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GRADUATE COLLEGE

LARIAT IN THE SUN: THE STORY OF WILL ROGERS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

SAMUEL FREDERICK ROACH, JR.

Norman, Oklahoma

1972

LARIAT IN THE SUN: THE STORY OF WILL ROGERS

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PREFACE

> "Can it be that a whole generation carries a wound in its heart for Will Rogers and the next, its own offspring, does not even know who he was?"[x]

Will Rogers died more than thirty-five years ago. At that time, he was one of the best known and most beloved Americans that had ever lived. Since the cowboy-philosopher's demise, at least sixteen books concerning him have been published. None of these volumes contain a documented analysis of the Oklahoman's complete life. This work represents an effort to fill that void. It is somewhat unorthodox in its evaluative methods and use of source material. This characteristic has been imposed by the nature of the evidence which exists concerning the cracker-box philosopher. The Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma, has been extremely helpful in this project. However, the files of the Memorial are not open to the researcher and he is only allowed to

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[x]Frank Tripp, "We Need Will Rogers," Fresno Bee, November 8, 1948, cited in Reba N. Collins, "Will Rogers, Writer and Journalist" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1967), pp. 8-9.

examine those materials which the curators, Robert Love and Paula M. Love, make available. Therefore, some primary documents housed at the Memorial are cited from secondary sources because I was not allowed to see them. Mr. and Mrs. Love are very protective of their holdings and seem to let each investigator view only a portion of their collections.[xx]

The published material which exists concerning Will Rogers also possesses peculiar characteristics. Many of the sources accepted in one portion of this study are criticized sharply in other sections. This is due to the contradictory nature of the works themselves. For example, numerous comments made by P. J. O'Brien in his, Will Rogers: Ambassador of Good Will; Prince of Wit and Wisdom, are definitely not true. Nevertheless, O'Brien evidently saw some of the travelogue films which Will made in Europe during 1926 and he includes some of the dialogue from the series in his treatise. This is the only source which records these comments. There is no known reason not to accept them as authentic recreations. Therefore, Ambassador of Good Will, despite its faults, is considered a valid source concerning the 1926 travel movies.

[xx]Both William R. Brown and E. Paul Alworth have indirectly alluded to this problem. William R. Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers " (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1964), pp. 416-417; Paul Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers " (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1958), pp. 2-3.

This examination cannot claim to be a definitive study of Will Rogers. However, it will, hopefully, present a new, critical and documented account of the great humorist's life. The contribution that he made to his society and the requirement of scholarship demand such a beginning.

I wish to thank the Library staffs of the University of Oklahoma, Emory University and Kennesaw Junior College for the assistance they have given me in this endeavor. Mr. Robert Love and Mrs. Paula McSpadden Love of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, deserve my unqualified indebtedness for unselfishly providing me with many previously unavailable materials. I owe Will Rogers, Jr. and Jimmy Rogers my heartfelt thanks for their cooperation.

Special appreciation is extended to the Administration of Kennesaw Junior College, and especially to George Beggs. Their help has allowed me to devote my full energies to this effort. The Kennesaw Junior College Foundation has generously supported my work with vital research grants. I can only hope that my performance has justified their confidence in me.

The History Department of the University of Oklahoma has supported me in an unqualified manner over many years. I can never express my appreciation to them. Dr. Gilbert C. Fite helped conceive this project and guided it to fruition through an exceptional display of professional and personal consideration. This study could not have been

completed without his supervision.

And finally, to my wife, Carole Hyde Roach, I am grateful for unfailing encouragement and a belief in me that surpasses human understanding.

AN HISTORICAL NOTE

Please don't write my life! . . . Every guy that has a pencil and some old fool scrap paper is going to put my life right in between the kivers of a dime novel (maybe nickle). I guess it is the same in each state. The disappointed writers of Kansas are perhaps after notorious characters up there. The unpublished writers of Texas are perhaps telling the early life struggles of some old Texas highbinder. That these gentlemen dident know you, or maybe had just met you once or twice in their lives never seemed to hinder their idea that they was the one to do your life.

What kinder hurt me about all this life writing epidemic is that no one that knows me has ever suggested writing one (that kinder hurt my pride).

Most of my life has been lived alone. I never run with a pack. In my later years Mrs. Rogers could perhaps give you a few details, but no one of my various authors has ever seen or asked her.

Besides I havent even started living. I am going to cut loose here

some day and try to get some life into my life and even then it wont be fit to tell about. The first part will be uninteresting and the last part will be too scandalous.

I am just tipping the boys off to sharpen their pencils and go after somebody else. Why dont they pick on Governor Bill Murray? Bill has done more, lived more in a year than I ever did or will. So Bill, I hearby pass on a batch (I think it is a dozen) of amateur Carl Sandbergs. Give em a chance, they are all fine boys. I got nothing against em. But let em practice writing your life. Yours can stand it. But my poor little life Bernard Shaw couldent make it look like anything.

Will Rogers, 1933*

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*Donald Day, editor. The Autobiography of Will Rogers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), pp. vii-viii of Foreword by Will Rogers, Jr. and Jimmy Rogers.

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LARIAT IN THE SUN: THE STORY OF WILL ROGERS

CHAPTER I

Early Years

> Some people say that this patch of land we call the Will Rogers Country, and the Oklahoma it became a part of, held the last flare of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, that here was its last frontier. Perhaps that is so. But that spirit, under the spacious clouds and along the landscape and the flowing Verdigris, seems too indigenous, too well blended with Osage and Delaware and Cherokee, to carry an alien tag.
>
> Rather than this, it was a spirit of gaiety and laughter at work, of a way of life that was good and somehow got distilled and poured into the heart of a little boy. [1]

This is the story of a wealthy Oklahoma cattleman's son who was born and raised to be a cowboy. The youngster, as has often been related, grew to such stature in manhood that the world became his playground and the greatest and meekest of its inhabitants his friends and associates. Yet this son of the western prairie always remained in the deep recesses of his heart, soul and mind what his heritage dictated--a cowboy. Many said this continuity precipitated his success. Others believed he possessed an inherent greatness which inevitably placed him

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[1]Noel Kaho, The Will Rogers Country (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), p. 4.

in the world's spotlight. Whatever the reasons for his rise to fame and fortune, Will Rogers reflected his frontier background throughout his life.

Colonel William Penn Adair Rogers, forecasting the future in a fashion similar to Mark Twain and Hailey's Comet, began life on election day, November 4, 1879, near today's Oologah, in the Indian Territory which later became a part of the state of Oklahoma. Doctor Richard Owen Trent, a relative, delivered him in the big "two story Log House" that served the Rogers' family as a ranch house. The back of the structure had three frame rooms. As birth neared, Mary Rogers, Will's mother, possible sensing an event of more than normal importance, asked those present to move her from a frame room in the rear of the house to the comfortable left front room. There she felt at ease with her rocking chair beside the fireplace, Clem's desk nearby and a little walnut bed that would be the baby's. Willie, as the family would call the new child, related many years later that his mother moved shortly before his birth because "she wanted me to be born in a log House."[2]

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[2]Donald Day, ed., The Autobiography of Will Rogers, foreword by Will Rogers, Jr. and Jim Rogers. (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1949), p. 3; Sallie Rogers McSpadden, "Sketch of the Early Life of Will Rogers," The Ranchman, I November, 1941, p. 7; Donald Day, Will Rogers: A Biography (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), p. 7; Spi M. Trent, My Cousin Will Rogers, Intimate and Untold Tales (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1938), pp. 14, 15. Noel Kaho makes the following observation concerning Will Rogers' birthplace: "Some people say that Willie was born at Oologah. But when Willie was born in '79 there wasn't

The facts surrounding Willie's birth remain hazy. Evidently "Aunt Sue Rogers," a Cherokee woman who answered a call to assist Mary Rogers, named the infant after her first husband, William Penn Adair, a civil war compatriot of Willie's father.[3] The strange and varied mixture of ancestral blood which ran through his veins made Willie an American hybrid. The best evidence seems to indicate that the youngest Rogers possessed a conbination of English, Welsh, Scotch, Cherokee Indian and either Dutch or German blood. His Cherokee Indian heritage

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any Oologah. And when the town was founded by the Sundays early in the nineties, Willie was long since away at school." Kaho, Rogers Country, p. 38. A similar and interesting notation is made by Reba Neighbors Collins concerning the date of Will's birth: "Though he was casual about most details, Will knew the exact date of his birth November 4, 1879. Yet he even once listed that fact incorrectly. Signing the 'Matriculation Book' when he entered Kemper Military School, January 13, 1897, Will listed his birth day as '11-4-1880.'" Reba Neighbors Collins, "Will Rogers, Writer and Journalist" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1967), p. 44. Willie's name was formally listed on The Authenticated Rolls of 1880, Cherokee Nation, Cooweescoowee District as number 2340. Day, Biography, p. 7; Homer Croy, Our Will Rogers (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), p. 7.

[3]William Howard Payne and Jake G. Lyons, compliers and editors, Folks Say of Will Rogers: A Memorial Anecdotage (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), p. 14; Trent, My Cousin, p. 16; Betty Rogers, Will Rogers: The Story of His Life Told by His Wife (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1943), p. 38; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 7. It should be noted that the Folks Say of Will Rogers version of this incident is accepted here because it seems to have the best chance of being correct. There are admittedly internal inconsistencies in this rendition. In addition, it should be pointed out the the work by Spi Trent tries to imitate Will Rogers' pseudo phonetic country writing and spelling style. The book is a good and valuable one without this awkward twist which creates somewhat of an artificial atmosphere.

has been stressed over the years because Willie himself emphasized it in his later life. The reports in this area are again conflicting; however, it is substantiated that both of his parents had Cherokee blood. The best evidence indicates that Willie's father was three-sixteenths Cherokee and his mother one-eighth. This would make Willie five-thirty seconds Cherokee. Accordingly, his name was listed on the official rolls of the Cherokee Nation as number 11, 384. The final census of the Five Civilized Tribes made by the Department of Interior in 1906 listed him as a quarter blood Cherokee Indian.[4]

Relatively few accounts of Willie's infancy are available, but he was evidently an unsightly baby. About the only recollection of his early childhood which projected humor, referred to his questionable appearance.

