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Dieffenbach on Beans, May 25, 1953

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1.
Beans! — "de Boonw!"

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Beans are of so many different varieties that I will not undertake to mention all of them in such a dissertation. Beans will climb all over; in fact they once had reached the moon in the story of Jack and the Bean-stalk. While a lot of them are generally planted in the cornfield, so as to avoid giving them poles, nevertheless a considerable number have always been raised in the home garden.

Beans are so easy to raise that I will not spend time nor ink in explaining how to prepare the soil. To make a long story short, let's get a hoe and plant them. But how? Oh well, don't put too many in one hill, but enough to have a nice stand, even if the bugs, the worms, and the beetles get some. For bush-beans planted in a row I prefer to drop two, about six inches apart, and have the next two not over a foot distant. So by the time the bushes are full grown, there is one continuous hedge-like row of beans. They used to say of a man — a nice do-well — "hell never amount to a hill of beans"; must have been a very poor specimen of homo sapiens.

Beans have always had a bad reputation, viz. that they cause the consumer to imitate a balloon,
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Beans! — "Die Bohna!"

and fill up with gas. Of late beans are infested with various insect enemies. The Mexican bean beetle is a nuisance, and should have kept "South of the Border". Beans are good food, either in the green state, or the matured seed. Who does not love a bubbling pot of tender bean-pods, and the shaft of a fork sticking up in the middle of the succulent mess? I would sooner be a poor penniless beggar picking a mess of beans, than a king reclining on a bed of roses.

Beans are so easy to raise and so easy to prepare for the table; even raw right off the bush. I have found the Golden Wax to be delicious eating. Some of the best beans that I ever ate were from a big cast-iron bean-pot in the fire-box of a big steam shovel, at the big power-plant at Pine Grove, when that project was under construction years ago. I was headed for the mess-hall for dinner when someone back of me hollered — "gleichst du kein gabockua boona?" (Don't you like any baked beans?)

I turned around and there was this grimy red-headed shovel-man, standing alongside his shanty and eating a dish of beans. So I walked back to him and inquired why he had called to me. "Well, you

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know, you are not over-eating in there," he said, pointing in the direction of the barracks with his spoon. "Don't you like beans?"

"Sure, I like beans," I replied. So he reached over and got the big poker he used to stir up the fire in the fire box, opened the door, and reaching in he pulled this big bean-pot out of the fire. Lifting the lid off with the poker he now got a spoon out of a small cupboard and ladled a pint of them into a granite-ware pan and handed them to me. He had a box of salt and one of pepper. The beans were soft and still dry and mealy, and plenty of the best of bacon in them. I never in all my varied career met up with anything in the line of food that could hold a candle to those beans. I did not need to go to the mess-hall - my top-button was open and I could have ate the pot and all - they were that good. When I asked him what I owed for the feed, he replied - "beans - you get beans in the store, or some bacon - the pot never gets empty." It sure didn't. I'd bet money he had three different kinds of beans in that pot at the same time. But the fire had to be kept a-going to run the big shovel; and men must toil, and women must weep.

Years ago the old folks would take a needle and
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a string and they would run the needle through a green bean-pod and tie the string to it; then another one was added, and so on, and on, and on. When the string was all used up or the cluster would get to be too heavy for the string, then the two ends were tied together and the entire lot was hung on a nail to dry. This was the way the Indians dried them, and still do so today. The colonists saw the red man do thus, and followed his example. When needed during the Winter the entire clump was thrown into a pot of hot water, the string was removed and by adding some meat or grease a good meal was the result. Likewise the dried kernels would be parched or scorched on hot stones, and carried in the pocket of the settler's wammus, or the breech-cloth of the savage, to be munched at their own leisure. The Indian on the war-path or the Dutchman on his Conestoga, bound for the wide and woolly West, would subsist on this meagre fare.

As a boy on the farm I used to eat my fill of an entirely different kind of beans; the only name that I know for them is the Penna. Dutch — "firo-boona". They much resemble a lima, only very much bigger, both the plant and also the full grown bean. We would boil them until soft and then pickle them.

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Beans! — "de Boon!"

These beans grow to an immense size, going over poles fifteen to some twenty feet high. The poles we would tie six of them together at the top, thus making a very strong buck, and not likely to blow over.

And now comes the superstitious part, the Black Magic, or whatever the *modus operandi* may be called. One year I planted a big patch of these beans as we could sell them at a special price because of their extra size. I cut, and dragged home, a thousand poles from the woods near-by. We put them up, and tied them; and the beans continued to grow like all get out, but refused to crawl up those poles. Not a single vine could you see on its upward way — they went around on the ground like crazy, but naary a one went up.

We wound them around the poles, cut a shiver of bark loose, and slipped the vine back of it, into the cut; they all returned to the ground. This kept up for weeks, the vines continuing to grow, and forming a dense, impenetrable mass of vines and leaves.

