things. The robins that seem to have a nest high up in our ridiculous old pear tree are singing joyfully because the weather is what it is, and a kindly mortal has spread before them a feast of worms.

There are prayers said in this morning chapel. Here is a row of seedlings praying for water; there is a groaning dahlia praying for a stake. But for the most part there is a hymn or two of praise and then a gay commingling in social intercourse; and if there is a mild undercurrent of worshipful intent, that is all the religion I and the garden seem to require.

OUR backyard is small; the garden is Lilliputian. And yet within its modest boundaries I can always find more joyful surprises in my short perambulation than a day in the whirling city can offer me. Never a morning, between frost and frost,
"MORNING CHAPEL" IN THE GARDEN

that does not present some new attraction unsuspected or only hoped for the day before. The buds have broken on the grapevine; or a yellow crocus is in bloom; or the tender green of the lettuce shows in a delicate line on the brown soil; or our first rose has appeared; or there are tiny pods on the pea vines; or the corn is in tassel; or a tomato glows rich red; or—but the list is endless.

Oh, it is worth while to plant and tend and garner! I cannot understand the man or woman with a backyard who is blind to these morning surprises, and deaf to the call of his bit of the soil. I cannot understand the heart that will deliberately close its doors to these free and God-given joys.

I am one of those fortunate ones who can go to work afoot, and after breakfast I can prolong my morning chapel, in a manner, by glimpses into other yards along the pleasant way to the shop. I like to fancy that Dr. Ludlow is rejoicing over the full-blown beauty of his symmetrical cherry tree, or that Mrs. Saunders has gazed with astonished delight that morning upon her first pink peonies. I wave a mental salutation as I pass, and feel that we understand each other.

And then in June there is the square white house with the super-gorgeous array of blue cornflowers and pink roses behind it. I mean to get acquainted and enter that backyard some day. I feel that it would be worth while. I know that it would put our humble rose-bed to shame, though I am still haunted by the conviction that our Killarneys are just a shade the finest roses ever grown in the open.

God bless you, brother backyardsmen. May your lettuce never fail to head nor your hollyhocks to bloom. And at your morning worship know that I am with you in spirit, and that our common text is "Consider the lilies."