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[4]Final Rolls of the Five Civilized Tribes (Department of Interior, 1906), p. 374, cited in E. Paul Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1958), p. 7; Trent, My Cousin, p. 256; Day, Biography, pp. 1, 4, 8; David Randolph Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1935), p. 46; Ellsworth Collings, The Old Home Ranch: The Will Rogers Range in the Indian Territory (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Redlands Press, 1964), p. 38. Those interested in geneological aspects of the Rogers family can begin by examining Emmett Starr's Early History of the Cherokee, Embracing Aboriginal Customs, Religion, Laws, Folk Lore, and Civilization (Published by the author, c. 1917); Carolyn Thomas Foreman's article on Mrs. William Penn Adair in Chronicles of Oklahoma, September, 1943, Vol. 21, No. 3; Mrs. Cherrie Adair Moore's article, "William Penn Adair" in Chronicles of Oklahoma, 1951, Vol. 28, No. 1; the studies of Noel Kaho of Claremore, Oklahoma; and Mittie Owen McDavid's study of the Irish-Indian heritage of Will Rogers in the May, 1940, Vol. II, No. 5, of The Southern Literary Messenger, all cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 331-332; Don L. Shadburn, "The Distinguished Rogers Family" The Georgia Magazine, XV June, 1971, pp. 13-15; Ibid., XV July, 1971, pp. 7-9.

Spi Trent, Willie's cousin, related a family story dealing with this topic:

> My folks are always laffin about the way Will looked when he Entered This World, an nobody would-a dreamed he would ever get connected with a man like Mr. Ziegfeld, who was a Beauty Specialist. They tell one about a bashful cowhand workin on the place who come in to look at the bundle of crinkled red flesh laying on his mamas knee, and how the cowboy just stood there scuffin his feet an trying to find something nice to say an not bein able to. Finally, Mrs. Rogers tried to help him out an she looks up and says, Joe, I know Exactly what you are Thinkin.
>
> Joe gets as red as Will was in the face an stammers and sputters all over himself. W-w-whats that, Maam?
>
> Youre thinkin this is the Ugliest Baby you ever did see.
>
> Joe was so took with shame that he rushed outer the room but later on he said to another cowboy, You know That Mrs. Rogers? She Sure is a mind reader.[5]

The parental influence on any child is a great one. This factor assumed added importance in Willie's case because of the isolation of the family ranch and definite personalities of both parents, Mary and Clem Rogers.

Clem Rogers, a self-made frontiersman, would have represented a hero figure to any child. He was born Clement Vann Rogers, the son of Robert Rogers and Sally Vann Rogers, on January 11, 1839, near today's Westville, Oklahoma. Clem's father died in 1840. When his son was only one year old, Robert Rogers made his wife promise, while on his death bed, that their son would be raised to "ride his own horse" in

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[5]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 16-17. All the mistakes in this quotation are taken from Trent's work. It should be noted that this story is also related in Folks Say of Will Rogers as taken from the Shawnee, Oklahoma, Morning News. Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 17.

the masculine tradition of the frontier.[6] Sally Vann Rogers tried to provide for her son as best as she could under the circumstances. The youth received a fair elementary education, much against his own desires, at the sternly run Baptist Mission school located near his home. He then went to the Male Seminary at Tahlequah to continue school; however, he eventually left there at age sixteen without graduating. There were evidently several factors involved in Clem's quitting school. His general distaste for education constituted one element of disenchantment, while an inability to get along with his stepfather compounded the problem. The final straw may have been a girl, Mary America Schrimsher, with whom he became infatuated when he met her at school in Tahlequah. The attraction seemed a mutual one, but Clem felt he had to prove himself as a man in the frontier tradition before he could win Mary America. This could not be accomplished sitting behind a school desk.[7]

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[6]Sally Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collins, July 10, 1941, cited in Ellsworth Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 8; Day, Biography, p. 4. The term "to ride your own horse" is explained by Ellsworth Collings as follows: "'To ride your own horse' was a common slogan among the early pioneer settlers of the Cherokee Nation and embodied the idea of strong, independent men and women, the ideal of the time." Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 8. Ellsworth Collings' work is extremely valuable because he obtained extensive interviews with Sally Rogers McSpadden, Will's only living sister, shortly before her death. This book remains the only properly documented research in print concerning even a portion of Will Rogers' life. It should be noted that Donald Day mistakenly refers to Clem's mother and father as Catherine and James. Day, Biography, p. 4; Trent, My Cousin, p. 22; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 7.

[7]Sally Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, May 10, 1941, cited

The ambitious youth had nourished the dream of becoming a cattleman since childhood. When he left school, it seemed natural for him to get a job as a cowboy with Joel M. Bryan, who was driving a herd of five hundred cattle to Kansas City. Soon after this, Clem decided he would like to establish his own ranch in the Cooweescoowee Country. The Cherokees held their territory in common and any Cherokee citizen could use as much of the land as he wanted, free of charge, as long as he did not interfere with the previous settlement activities of a neighbor. The obvious opportunities which existed in this region along with Clem's burning ambition convinced his mother and stepfather that he should be helped on his way. The prospective cattle baron received "twenty-five longhorn cows, a bull, four horses, some trading post supples and two negro slaves, Rabb and Huss, who had belonged to his father" as a parting gift.[8] Clem left home with his supplies and slaves and headed for the Cooweescoowee District in 1856. He soon established a trading post and ranch on the unsettled land which surrounded the Verdigris River. His efforts did not proceed unnoticed by Mary America Schrimsher.

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in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 9; Joseph Bradfield Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, Oklahoma; A History of the State and It's People, Vol. III (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co. Inc., 1929), p. 244; Day, Biography, pp. 4-5.

[8]Sallie Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, July 10, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 9-11, 28, 44; Interview with George Mayes who knew Clem Rogers as a young cowboy, cited in Ibid. Donald Day states that Clem was given "200 head of cattle, and a dozen ponies" when he left home. Day, Biography, p. 5.

She and Clem became man and wife in 1859. He had proven his manhood by making a place in the world for himself and a family.[9]

Mary Rogers, Willie's mother, provided a sharp contrast to her husband in almost all respects. Born on October 9, 1839, Mary had religious and wealthy parents, Martin and Elizabeth Schrimsher, who were from prominent families. They lived on a plantation near Tahlequah. The list of family accomplishments included two governors, a member of the State Supreme Court, a Congressman and a brother, John G. Schrimsher, who became a judge. Mary first attended school at the Academy located in Cane Hill, Arkansas. This reflected the financial prosition of her parents and their Cherokee Indian heritage. The recollections of her in youth remain scattered; however, she was evidently "sweet and unspoiled," "loved" by "everyone" as well as being a "tall, slender girl with dark hair and flashing black eyes."[10] It was no

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[9]Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 11, 45; Harold Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1938), p. 5; Day, Biography, p. 5; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 4; The works by Harold Keith and David Milsten are basically undocumented but they remain extremely valuable because of the extensive interviewing done by both authors. Keith's volume ends with a valuable five page bibliographical comment. This remains, along with Ellsworth Collings' efforts, the best scholarly approach in print to even a portion of Will Rogers' life.

[10]Ed Hicks to Ellsworth Collings, December 15, 1942, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 15-16; Thoburn and Wright, Oklahoma; The State and Its People, III, p. 258; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 5; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 39; Day, Biography, p. 4. It should be noted that there seems to be some confusion on the part of both Donald Day and Spi Trent con-

wonder that she caught the attention of young Clem Rogers.

Mary Schrimsher's Cherokee Indian heritage, however, bothered this lovely young woman. Her grandfather, John Gunther, married a fifteen-year-old full-blood Cherokee girl, Catherine by name, of the Paint Clan. Gunther, who owned a salt flat, acquired his wife's hand in marriage by offering her Clan salt "while the grass grows and the rivers run." Evidently Catherine never learned to speak English and John Gunther would not consent to their children learning Cherokee. The result of this situation saw the torturing experience of a mother being unable to communicate with her children. The bleakness of Catherine's existence imposed such pain upon her that she would visit her own people for weeks at a time. The desire to see her children tormented the distraught mother and she would return home for short periods. Things had not changed, however, and she continued to go virtually unnoticed by both her husband and children.[11] This type of traumatic experience, although it is obviously impossible to prove, could easily have made a lasting impression on the family of John Gunther and their descendants. And just as easily, it could have planted ex-

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cerning Mary Rogers' date and place of birth. Day, Biography, p. 4; Trent, My Cousin, p. 22.

[11]Day, Biography, p. 3. It should be noted that Day is the only person who relates this story and he gives no source. Since he did have access to the original Rogers' papers and the family, the story is accepted as truth.

tremely negative, inferiority feelings in that family concerning its Indian heritage.

Mary's nature and habits as an adult reflected her general background of wealth and stability; again a sharp contrast with her husband's relatively crude and aggressive harshness. She was "beautiful" and "deeply religious" as a mature woman.[12] Gaiety, industriousness, warmth and sensitivity seemed to characterize her personality. Sallie Rogers McSpadden, her daughter, related years later: "I have been asked, times without number, 'Where did Will get his wit?' Primarily from our mother, who was one of those bright cheery women who had a bit of repartee always on the end of tongue."[13] Mary's presence heightened the festive atmosphere at her children's parties because she enjoyed the good times as much or more than her youngsters. In addition to her lightheartedness, Mary was dedicated to her children and looked after their needs meticulously.[14] This combination of industriousness and sensitivity manifested itself in her gardening activities. Her flower beds reflected a profusion of color and her table arrangements

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[12]Mrs. Mary G. Ingram cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 16.

[13]Sallie Rogers McSpadden cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. xiii; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 6.

[14]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 42; Sallie Rogers to Ellsworth Collings, August 6, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 37.

were known throughout the community for their beauty.[15] Many neighbors made an annual spring pilgrimage to the Rogers' ranch in order to view Mary's yellow jonquils and white and lavender hyacinths. She also established the cedars which formed a beautiful archway above the path to the house as they ran along either side of the stone walkway from the front gate to the portico.[16]

Like his background, Clem Rogers' personality differed drastically from that of his wife. He developed into a self-reliant, successful, but harsh man. When the American Civil War divided the Cherokee Nation between Union and Confederate sympathizers, Clem joined the southern forces and served in Stand Watie's mounted rifle regiment. At the end of the war, he held the rank of Captain. His ranch had been destroyed during the conflict. Undaunted, Clem began anew in the Indian Territory as a common laborer at Fort Gibson. He soon began driving freight wagons between St. Jospeh, Missouri, and Dallas, Texas. This business prospered, until the railroads reached Indian Territory. The cattleman's life still held attraction for Clem and he once again returned to the Verdigris River area to resume ranching. The first in the region to use barbed wire, he prospered greatly. He shortly became a wealthy man and built an impressive white house which con-

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[15]McSpadden, "Sketch," p. 7.

