

KENTUCKY BLUE GRASS

"Next in importance to the divine profusion of water, light, and air, those three great physical facts which render existence possible, may be reckoned the universal beneficence of grass. Grass is the most widely distributed of all vegetable beings, and is at once the type of our life and the emblem of our mortality. Lying in the sunshine among the buttercups and dandelions of May, scarcely higher in intelligence than the minute tenants of that mimic wilderness, our earliest recollections are of grass; and when the fitful fever is ended and the foolish wrangle of the market and forum is closed, grass heals over the scar which our descent into the bosom of the earth has made, and the carpet of the infant becomes the blanket of the dead.

"Grass is the forgiveness of nature—her constant benediction. Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again with grass, and carnage is forgotten. Streets abandoned by traffic become grass-grown like rural lanes, and are obliterated. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal. Besieged by the sullen hosts of winter, it withdraws into the impregnable fortress of its subterranean vitality, and emerges upon the first solicitation of spring. Sown by the winds, by wandering birds, propagated by the subtle horticulture of the elements, which are its ministers and servants, it softens the rude outline of the world. Its tenacious fibres hold the earth in its place, and prevent its soluble components from washing into the wasting sea. It invades the solitude of deserts, climbs the inaccessible slopes and forbidding pinnacles of mountains, modifies climates, and determines the history, character, and destiny of nations. Unobtrusive and patient, it has immortal vigor and aggression. Banished from the thoroughfare and the field, it bides its time to return, and when vigilance is relaxed, or the dynasty has perished, it silently resumes the throne from which it has been expelled but which it never abdicates. It bears no blazonry of bloom, to charm the senses with fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more enchanting than the lily or the rose. It yields no fruit in earth or air, and yet should its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the world.

"One grass differs from another grass in glory. One is vulgar and another patrician. There are grades in its vegetable nobility. But the king of them all, with genuine blue blood, is Blue Grass. Why it is called blue, save that it is most vividly and intensely green, is inexplicable; but had its unknown priest baptized it with all the hues of the prism, he would not have changed its hereditary title to imperial superiority over all its humbler kin.

"There is a portion of Kentucky known as the 'Blue Grass Region', and it is safe to say that it has been the arena of the most magnificent intellectual and physical development that has been witnessed among men or animals upon the American continent, or perhaps upon the whole face of the world. In corroboration of this belief, it is necessary only to mention Henry Clay, the orator, and the horse, Lexington, both peerless, electric, immortal. The ennobling love of the horse has extended to all other races of animals. The reflex of this solicitude appears in the muscular, athletic vigor of the men, and the voluptuous beauty of the women who inhabit this favored land. Palaces, temples, forests, peaceful institutions, social order, spring like exhalations from the congenial soil.

"All these marvels are attributable as directly to the potential influence of blue grass as day and night to the revolution of the earth. Eradicate it, substitute for it the scrawny herbage of impoverished barrens, and in a single generation man and beast would alike degenerate into a common decay. Man cannot become learned, refined, and tolerant, while every energy of body and soul is consumed in the task of wresting a bare sustenance from a penurious soil; neither can woman become elegant and accomplished when every hour of every day in every year is spent in the deadening drudgery of domestic cares. There must be leisure, competence, and repose, and these can only be attained where the results of labor are abundant and secure.

"Social degradation, wherever it exists, arises largely from material causes, and is susceptible of relief. In the moral pharmacy there is an antidote. That salutary panacea is Blue Grass. This is the healing catholicon, the strengthening plaster, the verdant cataplasm, efficient alike in the *Materia Medica* of Nature and of Morals.

"Seed the country down to blue grass and the reformation would begin. Such a change must be gradual. One generation would not witness it, but three would see it accomplished. The aspect of Nature and society would gradually change.

"If we would have prosperity commensurate with our opportunities, we must look to Blue Grass. It will raise the temperature, increase the rainfall, improve the climate, develop a higher fauna and flora, and consequently a loftier attendant civilization; and with the general diffusion of blue grass, we may reasonably anticipate a career of unexampled and enduring prosperity."

—From *Essay by the Honorable John J. Ingalls, one time United States Senator from the State of Kansas.*