When I told of my trouble at my neighbor's, their grandson remarked —: "Ich duck de hucht see in unner gainta gablonst." — (I guess you planted them when the corners of the moon were turned down.)

At the time I remembered the date of planting them:
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He got the calendar hanging on the wall of the kitchen, and together we looked it up. And I'm a knock-kneed, glorified wobble-de-gook if it wasn't "in the down of the moon". Where in all the Sam Hill the power comes from I don't care a wee bit; all I know is that those daw-beans never went up those poles; and in all that dense jungle of vines we didn't get one bushel of beans, all told.

Anyone reading this narrative and doubting the truth of the above statement, just get in your car, drive to my home, and take me to any notary you desire — I'll sit on a pile of Bibles as high as the Empire State Building and I'll swear that every single word of it is true. This happened some thirty years ago, but some of the persons who had helped are still living.

I am a born Pennsylvania Dutchman. I am not superstitious, taking things as a whole. I am very much like the man from Missouri — I've got to be showed; and that time I guess the evil spirits decided it was time to show me.

I remember the time when Wm. Geckman was the County Superintendent of Schools, in Berks County. Dad was one of the school-directors in Bethel Township, so, when the Sept. came around May 25th. 1953

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visiting the schools, Dad accompanied him, and drove him over the highways and bi-ways of the entire Tap.; this required several days to cover the whole territory, Bethel being of considerable size, and the roads of that day being as they were. So the Supt. stayed at our home overnight.

Well do I remember how he sat at that table and shovelled in the aforementioned big beans, above his flaming red beard. He was a tall man, still quite young, and he had the most wonderful red whiskers that I ever saw. Finally, when he could no longer get them down, then he commenced to praise those beans, asking my mother how she prepared them; and I am positive that he had a few in his pocket for seed, when he left our home.

Some of the self-same variety were dark-colored, and had fiery-red spots on them; the others were white. I have scoured the country-side for a number of years, asking the leading agriculturists, market gardeners, seedsmen and anyone that I imagined might know or remember about these big and delicious beans, but up to the present date, I have failed to find him. (It don't matter if it should be a her.) (She might be able to help a lonely old man to cook 'em.)

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Beans are very nourishing and also healthy, if not too freely indulged in; in that respect they are much like liquor. (The word as used here of course means alcohol.) And believe it or not, as Ripley says, beans contain alcohol. I have in my possession a book on Brewing and Distilling, formerly used by Samuel Dieffenbach of Mt. Aetna, Pa. in his distillery — "dort unwar om Sei Barrick," — (at the foot of Hog Mountain) a steep hill at the east end of the town, and still so called by the inhabitants of the village.

Sam D. was a brother of my grandfather, and did a flourishing business in his day, running a big licensed distillery. In this book that I have there is a table of various grains, nuts and seeds that may be used for distilling alcohol, and the common bean is one of them, also the acorn and horse-chestnut. The last mentioned may be irrelevant to the subject, but who has not read some irrelevant stuff in their time?

J. H. Reichert who used to own and operate Willow Glen Dairy Farm near Host, Pa., years ago, one year gave a picnic for his employees and friends. This was held in Amanda Miller's big grove (an adjoining neighbor) and old Jake out-did himself that time, he had an orchestra, refreshments, and some kind of a clown to entertain the crowd, and this comic guy sang a
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song in the P. Dutch dialect about beans. If I
 can still get it all in line so as to make sense, it
 ran in this manner: "Boona fer moryets; boona
 fer mitt-dawgs; boona fer owvets! Boona! Boona!
Boo-oo-ooona! Boona sin net goot fer der mawgs;
 boona-fer dommt sei — de schteck wofo ain ou
 da awga! Boona! Boona! Boo-oo-oo-ooona-a-ah!
 (Beans for breakfast; beans for dinner; beans
 for supper! Beans! Beans! Be-e-e-ans! Beans
 are not good for the stomach! Beans, I'll be damned,
 the vines will grow out of your eyes! Beans! Beans!
 Be-e-e-eeeee-eans!) If I remember a-right he gave
 some story of working on a farm and being served beans
 exclusively for every meal, and then made up the song
 to fit the tale. Anyway we all laughed more about
 beans that afternoon than ever before or since; or
 like Tom Epting of Strausstown used to say — "Meer
 hen mainer gschposs cot os leidt hen"! (We had more
 fun than people have.) "Waishet do, liever Editor —
 der Tom iss ewa awe so ew n arrisher Deitscher
 dei-hecker!" (Do you know, dear Editor, Tom also
 is such a crazy Dutch — ? "Was der deffel haist
 mer now ew dei-hecker, in Anglisch? Euschuld
 ich ew see mich? (Pardon me!)

Curtain.

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