[16]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 40-41.

tained two fireplaces. The front walk was bordered by cedar trees and Mary's gardening made the yard a showplace.[17] The Rogers' home constituted one of the finest houses in the District and served as a truly fitting symbol of Clem's growing success and affluence.

By 1890, when Willie was 11 years old, Clem Rogers registered in the Census of the Cooweescoowee District of the Cherokee Nation as its third richest man. The basis of Clem's wealth remained cattle. He marketed between two and four thousand head of cattle each year during the 1870's and 1880's. Will Rogers himself told Herb McSpadden that it required as many as four long stock trains to load his father's cattle. Clem's purchase of a sewing machine and a piano, the first in the Cooweescoowee District, for his wife merely emphasized his growing position of wealth.[18]

The 1890's brought tragedy and change for Clem Rogers. Mary

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[17]Paula McSpadden Love, comp. The Will Rogers Book (Indianapolic, New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc., subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 160; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 18-28, passim; Day, Biography, pp. 5-7; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 7. It should be noted that Mrs. Paula M. Love is Will Rogers' niece.

[18]Herb McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, July 10, 1941; Culles Mayes to Ellsworth Collings, August 16, 1941, all cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 68, 71; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 16-17, 332; Roger Butterfield, "The Legend of Will Rogers" Life Magazine, XXVII July 18, 1947, p. 82. Homer Croy's work remains extremely valuable due to his extensive interviewing work and the skimpy combination of footnotes and bibliographical essay placed at the end. It is the third best documented work in print on Will Rogers behind the efforts of Ellsworth Collings and Harold Keith.

died in 1890 and, at the same time, general farming began replacing cattle ranching as the dominant economic activity in the area. Clem Rogers adjusted by turning to farming. He was the first to introduce extensive wheat cultivation into the Verdigris region. Farming generally replaced the raising of cattle on Clem's ranch. Will Rogers remembered having seen as many as fourteen reapers working in Clem's wheat fields at one time. In 1898, Clem quit the farm and moved into Claremore. There he purchased a hotel, livery stable, other property and a large two-story frame house on Fifth Street. Clem also became an executive vice-president of the new First National Bank of Claremore.[19]

Besides acquiring wealth, Clem Rogers succeeded in other ways. He had political experience through service as a member of the Confederate Council's Senate from 1862-1865, six years as a Cherokee Nation senator, an appraiser of the intruder improvements to the Cherokees in 1893, a member of the Dawes Commission in 1899 and a member of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention in 1907. The latter body named the area surrounding Claremore, Chelsea and Oologah, Rogers County, in honor of Clem.[20]

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[19]Charles Gilbreath to Ellsworth Collings, August 6, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 96; Ibid., pp. 71, 84-85; Kaho, The Will Rogers Country, pp. 37, 39-40; Trent, My Cousin, p. 22; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 27-28.

[20]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 5; Kaho, The Will

Clem's nature and habits fit in neatly with the image of the self-reliant and successful frontiersman. A large, impressive looking man with heavy eyebrows and drooping mustache, he always dressed to his station in life by wearing a white shirt, tie and coat with accompanying vest. He was regarded as generous to a fault. Each morning one of his children rode to the post office at Oowala to pick up the New York Times, various magazines and the latest issue of the Stock Report. All of these materials, in addition to many others, the master of the house read avidly. There remained, however, a rough, hard-driving and possibly even cruel side to Clem's personality. One of his blacks, Clement Van Rogers, related: "There wasn't ever any better person to be owned by than Mister Clem. When he said a thing he mean it, an' you didn't trifle around when he give you an order. More'n once he licked me, but it wasn't ever out of place."[21] Clem experienced moody spells and sometimes "he would be silent for a long period of time."[22] His voice projected loud and boisterous and his actions sometimes more than matched these qualities. An old neighbor recalled many years later

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Rogers Country, pp. 32, 42; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 28.

[21]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 4; Day, Biography, p. 15; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 6; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 38.

[22]Miss Gazelle Lane, Willie's cousin, to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 24.

that Clem "was rich and haughty--awful haughty. He thought he was monarch of all he surveyed, and he pretty nearly was." Upon finding someone on his range who did not belong, "he would ride up and hit him over the head with a quirt."[23] Some disliked Clem to the extreme and there existed bitter and unpleasant stories about him.[24]

The first ten years of Willie Rogers' boyhood were typical in some ways and very atypical in others. He was Mary Rogers' eighth child. Three of her children died at birth; Sallie, Maude, Robert, and May remained alive. Young Willie received special attention from his mother and sisters for two reasons. First, he was the baby. Second, the only other male heir, Robert, died of typhoid fever sometime between Willie's second and fourth birthday. Willie deserved special attention and consideration because, in the tradition of the frontier, he would someday assume the leadership of the Rogers family.[25]

Mary Rogers' health remained poor after Willie's birth and a black couple, Aunt Babe and Uncle Dan Walker, took daily care of the

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[23]Butterfield, "Legend," p. 82; Day, Biography, p. 10; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 39. Some favorable biographers have tried to pass off the harsh side of Clem's personality by referring to the fact that he was well-loved by all since he was universally known by the supposedly affectionate title of "Uncle Clem." Ellsworth Collings makes the following interesting comment on the matter: "Everybody in the new country, regardless of age, was known as 'Aunt' or 'Uncle'...." Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. xii.

[24]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 127.

[25]Day, Biography, pp. 7, 10; McSpadden, "Sketch," p. 7; Croy,

younger Rogers. Aunt Babe, a devoutly religious woman, would hold out her arms to Willie and say: "Come here, Willie. De Good Lawd say suffer little chillun what come unto me." Willie told his cousin, Spi Trent, that he feared going to Aunt Babe because "he might have to suffer." The young boy, however, did not project his caution toward Uncle Dan, whom he adored. Uncle Dan taught Willie how to ride and placed the first rope in his hands. The boy took to riding and roping immediately. Spi Trent related how Willie and one of Uncle Dan's boys, Mack, played rodeo at an early age. Willie would put a saddle on his back and play the part of horse by getting down on his hands and knees. Mack would then climb into the saddle and stay there until thrown off.[26]

Willie continued to play with black children throughout his early childhood. The association of a white child with so many blacks was because blacks provided the only companionship in the immediate vicinity near Willie's age. Rabb Rogers, one of Clem's former slaves, settled a few miles west of the big ranch. Rabb and his wife, Rody, had eleven children. Young Willie discovered this wealth of companionship and fun

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Our Will Rogers, pp. 20-21; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 161; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 41. There is a conflict between Betty Rogers, Croy and Day concerning the exact time of Robert's death. This work has taken the liberty of using the same loophole Day employed to avoid the controversy.

[26]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 17-18; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 10-11; Day, Biography, pp. 11-12; Clement Van Rogers to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 5-6.

by the time he reached six years of age. Visits to Rabb's became a common occurence; however, Clem and Mary oftentimes found it difficult to tear their young brave away from his playmates when time came to return home. Although cherishing the periods he spent at Rabb's, Willie had not forsaken Aunt Babe and Uncle Dan Walker. They had four boys and a tom-boy girl named Charlotte. Fun especially abounded on the Saturdays when additional black children came to spend the day at the Walker's. Willie particularly enjoyed fishing trips to catch perch on the Four Mile branch, since the fishermen earned a reward of a fish fry on the stream bank if the catch proved a large one.[27]

Willie's early youth also manifested an interest in the riding and roping activities of cowboys. Both Spi Trent, one of his boyhood companions, and Sister Sallie, saw this trend.[28] Because of young Willie's preoccupation with horses, B. T. Hooper, an early Cherokee cowboy who worked for Clem, received the task of keeping the adventuresome boy from getting hurt. Hooper recalled that he was assigned the job of helping Willie to get on and off his horse by the time the boy was three or four years old. Willie was allowed, due to his own insistence, to go on the big roundup held for all the ranches of the Verdigris Country by the time he reached eight or nine years of age. His horseman-

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[27]Keith, Boys Life of Will Rogers, pp. 16, 17, 18, 24, 25, 27.

[28]Trent, My Cousin, p. 18; McSpadden, "Sketch," p. 7.

ship seemed reckless: however, and once again B. T. Hooper saw that the fearless youngster avoided breaking his neck.[29]

The rascally and wholesome things young boys do when they begin to move away from home came naturally to Willie. He never liked hunting; however, like any youth he would use it, or anything else, as an excuse to avoid going to church on Sunday morning. Spi Trent, a compatriot on some occasions, recalled howhe and Willie chased coyotes and jack rabbits with their dogs and horses as a way of justifying their absence from the dreaded weekly religious services. One "old fussbudget" once accused Willie of stealing some of his hogs during one of the Sunday morning forays, but nothing ever came of it.[30]

One time, as frisky youngsters will do, Spi Trent took advantage of his partner Willie and played a practical joke on him. Spi related this "Christmas story" as follows:

> Well, pretty soon we had our curiosity satisfied about the presents an was outside with our fireworks. Will had a package of firecrackers in his hip pocket and If You Remember the arkitecture of firecrackers you will recollek there are about 100 crackers all attached to a little white fuse string which hangs out at one end so you can set em all off at one time if Youve a

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[29]B. T. Hooper to Ellsworth Collings, June 20, 1953, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 57-59. Collings noted the following concerning his interviews with Hooper: "At the time of this interview, Mr. Hooper was 94 years of age. He was weak physically, at the time, but mentally sound. His mind was active and had a fine memory for details over a long period. He was a very intelligent man." Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 59fn.

[30]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 14, 19-20.

Mind To.

