TRANSFORMING A BACKYARD INTO A GARDEN: BY CAROLINE SHELDON

There are a few unsightly spots in our beautiful little town, and one of them is “The Row.” This is a long, dreary-looking tenement house facing a factory. It is of a dull, neutral color and, on passing it, one is likely to wonder how any one can be discouraged enough or indifferent enough to his surroundings, to be willing to live in such a place, even with the inducement of low rent.

Some weeks ago a friend showed me a photograph of one of the backyards in The Row. It is such an excellent, such a convincing example of what a determined love of beauty can produce, with unpromising materials, and with no encouragement from external circumstances, that it is worth passing on. Few workers could begin with less inspiration from environment, or suggestion in house or grounds of any possible plan of improvement. The first photograph shows the house and yard as they were when Mrs. B—moved in; the second gives the results of her efforts at beautifying her abode.

Mrs. B— is a working woman. She earns her living by scrubbing, cleaning and laundry work, some of the hardest forms of manual labor. Yet that she has a constructive imagination, a love of beauty, and good taste, is clearly shown by the changes in house and grounds wrought during her occupancy of one of the tenements in The Row.

The first step in the process was the cleaning up of the yard, the removal of the rubbish, clearing the ground, mending the walk, and in other ways providing for order and cleanliness.

Next, as the coal-house could not be painted, Mrs. B—planted Madeira-vines, grape-vines, castor-beans, and morning glories, all rapid growers, which soon covered the unsightly building with their own gracious lines and tints of beauty. Similar vines and plants, with the addition of a clump of canvas, were persuaded to hide the fence on the left of the enclosure, while two old wire plant-stands, being given a coat of white paint, and filled with pots of small plants, make the coal-house look, from the yard, as though it were a well-shaded porch.

Mrs. B—sleeps in her transformed “yard,” unless the inclemency of the weather makes such a thing impossible. Hence the cots which suggest an
out-of-door sitting room. The rugs which cover the hard, bare earth, are inexpensive, easily cleaned, and can be quickly placed under shelter at the approach of a storm.

This transformation indicates the coming of the days when there will be no more backyards, or rather none of those unsightly, unwholesome, disease breeding plots of ground at the back of town and city houses given over to ashes, garbage cans, old rags and broken furniture. Backyards should be, like the walled gardens of Araby, oases of beauty and rich sources of income. The authorities of every city and town will gladly cooperate with tenants in the removing of the heaps of useless objects that encumber the earth,—an invaluable possession. Few indeed are the city houses which can boast a bit of earth that will transform a wee brown seed to drapery of flowering vines or luscious, wholesome fruits and vegetables for the table.

Even a small yard far down at the bottom of a city canyon formed by skyscraping office buildings or towering tenement houses, could be made a comfort to the owner and a joy to the hundreds of neighbors looking down upon it by such vines as periwinkle, which will cover the ground as grass and star it with delicate little flowers, or the green of white-leaved vinca, or shapely ivy leaf. Evergreen trees will grow provided they get sweep of air; ferns of course will thrive. Instead of grass, if there be not enough sun for grass, make a "pebbled lake," as the Japanese do. They are neat and decorative and can be bordered with ferns. On the top of a fence, jars or wooden boxes of ivy could be put. True, it is a great disadvantage not to have the sunshine to call out flowers; still a yard can be made beautiful without it.

We know a New York City postman who makes the long trip to the Bronx every day just because he can rent a little house with a bit of ground at the back. This postman has by patient development of his small portion of earth managed to have a grape-vine over his kitchen door that yields him fruit for the fall and jellies for the winter. There is a small chicken coop in one corner of the yard with another grape-vine over it. In the center of the garden is a plum tree. Corn grows along one side of the fence and rambling roses over the other. Last year he raised lettuce, radishes, squash, peas, celery, parsley and tomatoes enough to supply his own table and his neighbors, who used their backyards as dumping ground for lumber and ashes. Between the rows of vegetables he "stuck some bundles of them pansies" and some dahlias. Many flowers hobnob socially with his vegetables. In the evening he rests under his grape-vines, enjoying a sight of his estate enclosed on three sides with a high board fence, yet blooming with "posies" and yielding fresh fruit and vegetables.

DON'T KILL THE BIRDS, THEY ARE ONE OF THE FARMER'S GREATEST HELPERS

It is an encouraging sign of the increase of kindness in humanity, of the desire to live and let live, that has resulted in the almost universal interest and protection of our bird life. Through the unceasing energy of our Government we have been convinced that the birds are one of the most active agencies for good. Without these little flying songsters the farmer's crop could not be raised, therefore the food supply would be endangered. From time to time we see photographs in different magazines of birdless areas, the trees of which have been stripped by Gypsy moths or some other pest. It has been brought to our notice that regions carefully guarding bird life by the putting up of nesting boxes, feeding shelves, leaving coverts and tangled thickets in which they can build have remained green and thriving while tracts of land in the same neighborhood where birds have been given no protection have been shorn of their leaves by destructive insects. The great balance of nature has been disturbed by wanton destruction of bird life in the past, and we have paid the penalty. But there are now over one half a million bird clubs in this country actively engaged in establishing bird sanctuaries and interesting the schoolchildren in protecting rather than destroying their nests.

One pair of Gypsy moths unchecked would in eight years produce a brood that would destroy every vestige of foliage in the United States is a statement of the North American. The number of Gypsy moths destroyed in even one day by the birds is almost unbelievably large. It has been proved by statistics over and over again that without the birds our country would soon be ravished of most of its beauty.