So after I Get a Look at the rear of Will, I happen to see that this little fuse is hangin out. Well, I sure looked at that little string for quite a few minutes an the more I looked the More something kepta-saying to me. Do It, Spi! Go on and Do it! So pretty soon you can see I Would Have to Obey that old voice.

. . . I began to fear the fuse was goin to sputter out and die but-Nosir! In another second, PoP! SpiT! BanG! WHIZZ!! A clickin started up which might be likened to machine guns today.

So here come the folks. Aunt This and Cousin That. Even my Grandma. . .

By the time they caught up with Will the seat of his pants was afire an he was screamin the old blood-curdlin Indian Territory whoop. . . .

Well, they finally extingwished Will and aplastered him up an put him to bed an he wasent in such bad shape that he couldent eat no turkey but it Was several days before he could set on a hoss.[31]

Willie's early home life proved generally warm, happy and full of activity. The latch-string was always out at Clem and Mary Rogers' ranch, and since few lodging places existed in the Verdigris Country during those days many people took advantage of their hospitality. The guests varied from Cherokee officials on their way to council at Tahlequah, to circuit riders familiar with Mary's piety, to people traveling to the court held at Kephart Spring. Mary established a custom of bringing a family home from church for dinner each Sunday. This usually developed into an all-day engagement and oftentimes the guests spent the night. Visitors at the Rogers' always left with some token of friendship from the mistress of the house. These gifts ranged from home-grown apples

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[31] Ibid., pp. 26-28.

and peaches to baked goods.[32]

Young Willie enjoyed the numerous parties and recreational outings which took place in addition to the normal flow of visitors at the ranch. The parties usually consisted of the Bell, Foreman, McCleland, Land and Lippe children. Lanterns hanging lazily from the trees lighted the lawn on such festive occasions. The evening's activities often developed into a profusion of singing and square dancing. Other outdoor activities included Clem's fishing trips to Four Mile Creek. Neighbors often came and spent the night in order to join the Rogers in getting an early start the next morning. Everyone enjoyed the traditional fish dinner held at the day's end.[33]

Willie's childhood seemed happy and enjoyable. However, behind the comfortable facade of a happy home unsettling forces were at work which eventually imposed pain and hardship on the youngest Rogers. Part of the difficulty resided in the youth's relationship with his parents, while the uncontrolable flow of human events determined the rest.

"Will and his mother were very close. Her face and her voice always stayed with him. He remembered her doctoring the Negro help,

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[32]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 6-7; McSpadden, "Sketch," p. 7; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 160; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 12.

[33]Sallie Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, July 10, 1941, August 6, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 33, 36-37.

and he remembered the slow Southern sweetness of her voice. In his mind's eye he could see her sitting in her chair, smiling at him and lifting her hand to the gray-streaked, black hair that she always wore in a knot at the back of her head." Her "calm, sweet, unruffled manner remained always the same." Mary Rogers and Willie enjoyed many things together which manifested the bond of affection that existed between them. For example, on cold evenings they worked together to protect the potted plants in Mary's bedroom from the frost.[34] Miss Gazelle Lane, a cousin of Willie's, remembered that he and Mary frequently went visiting together in a buckboard pulled by a white horse. And finally, the two of them liked singing church hymns together.[35]

Willie's relationship with Clem never became as wholesome as that shared with his mother, and it remained infinitely more complex. The boy possessed deep positive and negative feelings concerning his father and apparently never reconciled this contradiction in his personality. The strain that these opposing emotions placed on Willie eventually resulted in a basic alienation from his father. The positive side of this father-son relationship rested in part upon Clem's generosity with his only remaining son; he seldom denied him anything. Clem's

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[34]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 39, 41.

[35]Homer Croy, "I'll always remember... The Words of Will Rogers," Fort Worth Star Telegram, Magazine Section, Parade, March 9, 1958; Miss Gazelle Lane to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 32.

wealth and prominence also provided a masculine hero figure with which his youngest could identify. The story of the older Rogers' first cattle drive at age sixteen with Joel M. Bryan added a touch of the super-hero to Clem's image. The cowboys with whom he worked herded five hundred longhorn steers to Kansas City. The flooded market there forced Bryan to drive the cattle an additional two hundred and fifty miles to St. Louis. The cowboys only lost one steer on the whole trip and he jumped off the ferry boat taking the herd across the Mississippi to the stock pen in East St. Louis. When last seen the longhorn was floating south and may have survived by swimming to shore. This story presented an apocryphal feat which stamped a permanent impression on young Willie.[36]

Willie harbored strong hostility feelings toward his father at the same time that he worshipped him as a hero. Part of this negativeness stemmed from the contrast between the youngster's mother and father. His mother projected warmth, sweetness, lightheartedness and understanding while his father appeared "stern," "blustery and loud" and insensitive. As Willie grew older it became apparent that he possessed a

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[36]Thorburn and Wright, Oklahoma; The State and Its People, III, p. 244; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 9-10, 39, 47; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 161; William Richard Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1964), p. 165. It should be noted that Ellsworth Collings and William R. Brown have realized the complexities and importance of Will's relationship with Clem better than anyone else who has worked on the topic.

strength of mind and will which equalled that of his father. It seemed inevitable that two such strong personalities would produce conflict and alienation. An incident involving Willie, his sister Maude and Clem depicted this situation. Willie and Maude were walking through a pasture one day when they heard Clem yelling after them from astride a racing horse. They turned to see an enraged bull bearing down upon them with lowered head and slashing horns. Maude grabbed her younger brother's hand and began running for safety. Willie jerked loose, turned to face the onrushing bull, planted his feet firmly and began making a loop in his ever-present rope. Clem reached the stubborn youth just ahead of the bull and sped him to safety. Willie immediately received a sound spanking, but he refused to cry. The two, father and son, looked at each other with equal defiance. "Well, I guess there isn't much to do," Clem told Mary later. "There's a lot of mule in Willie."[37] This type of father-son antagonism gradually developed into an established pattern of behavior within the Rogers family.

Willie's life took a decided turn for the worse at the age of eight. Both his mother and sister Sallie had tried to teach him the three R.'s, but neither met with any success. Their failure prompted the decision, much to the youngster's dislike, that he should go stay with Sallie and her husband, Tom McSpadden, in order to attend the one-room Droom-

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[37]Day, Biography, pp. 11-13; Trent, My Cousin, p. 117; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 39, 44.

gule school located near the McSpadden ranch. Willie hated school and the only way Sallie could make sure he attended every day was to convince him that she could keep him in sight from the time he left the ranch on his pony until he arrived at the school house. The reluctant scholar did not stay at the Droomgule School long. He "kicked up such a rumpus" and showed such little progress that his parents let him quit.[38] Next, his parents decided to send him to the Harrel Institute at Muskogee. This female seminary was located some sixty-five miles from the Rogers' ranch, and it held religious affiliations. The school's president, Theodore F. Brewer, and Clem were close friends. Brewer suggested that Willie could enter school as a special student and room with his son, Robert P. Brewer. The experience of attending a girls' school proved a bad one for Willie. The torturous sojourn ended when he caught the

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[38]Trent, My Cousin, p. 31; Kaho, The Will Rogers Country, p. 37; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 14-15; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 22; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 44-45. Betty Rogers indicated that Willie left Droomgule because Clem was dissatisfied with his progress while Spi Trent felt that Willie's unhappiness caused the move to another school. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 45; Trent, My Cousin, p. 36. Donald Day suggested Willie stayed at the Droomgule school two years. Day, Biography, p. 18. Reba N. Collins noted the following concerning Willie's first school experience: "Croy states that Will spelled the name of his first school incorrectly, spelling it 'Drumgoul' instead of the correct 'Drumgoole,' (p. 335). Collings and Betty Rogers both used Will's spelling in their books. Kaho added to the mystery, spelling the school name 'Droomgule.' Dr. Kaho, now a dentist in Claremore and accepted as an authority on history of the area, is probably the most reliable source. For this reason, his spelling will be used in future references in this paper." R. N. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 48.

measles and returned home to recover.[39]

Willie did not find warmth and consolation at home as he had expected, but rather he met the grey ghost of death and the selfless despair of childhood grief. His mother caught typhoid fever shortly after his return. Strings of wagons brought ice from Coffeyville, more than forty miles away, but to no avail. Mary Rogers died and her only surviving son found himself denied a last loving farewell; he remained too ill to attend the funeral. Willie Rogers never recovered from the loss of his mother. The slightest inadvertent reference to her would bring tears to his eyes. Willie, the boy grew into the man, Will Rogers, but the memory lingered on and some forty years after his mother's death the humorist would say to the world: "My own mother died when I was ten years old. My folks have told me that what little humor I have comes from her. I can't remember her humor but I can remember her love and her understanding of me."[40]

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[39]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 31-32; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 34, 42, 56; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 15. It should be noted that Homer Croy evidently became confused concerning the order in which Willie attended various schools. Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 25. Betty Rogers says Willie was home for the second summer vacation from Harrel when his mother died. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 46.

[40]Will Rogers, Twelve Radio Talks Delivered by Will Rogers During the Spring of 1930 Through the Courtesy of E. R. Squibb & Sons (n. p.: E. R. Squibb & Sons, 1930), May 11, 1930, p. 21; Day, Biography, p. 18; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 45. Mary's death proved a tremendous loss for the whole Rogers' family. Years later Willie's sisters, Sallie and Maude, could hardly speak of their

Mary Rogers' death destroyed the most basic home tie for Willie. The boy's second love, the idea of becoming a great rancher, floundered when squatters began to move onto his father's land and divide it into small farms. Years later Will sadly wrote of his reaction to the passing of the frontier:

> "No greater, no happier life in the world than that of the cattleman. I have been on the stage for twenty years and I love it, but do you know, really, at heart, I love ranching. I have always regretted that I didn't live thirty or forty years earlier, and in the same old country--the Indian Territory. I would have liked to have gotten there ahead of the 'nesters,' the barbed wire fence and so-called civilization. I wish I could have lived my whole life then and drank out of a gourd instead of a paper envelope."[41]

It seemed as if everything the youngster loved and held dear met with disaster. This syndrone of trauma transformed a relatively secure and happy child into a miserable wanderer who sought desperately to

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mother without crying. They believed that her death was especially tragic for their younger brother because he obviously needed her so badly. Willie could not even bare to speak of his mother because of the pain such a memory held for him. Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 31, 1970. Mrs. Love, the daughter of Will's sister, Sallie, possesses much material on Will Rogers and a great deal of insight into his character. Nevertheless, the researcher must be cautious in using her gracious and unselfish assistance, for Mrs. Love sees nothing but the absolutely good and perfect in Will Rogers. Her deification of the great Oklahoman reaches such extremes that she cannot speak of him logically. Many questions that need to be asked are unapproachable because of her attitudes. This situation is unfortunate since Mrs. Love controls the dissemination of material at the Will Rogers Memorial. The researcher must be unnecessarily cautious in dealing with her.

[41]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 56. See also: Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, verbatim copy, October 21, 1934, p. 3, located in the Will Rogers Memorial.

replace the love and sense of purpose that had been so cruelly taken from him. Some would say, and possibly correctly, that neither Willie, the child, nor Will, the man, ever succeeded in this emotional pilgrimage.[42]

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[42]Day, Autobiography, p. xiv. The following comments by Reba N. Collins concerning the value of this volume should be noted: "Day can be given much credit for making the writings of the sage of Oklahoma available to the reading public; without the edited volumes it is unlikely that any person other than a scholar would discover or have access to most of the written humor. On the other hand, he has taken such liberties in editing the material that it is impossible to know whether the quotations are from Will's articles, books, lectures, letters, or radio speeches. Sometimes his 'sayings' from more than one source and from different times are spliced into a single unit of writing with no documentation to indicate this fact.

Another weakness is found in Day's editing of certain articles and books by Rogers. Words, sentences, or even several pages may be omitted with no indication of such changes, resulting sometimes in a distortion of the meaning, not to mention the change in style."

Mrs. Collins makes an additional evaluation concerning approximately the first fifty pages of the Autobiography which supposedly came from an unfinished manuscript: "It should be noted that Day obviously used this same article /_George Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers" The American Magazine, November, 1919_/ to make up most of the first 50 pages of the 'autobiography'; he failed, however, do identify it as such and took great liberty in changing the wording of the quoted material." And again: "In the 'autobiography' he /_Day_/ copied almost verbatim an article published with Rogers' by-line in 1917 /_ Will Rogers, "The Extemporaneous Line" The Theatre, July, 1917_/. . ." . . . . Day incorrectly identified the 1917 article by Rogers as the American article by Martin." Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 36-37, 71, 94. Collins' final evaluation of the Autobiography is direct: "No matter how good his intensions, Day has managed to bring confusion and distortion that is being compounded through reprintings." Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 42. Homer Croy evidently saw the "autobiographical manuscript." His comments concerning it cast further doubt on Day's work: "He/_Will Rogers_/ had written very little about himself. What he did write of an autobiographical nature was as thin as the skeleton of a crow. He devoted five sentences to his school career (he attended six different schools) and three sentences to his courtship and marriage.

The reason for this, as he always said, was that he was planning to write his autobiography and was saving the goodies." Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. vii. Croy's comment carries added weight since he was a personal friend of Will Rogers in later life. Will Rogers, Jr., on the other hand, adds value to Day's work by relating that the historian had access to the family papers. Will, Jr. also said that there was a partially completed autobiography written by his father which Day received. Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971. Betty Rogers described the autobiographical manuscript as follows: ". . . and from an unpublished manuscript written many years ago, long before Will could use a typewriter, or had any thoughts of becoming a newspaper;syndicated writer. This was scribbled in lead pencil--on the stationery of the St. Francis Hotel, West Forty-Seventh Street, New York City. Headed 'How I Broke Into Show Business' it was Will's one attempt to tell his own story. He left it unfinished. And he never tried it again." Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 22.

CHAPTER II

A Restless and Alienated Youth

> My father was pretty well fixed, and I being the only male son he tried terrible hard to make something out of me. He sent me to about every school in that part of the country. In some of them I would last for three or four months. I got just as far as the fourth reader when the teachers wouldn't seem to be running the school right, and rather than have the school stop I would generally leave. Then I would start in at another school, tell them I had just finished the third reader and was ready for the fourth. Well, I knew all this fourth grade by heart, so the teacher would remark:
>
> 'I never see you studying, yet you seem to know your lessons.' I had that education thing figured down to a fine point. Ten years in McGuffey's Fourth Reader, and I knew more about it than McGuffey did.
>
> But I don't want any enterprising youth to get the idea that I had the right dope on it. I have regretted all my life that I did not at least take a chance on the fifth grade. It would certainly come in handy right now, and I never go through a day that I am not sorry for the idea I had of how to go school and not learn anything. [1]

The fates set young Willie Rogers adrift shortly after his tenth birthday. His mother's tragic death removed the homely warmth which characterized the Rogers' ranch and a pervasive emptiness soon en-

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[1]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in George Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers: The Story of a Cowboy Who Became a Famous Comedian" The American Magazine, LXXXVIII November, 1919, p. 107.

shrounded the boy. His sisters married and left home while Clem spent increasingly longer periods of time traveling on business. These developments reinforced the isolation and loneliness that quickly became the youth's daily companions. Willie's second love, ranching, also began fading as settlement made increasingly persistent inroads against the open range. He reflected the cloud of gloom which descended upon him by playing with ropes for hours on end and spending increasingly longer periods of time at Aunt Babe's and Uncle Dan's.[2]

Clem Rogers seemed to understand his son's emotional distress and responded in the only way he knew; Willie got everything he desired. The youngster, being the only surviving son of a wealthy man, had always received more than most children. His father's reaction to Willie's sadness following Mary Rogers' passing only reinforced this pattern of extreme indulgence. Trips to St. Louis and Kansas City became a common occurrence. In addition, Willie always possessed plenty of spending money and three of his horses, Comanche, Robin and Monte, many regarded as the "three outstanding horses in the Indian Territory, or anybody else's territory."[3]

The most gratifying thing Willie obtained during this trying period of life came as a gift to Clem. The latter bought "3,500 cows in Texas."

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[2]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 49; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 11.

[3]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 48-49.

They arrived accompanied by "seventy-five or eighty dogies or motherless calves." Clem gave these infant cows to Willie when their mothers refused to claim them. These calves comprised the youngster's first herd and he treated them with understandable care and tenderness.[4] Dogies usually have a hard time living without their mother's milk. Willie worked hard to see that they survived. Many times he brought starving calves to the ranch house and tried feeding them off a milk cow. If this failed, he taught his charge to drink out of a pail. These efforts succeeded and soon the calves were feeding on the range.[5] This achievement brought father and son together in momentary union. Clem experienced pride in his son's success and helped the eager boy choose the "dog iron" brand for his cows. The "dog iron" ( ) resembled a circle on top of an inverted and squared sling shot. This symbol evidently came to mind because it looked like the andirons in the home fireplace.[6]

Willie found meaning for the old adage "all good things must come to an end" in the fall of 1891 when Clem informed the youth that he would have to postpone his ranching career and return to school. Clem ac-

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[4]Herb McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, August 6, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 107.

[5]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 50-51.

[6]Herb McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, August 10, 1941; Sallie Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, August 4, 1941, all cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 107; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 51.

cepted the budding scholar's adamant stand against returning to the "hennery" at Harrel Institute. New arrangements provided for the younger Rogers to stay with friends while attending the Cherokee Seminary at Tahlequah. This sojourn into the halls of learning proved a short one. Willie became "careless and untidy and his manners were those of a spoiled, impetuous boy." Teachers thought him "lazy" and he performed miserably in the academic sphere.[7] Information regarding Willie's stay at Tahlequah remains extremely skimpy, but one writer reported that he "didn't like the school and didn't care who knew it. He yelled in the hallways, crept up on girls who were studying at night, and let off war whoops that would have thrilled Chief Claremore. He got into arguments with his teachers; he liked to argue and here was a golden opportunity. It worked. In two weeks he was back on the ranch, pale and shaken."[8] Unfortunately home remained a lonely place for Willie. Maude kept house for a while and there was a housekeeper, Mary Bibles,

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[7]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 47; Trent, My Cousin, p. 32. It is interesting to note that many biographers do not even mention Willie's stay at the Tahlequah Seminary.

[8]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 25. Croy's rendition of Willie's activities while attending Tahlequah seems questionable. He gives no direct source for his information like he does concerning similar events at Scarritt College and Kemper Military Academy. At the same time, however, his interpretation deserves mention because of the extensive interviewing he engaged in and the continuity of his approach with Willie's reaction to school environments elsewhere. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 31-33, 39-41. Donald Day presents Willie's stay at Tahlequah in a bit more favorable light by saying "he did not last until Christmas." Day, Biography, p. 19.

who had come originally to nurse Mary during her illness. But things never seemed the same.[9]

Clem Rogers grew increasingly worried about his son. He saw the boy as irresponsible and in need of firm control. This concern led him in the fall of 1892 to enroll Willie in Willie Halsell College at Vinita, Oklahoma. This placed the boy within twenty miles of home and allowed close family supervision.[10]

Willie enrolled in the preparatory course of study at Willie Halsell. This required him, much to his disgust, to take piano and oil painting in addition to the standard curriculum. Such a program of study obviously lacked interest for someone who pictured himself as a big cattle rancher and possessed a strong aversion to school. Willie's reaction to his new studies planted a firm memory in Spi Trent's mind. Spi recalled that "in the summertime when he /_Willie_/ use to come home to the ranch he made me promise not to tell Anyone What he was studyin. Just image, Spi, he says. Them trying to make an Oil Painter out of a Big Cattleman like me. It makes me sick to my stummick."[11] The situation at Vinita obviously repelled the younger

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[9]Day, Biography, p. 19; Kaho, The Will Rogers Country, p. 37.

[10]Trent, My Cousin, p. 32; Day, Biography, p. 19. Day points out that although called a "college," Willie Halsell really would be equated to a Junior High School today. Day, Biography, p. 19.

[11]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 32-33; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 57.

Rogers; however, his experience there definitely brought positive, if painfully hesitating, growth. The mere fact that he attended the same school for three years without quitting or being expelled represented a miracle.[12]

Willie first lived at Aunt Laura Cooper's boarding house while attending school at Vinita. Her large three-story home sheltered about forty students who referred to it as "The Annex." Willie developed an antagonistic relationship with Aunt Laura's daughter, Oneida, which evidently typified his first year's performance at the College. He harassed Oneida with his ever-present rope by continually lassoing her feet, legs and arms. Sometimes he sent his unsuspecting victim sprawling on the ground in what seemed to him a tremendously humorous manner. Oneida remained a favorite target for Willie's antics; however, the rascally youth soon branched out and began antagonizing many other girls with his roping antics--even those at Wooster College on the other side of town. Jim Rider, a classmate of Willie's at Vinita, related his activities there: "Rather than take part in the games with the rest of us he would sit around and think up some way to play a trick on some of the girls. Will never did go in for this education stuff in a big way. He liked to rope and joke."[13]

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[12]Trent, My Cousin, p. 32. Donald Day believes that Willie stayed at Willie Halsell College for four years. Day, Biography, p. 19.

[13]Jim Rider to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of

Willie's roping activities presented only one facet of the generally unsatisfactory behavior pattern which characterized his first year at Willie Halsell. Academically he possessed ability when motivated in subjects which appealed to him. Unfortunately these courses only appeared occasionally. Normally the disinterested youth never opened a book and remained unconcerned with his grades to the point of not even examining his report cards. Willie simply detested studying and made no effort whatsoever to hide his feelings. This negative attitude toward school work matched closely the youth's slovenly personal appearance. Although he always had money, he never purchased clothes. He dressed in shabby, wrinkled shirts and pants and complemented this wearing apparel with dirty, uncombed hair and blackened fingernails. Oftentimes Aunt Laura Cooper forced him to leave the dinner table to wash his face, hands, neck and ears. Oneida gleefully assumed the task of making sure that the disgruntled scholar accomplished his mission.[14]

Willie wrote Charlie McCellan, a close boyhood friend, numerous times during his first year at Vinita. This correspondence indicated that part of the younger Rogers' discontent stemmed from loneliness. A letter of March 28, 1893, ended: "I must close as I am getting sleepy answer soon I don't get a letter only once a month." Willie tried to get

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Will Rogers, p. 26; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 60-61, 77.

[14]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 59, 79.

Charlie to join him at Willie Halsell: "you ought to come here to school." This desire reflected the youngster's isolation, which was eased by the understanding of Aunt Laura. On the other hand, Willie sometimes enjoyed his schooling. He thought that the College was a "dandy place" since "we have boys and girls all board here and we take them to church every Sunday night and have dances and do anything you want to I sure have lots of fun up here."[15]

The summer of 1893 represented both sadness and joy for Willie Rogers. Upon returning home from school, he found, much to his dismay that Clem had married the housekeeper, Mary Bibles. Willie's apparent dislike for his new stepmother, combined with the fact that Clem was twice her age made the new development difficult for the youngster to cope with emotionally. He probably would have found it hard, considering the close relationship he shared with his mother, to accept anyone Clem chose to marry. The suddenness of the news only made an inevitably difficult situation traumatic. Willie registered deep shock, hurt and alienation. Once again, Clem sensed his son's distress and tried, as before, to neutralize it by showering him with gifts. This time the presents included a bicycle, one of the first in the area, and a trip to visit the World's Fair in Chicago.[16]

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[15]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 18-24. The obvious mistakes in the quoted material cited here are Willie's.

[16]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 30, 92; Collins, "Writer and Jour-

Clem and Willie's visit to the World's Fair during 1893 resulted in a deep emotional experience for the drifting youth. All he loved and cherished, from his mother to the prairie, seemed to have been snatched from his grasp by the cruel fates. A bleak and evidently unchangeable void haunted him. Then one day at the World's Fair a possible way out of the sadness which tormented the boy materialized. Father and son attended the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. Both considered this diversion as the high point of the trip, so it came as a parting treat. Willie enjoyed the entire show, but became transfixed by the performance of the Mexican vaqueros, the world's champion ropers. The act consisted of fifteen minutes of roping horses and riders in every imaginable manner and featured the great Vincente Oropeza's skills. The agile Mexican executed "fluent spins, leaped lightly in and out of his whirling loop and snared the racing horse that was his foil, by its tail."[17] He performed every trick possible and concluded his act by spelling his name, one letter at a time, in the air with a rope. The Mexican vaqueros' performance and Oropeza's exhibition profoundly impressed young Willie Rogers. After his Chicago trip, trick roping became a consuming passion that remained with Willie until he died many years later. It apparently replaced the source of identification and affection which had been

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nalist," p. 53; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 62.

[17]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 71, 62, 70, 72.

taken from him. The art of the lariat, as Spi Trent related, "got under Wills skin and stayed there to become an actual part of him" and "from that day on when you looked for Will you would find him practicin these tricks."[18]

The summer of 1893 ended after the trip to the World's Fair and the fall school term appeared all too suddenly. Willie returned for another nine months at Willie Halsell College. The second year's achievements appeared discouragingly familiar and few in number. The youth's appearance remained slovenly and his aversion to study continued unabated. A classic story painted a vivid picture of Willie's disinterest in academic pursuits. He took piano lessons at Aunt Engenia Thompson's house. One day a group of students waited outside Aunt Eugenia's home for the younger Rogers to finish his lesson so that he could join them on the way to class. A distraught Willie appeared at the front door and informed his comrades: "You'd better jest go on and not wait for me. I forgot to practice my piano lesson yesterday, and Aunt Eugenia says I've got to practice it this morning before I go to school." The group ambled off, but in a short while they turned around and saw Willie cheerfully racing toward them. All curiously asked how he had escaped detention. "Oh, Aunt Eugenia kept pointin' her finger at the notes on the music page and sayin' 'What's that? What's that?' An'

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[18]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 66-67.

I said, that's yore finger, Aunt Eugenia. Then she slapped me off the stool and told me to go on to school, and here I am."[19]

The story of Willie's second year at Vinita, however, did not reflect complete failure. He began to show signs of maturing socially during this period and apparently found a place for himself among his peers. These developments resulted in more constructive social behavior on Willie's part. Classmates, due to his big ears, nicknamed him "Rabbit" and sometimes referred to him as "Mule Ear."[20] This signified group acceptance rather than derision and young Willie responded enthusiastically. He became exceeding generous with his gifts to friends, even to the point of giving away a pair of boots if a friend voiced admiration for them.[21]

The developing youth's growth received an added boost when he convinced his close friend from home, Charley McClellan, to enter Willie Halsell. The two companions started attending parties and soon began offering entertainment at such gatherings. Charley made speeches

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[19]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 57-58. Keith gives no direct source for these statements; however, the extensive interviewing he conducted seemes to justify using them.

[20]Ibid., p. 82. Homer Croy makes the following comment concerning these nicknames: "For some reason or other, in later life Will was sensitive about the size of his ears and said he had been given the name of 'Rabbit' because he could run so fast." Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 335.

[21]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 18.

in Cherokee while Willie translated them and added bits of humor to the delight of those watching. Willie also participated in school programs by doing comedy sketches. Most of these skits centered around imitations of well known folk figures. Willie's depiction of a black preacher proved his best. The thespian darkened his face, wore glasses and came attired in a swallow-tail coat with white gloves. The audience convulsed with laughter as he stomped over the platform, jumped up and down and pounded the pulpit. These exhibitions constituted the youth's first efforts at performing and the recognition they brought probably had an impact on him.[22] Willie's second year at Vinita ended on this positive note.

During his third and final year at Willie Halsell College, Willie visibly matured. He moved out of Aunt Laura's "Annex" to a Mrs. Miller's house and began wearing better clothes. Specifically, the younger Rogers purchased his first pair of long pants and dressed tastefully with accessories which included neckties, fancy boots and spurs. The new Willie sought social acceptance by having a constant supply of chewing gum which he passed around generously. This personality transformation apparently developed because of one simple fact--girls. The former rope tantalizer now walked girls home from class and constantly

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[22]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 77; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 19-24, passim. Although no direct evidence exists, it can be assumed that Charley McClellan entered Willie Halsell in the fall of 1893.

offered them small presents of chewing gum. This interest in the opposite sex brought other changes in Willie. He began taking courses like dancing, art and elocution. He even won a medal in reading. Amateur theatricals became increasingly important to him, and he performed whenever possible. The sense of identification and purpose which attended these personality changes must have filled a great gap in the once sad youngster's life.[23]

Willie left Willie Halsell at the age of fifteen and entered Scarritt Collegiate Institute in Neosho, Missouri, in the fall of 1895. There is no definite explanation for this move; however two factors apparently influenced the decision. First, as Spi Trent related, Willie fell under the influence of Professor J. C. Shelton who traveled the Indian Territory recruiting for Scarritt. The advantages presented by the new school combined with the professor's horse and buggy created a positive desire in Willie to attend school at Neosho. An additional motivating force may have been Clem's growing discontent with his son's poor academic performance. W. E. Sunday, an acquaintance of both father and son, recalled Clem's consternation with Willie's school record during these years. An interview with Sunday in the Shawnee, Oklahoma, Morning News depicted Clem's aggravation: "Time and again, the father would confide to

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[23]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 82-86; Aunt Laura Cooper to Jack Lait, cited in Jack Lait, Our Will Rogers (New York: Greeberg Publishers, 1935), pp. 97-98.

Sunday that 'the young scamp had been sent home again.' 'What for?' 'Oh, arguing with the teacher.'"[24]

Willie remained a poor student at Scarritt. He also continued the social growth and theatrical interests which manifested themselves during his final year at Willie Halsell. The gregarious youngster dated and soon became a campus personality due to his Cherokee songs, pranks and humorous stories. Fellow students conferred the nickname of "Wild Indian" upon him. This designation signified acceptance and an awareness on the part of his comrades that the boy from Oologah remained a bit untamed. Willie's interest in the thespian arts assumed an air of intrigue and adventure at Neosho. The school prohibited students from attending the shows which traveling stock companies occasionally put on in Neosho. Willie, undaunted by regulations, never missed such performances. He disguised himself as a black man and viewed the productions while safely hidden in the black gallery. The obviously effective disguise included an old suit, a pillow for padding, blackened face and hands, and a homemade wig.[25]

Things went fairly well during Willie's tenure at Scarritt; however, he was not without problems. His main frustration centered around

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[24]W. E. Sunday interview in Morning News (Shawnee, Oklahoma), n.d., cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 18; Day, Biography, p. 20, 32; Trent, My Cousin, p. 33; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 31.

[25]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 93.

his inability to develop satisfactory relationships with girls. This difficulty apparently arose because of his undisciplined activities. Its existence probably made a deep impression because Willie still needed to replace the female love and understanding he lost when his mother died. The youngster's correspondence with a girl he dated at Scarritt, "little Maggie" Nay, clearly defined his plight. "Little Maggie's" mother refused to let her date Willie due to his wildness. The girl, in rejecting an invitation, bluntly and honestly wrote her eager suitor the truth. His reply of November 27, 1896, revealed understandable hurt and rejection:

> Of course I am sorry as can be but then if your mother does not want you to go with me why it is all right. I would hate to do anything contrary to her will. I know I drink and am a wild and bad boy and all that but you know that Marvin is a model boy, he never did anything in his life, he is as good as an Angel. I am an outcast I suppose so. Of course I don't do anything that will get you with a drunkard as I am.
>
> And as far as me not coming back after Xmas I will be here but then that is all right. I know how it is when you don't want to go with a boy. A girl has to make up a good excuse to tell him, so you see that is the case with you. You want to make things as smooth as possible, so that is all right, but I would rather you would have just told me that you did not dare quit Warren and go with me. I would not have got mad at you for it and that would have been all that there was to it.
>
> I was a fool for trying to go with you any way. I might have known you would not have gone with me.
>
> . . .
>
> Well, I suppose you have heard enough of the Drunkard that they call Will Rogers, so I will close hoping you all a merry evening, as I expect I had better not go as your Mother might object ot me. And as Jess says that no decent person would speak to me and I know all of you are decent but I am very sorry that I can not come.[26]

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[26]Willie Rogers to "Little Maggie" Nay, November 27, 1896, Neo-

The incident with "Little Maggie" Nay took on added significance because it reinforced a distasteful series of unsuccessful attempts by Willie to establish happy relationships with girls. The first young lady he proposed to as a teenager flatly rejected him; the father of another set a dog after him, and Kate Ellis, the daughter of the hotel keeper in Oologah, received strong advice from her parents concerning Willie's irresponsibility.[27]

The younger Rogers' career at Scarritt ended rather abruptly around December of 1896. Again the circumstances surrounding his leaving are not clear, but more than likely school officials and Willie reached a mutual understanding concerning the wisdom of his withdrawal. Since he left during the middle of the year, it would seem that the wayward youngster had failed once again in an academic environment. This news understandably disturbed Clem. Reverend Beasley, an official of Scarritt, wrote years later of Willie's record at the school: "There were brilliant students in that school who gave promise of success and achievement, and have since fulfilled that promise. But even the most sanguine could not have predicted that the funny fellow we knew as Will Rogers, would be anything but mediocre, or live anything but an absurdly uneventful life."[28]

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sho, Missouri, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 31-33.

[27]Day, Biography, pp. 32-33.

[28]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 97; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 32-35; Day, Biography, p. 28. Spi Trent intimates that Willie stayed

Things other than school were of more interest to Willie during his teens. Summer vacations and holidays provided him with opportunities to engage in his own chosen pursuits. Willie loved, for example, to hunt coyotes and rope wild turkeys. He usually found companionship on such escapades in an old spotted grey hound named Jim, the Bible boys, the Dawsons, the Barkers and Bright Drake. The adventurers oftentimes spent the night on the open prairie by a log fire. Once they brought back a live coyote and tried to tame it. The attempt failed, but stood as an example of the extremes the youths experienced in their search for entertainment. A corollary to Willie's hunting excursions found expression in a joke he enjoyed telling about two coon dogs. "He named one of those dogs," related Spi Trent, "YOU-KNOW and the other DID-HE-BITE-YOU! He sure had a pack of fun out of those names as when you would say, Whats your dogs name? Will would say, DID-HE-BITE-YOU. An right anyway you would say, OH, NO. I just wanter know his name. Will would say, YOU-KNOW. And he would keep this up. . . ."[29] These activities proved that Willie possessed a humorous but rascally disposition.

One contradiction apparently existed between Willie's background

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at Scarritt only a term and one-half while Croy gives conflicting information. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 32-34; Trent, My Cousin, p. 35.

[29]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 111-112; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 52-53.

as a western outdoorsman and his actions as a youth. He never carried a gun and evidently seldom killed anything while hunting. Betty Rogers, Will's wife, said that Willie's early aversion to shooting and hunting stemmed from his compassionate inability to destroy living things. Spi Trent, a constant teenage companion, hinted at another possible explanation for this incongruity. He told the story of a Sunday morning hunting expedition which resulted in Willie's standing twelve feet away from a covey of quail with shotgun poised for the kill. The excited woodsman took careful aim and fired while the quail remained a stationary target on the ground. The "shots passed at least 2 feet over the quail an tore a hole in the ground big as your hat" while the prey fluttered for safety. Spi concluded the story's sad rendition: "Well, you can have your opinion the same as I have Mine, but I always will think that was one of the things disgusted Will with shootin." Evidently Rogers, the hunter, ended his career partly because he could not aim a gun.[30]

Vacations included activities other than harmless pranks and outdoor excursions. Willie also spent a great deal of time working around the ranch and tending his own herd of cattle. The interludes spent as a cowboy reflected the youngster's continuing loneliness due to the loss of his mother and the attacks upon the open range by encroaching settlement.

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[30]Trent, My Cousin, p. 113; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 274.

Betty Rogers related this facet of her husband's youth: "Cowboys are usually lonely men and much of the time Willie was a lonely boy. Old friends say he always talked to himself in the saddle. They used to wonder what he talked about, they said, but whatever it was, he kept it to himself." Willie's depressed isolation most likely found reinforcement in feelings of inadequacy. Clem established a tradition of work and success which many would have felt unable to equal. The youngest Rogers may well have despaired of living up to what he thought constituted his father's expectations. Betty told a story exemplifying this characteristic of the father-son relationship:

> 'Riding along with Papa,' Will told me, 'I never could keep up with him. Papa could ride all day long and his horse would never be out of a little fast walk or dog-trot. We'd start out in the morning side by side, but my horse was soon lagging way behind and I'd have to kick him in the sides to catch up. At the end of the day I was plumb played out and my horse was in a lather, but Papa wasn't tired and his horse never turned a hair.'[31]

The loneliness Willie experienced at this early stage in life and the precipitant reasons for it established a life pattern which the younger Rogers never completely broke. Betty recalled again: "As a little boy on horseback, he had learned to be alone, and it had stayed with him. 'I've always been a lone wolf,' he used to say. 'I never run with the pack.'"[32]

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[31]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 34; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 167-168.

[32]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 49, 107.

Clem Rogers was clearly upset with his son when the latter returned from Scarritt Collegiate Institute in the early winter of 1896. Scarritt constituted the fifth school Willie had attended without success. Clem felt that he should take decisive action to correct his son's unacceptable attitute toward education. One day shortly after Willie's return from Scarritt, he walked into the general store at Oologah wearing an extreme look of satisfaction. He informed Ed Sunday, the proprietor: "Well, I've got Willie where he won't do any more arguin' with teachers!" "Where is that?" asked Sunday. "In a military academy /_Kemper Military Academy_/," replied the gleeful Clem.[33] "They'll chain him down and make him do what I want him to."[34] A possibility exists that the uniforms, guns, gold braids, flashy buttons and sense of adventure depicted in Kemper's catalogue attracted Willie's interest and he may have suggested the idea of attending the school to his father. Regardless of who conceived the plan, seventeen year old Willie enrolled at Kemper Military Academy in Boonville, Missouri, On January 13, 1897. He entered the modern equivalent of the sophomore year of high school. By mid-twentieth century standards, this would indicate that Willie was less advanced academically than his age would warrant. However this was not the case on the frontier where work often came ahead of education.

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[33]Morning News (Shawnee, Oklahoma), n. d., cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 18.

[34]Butterfield, "Legend," p. 84.

Willie showed reasonable scholarly attainment considering the time and place.[35]

Willie's behavior at Kemper repeated previous patterns; he performed erratically in the academic sphere, became known as the school clown and manifested a continuing interest in theatricals and proper dress. His activities at Kemper are known in detail due to the excellent work by A. M. Hitch, Will Rogers, Cadet. Hitch shows the boy's academic experience at Kemper reflected breadth. His studies included such diverse courses as arithmetic, history, elocution, Bible, physics and reading. The youngster's over-all grade average approximated that of all students in the school. However, his grades were very uneven. His monthly scores in history, for example, ranged from 68 to 100. Willie generally did well in elocution, political economy and letter writing, but performed poorly in physics and bookkeeping. He remained unconcerned about school work, studied little and relied on a good memory to carry him through subjects which appeared interesting.[36]

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[35]Day, Biography, p. 21; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 50; Trent, My Cousin, p. 36; A. M. Hitch, Will Rogers, Cadet (Boonville, Missouri: Kemper Military School, 1935), pp. 4-5. Spi Trent suggests that Willie had alot to do with the decision to attend Kemper while Rogers Butterfield and Folks Say of Will Rogers rely on Ed Sunday and take the position that Clem made the choice. Trent, My Cousin, p. 36; Butterfield, "Legend," p. 84; Morning News (Shawnee, Oklahoma), n. d., cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 18.

[36]John Payne to A. M. Hitch, cited in Hitch, Cadet, pp. 7-8.

Many former Kemper cadets associated Willie with the nickname, "Swarthy," and his role as school clown. One classmate thought that he "had a loud mouth and a nervous disposition and always had to be doing something. He was long on pranks." A favorite jest saw Willie don a disguise made up of an old hat, boots, topcoat and mustache. The adventuresome cadet, attired in this fashion would walk past the officers on guard duty at the campus gate and enjoy an afternoon uptown. Willie also enjoyed the traditional midnight water drill. The trickster and some accomplices would enter a sleeping victim's room after taps. Someone would set off an alarm clock while another conspirator yelled "fire." The aroused and confused object of the practical joke met a bucket of cold water as he leaped from bed to seek safety. The most humorous, if admittedly accidental and dangerous, incident which occurred during the Kemper years almost cost Willie's life. The youngster had returned to the home ranch during a vacation period. He projected extreme pride in his proficiency at military drilling and decided to give some of his friends a demonstration. There were no rifles available, so a shotgun had to serve as a cumbersome substitute. Things went well until the young soldier responded to the command, "Order Arms." The shotgun's butt hit the ranch house floor solidly and as it did the firearm discharged. The spray of shot knocked Willie's hat off and cut his temple so severely that the resulting scar remained through-

out his life.[37]

Willie found it difficult adjusting to the dress regulations at Kemper. He showed defiance for the whole system of military discipline by wearing his uniform in a relative state of dishevelment and keeping an untidy room. This form of rebellion did not mean that he decided to drop his recently acquired desire for nice clothes. Rather, he continued to dress like a "dude" when the time and place warranted, and even bought a "pair of tails for weddings and such!"[38]

The restless teenager's interest in theatrical endeavors continued to grow in Boonville. He began organizing all types of minstrel shows in addition to the ever-present roping routines. Clem found reason for concern over these activities and told his banking partner, Jim Hall: "Im Awful Worried about Will. It just looks like he has a yen for this show business."[39] In this manner another possible source of alienation between father and son appeared.

Two important new facets of Willie's life became apparent at Kemper Military academy. On several occasions the quarter-blood Cherokee entered heated arguments in defense of Indians. Since this characteristic of Willie's personality will develop into an integral part of this presen-

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[37]John H. Payne to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 38, 41; Hitch, Cadet, pp. 11-12, 14-17.

[38]Trent, My Cousin, p. 42; Hitch, Cadet, pp. 13-14.

[39]Trent, My Cousin, p. 40.

tation, A. M. Hitch's remarks on the subject appear worth quoting:

> On at least two of the three recorded occasions when he lost his equanimity he was merely rising to the defense of the indian /_sic_/. Once a classmate referred to a certain indian chief as a thoroughbred. Will's voice rose to a high pitch in resentment as he explained that 'fulblood' was the proper term and that is spoiled his whole afternoon to hear someone call a fine indian a thoroughbred. Again in a 'Bull Session' a cadet inadvertently or perhaps purposely remarked that indians and negroes were very much alike. Will lost no time in challenging the remark. With much heat and no humor he argued that the two races were wholly different in orgin, ideals, characteristics and possibilities, that the two had never mixed except in the case of one tribe and that other tribes had nothing to do with this one for that reason.[40]

No clearcut explanation exists concerning these angry outbursts in defense of the boy's Indian ancestors. He could have been simply identifying with his Indian forebearers in a jingoistic manner. Also, there seems a chance that his mother, due to the negative experience her own mother underwent in connection with Indian blood in the family of John and Catherine Gunther, may have passed on a deep sensitivity and feeling of inferiority concerning the Rogers' Indian heritage. If this was the case, then Willie's outbursts find explanation in simple over-compensation for feelings of inadequacy. Finally, the boy's troubles with girls remained a harassment that could have made him sensitive concerning his Indian ancestry. John H. Payne, Willie's roommate at Boonville, related one experience: "Now and then on Friday night we had a dance. The girls had to be rustled from the town supply. Will was smitten on

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[40]Hitch, Cadet, pp. 16-17.

a town girl named Mamie Johnson and asked her to go to a dance. She turned him down. He never said much about it, but he was hurt."[41] Willie might have blamed his continuing difficulties with girls on his Indian blood and thus over-responded in defense of his Cherokee heritage.

Shyness constituted the second trait that appeared in Willie's personality during the Kemper years. The yough found widespread acceptance and even admiration within his own group at the Academy. At the same time, however, he appeared reticent and found it difficult to project beyond his own friends. Numerous cadets who attended Kemper during the late 1890's cannot remember Willie Rogers, although the school consisted of only seventy students. The most dramatic example of the youngster's anonymity took place in a conversation between a former Kemper classmate and an Academy teacher just after Willie's death in 1935:

> When did you attend Kemper?
> About 1897 or '98.
> Then you must have known Will Rogers.
> Yes, there was a boy in school at that time by the name Will Rogers. I sat near him in the study hall.
> Too bad about his death, said the teacher.
> What death?
> Why, the airplane accident in Alaska.
> The papers are full of it.
> You don't mean to say that that Will Rogers is the Will Rogers I knew at Kemper? Why, I go to every one of his pic-

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[41]John H. Payne to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 41-42.

tures and read him every day in the papers but it never occurred to me he was the Will Rogers I knew at Kemper.[42]

Willie stayed at Kemper Military Academy a little over twelve months. He ran away from school during the spring term of 1898. His escape preparations showed the youth possessed a certain degree of sly cleverness. He wrote both sisters, Sallie and Maude, asking for a ten dollar loan. Both responded after deciding not to inform Clem of their actions. Billy Johnson, a close friend at Kemper, advised Willie to seek employment as a cowboy on Frank Ewing's ranch near Higgins, Texas, and that became the younger Rogers' destination when he left Boonville. Clem Rogers became incensed upon receiving news of Willie's flight from Kemper. He stormed into Ed Sunday's general store at Oologah and raged: "Do you know what that damned boy has done? He's run away from school and he's over in the Texas Panhandle, digging ditches for 50 cents a day. Well, I'm going to let him stay there and rot!"[43]

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[42]Hitch, Cadet, pp. 19-21.

[43]Butterfield, "Legend," p. 84; Hitch, Cadet, p. 28; Trent, My Cousin, p. 44; Mrs. Sallie Rogers McSpadden to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 35-36. Noel Kaho, like most biographers, tried to minimize the bitterness between Willie and Clem in the following fashion: "Later /after finding out Willie had left Kemper/, when Clem was talking to intimates he referred to Willie as 'that damned kid,' but he meant it only as a doting father can mean such a phrase, and he would have lost his tongue rather than have a stranger misinterpret his exact meaning." Kaho, The Will Rogers Country, p. 37. Much confusing and contradictory material relates to the amount of time Willie spent at Kemper and the approximate date of his departure. For

The explanation of Willie's clandestine departure from Kemper appear obvious. The youngster never liked school and after six failures it seemed logical to try something else. He told Spi Trent shortly before he left: "Spi, I really Try to be a good sport about this school business but I am gaggin at the bit. I cant keep myself inside a school room. I try, All Right, an I reckon my Body stays put but I personally am out in Green Pastures, an if you ask me, I believe thats where all the learning in the world has been, if folks wanter bother studyin it."[44] The 150 hours of demerits on the boy's record reinforced this view of school.[45] A second and equally obvious factor may have entered into

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example, see Milsten, p. 35; Butterfield, p. 84; Betty Rogers, p. 292. A. M. Hitch's examination of school records clearly established the spring of 1898 as the time Willie left Kemper. Hitch, Cadet, p. 28.

[44]Trent, My Cousin, p. 39.

[45]P. J. O'Brien relates a different version of the flight from Kemper: "But life at the military school with its strict regulations and form-fitting tunies must have been the last straw for the restless youth from the plains, for he wrote his father that he was going to 'skip school and help some fellers dig an oil well in Texas.' The elder Rogers told him to go ahead and 'work out his own salvation.' Digging for oil proved an irksome task, and Will bombarded his home with letters telling of the privations in the oil fields and his homesickness for the ranch. His father laughed at the letters. . . ." P. J. O'Brien, Will Rogers, Ambassador of Good Will; Prince of Wit and Wisdom (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1935), p. 28. R. N. Collins makes the following comment concerning O'Brien's work: "The biography of Will Rogers by P. J. O'Brien published within sixty days after Rogers's death, also contains many errors in fact. . . . Though mistakes can be found throughout the book, one example which concerns Rogers' writings will illustrate the seriousness of the errors from a historical point of view." Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 32. Betty Rogers, Will's wife, sent a telegram to V. V. McNitt of the McNaught Syndicate upon seeing O'Brien's

the flight from Kemper. Willie had lost much that he cherished over the years and he had developed a deep alienation toward his father in the process. Running away presented one way of coping with such hostility and sadness.

When Willie ran away from Kemper Military Academy at age eighteen he was a sad, alienated, hostile young man who seemed to have failed. His lack of success at six different schools probably resulted from several interrelated factors. First, Willie's restless spirit revolted against formalized education from the very beginning. This aversion evidently reflected the boredom of a quick mind in a regimented and stale atmosphere, and the inability of a spoiled child to suppress his own desires.[46] The wayward youngster's educational difficul-

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work. She wrote: "No one in family knows anything about publication. . . Hasty examination shows numerous inaccuracies and several pictures for whose publication I know no authority." Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 33. Mike Wallace, commentator for "Will Rogers - Biography," stated in that film release that Willie was "expelled from school for the seventh time" when he left Kemper. Both the number and circumstances are incorrect in this report. "Will Rogers - Biography." Wolper Productions, Inc., Hollywood, California. Biography Series, Commentary, Mike Wallace. Mrs. Paula M. Love believes that Willie's education equals a modern-day junior college degree: "The so-called colleges he attended were on a high school level, but they had splendid instruction and would compare favorably with the sophomore year in college in the present day course of study. In all, he attended school for about ten years." Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 137. The internal contradictions in this evaluation tend to neutralize its validity.

[46]Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 42fn, 43.

ties increased due to the tremendous sadness he experienced with the unexpected loss of his mother. His unrestricted harassment of girls at Tahlequah and Willie Halsell seemed an exaggerated effort to replace the female attention and love he lost when Mary Rogers died. Although these actions represented something of a typical maturation syndrome, they made scholarly attainment impossible. Willie realized that his educational record constituted a great failure and he showed guilt feelings about the situation for years. For example, he stated many times in later life that there "wasn't a day in his life he didn't regret" not taking advantage of his educational opportunities.[47]

The youngest Rogers' school deficiencies produced personal as well as academic results. They reinforced the wall of alienation and antagonism which was growing between Willie and his father. The elder Rogers evidenced extreme displeasure with his son's unending short comings in education and self-control. The boy, for his part, experienced frustration and guilt because he could find no way of pleasing his partially idolized father with educational attainment.[48] This emotional cycle, as before, eventually led to alienation. Such repulsion conceivably found sharp reinforcement in Clem's surprise marriage to Mary Bibles and Willie's apparent feelings of inadequacy in trying to live up

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[47]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 292.

[48]Ibid., p. 292.

to his father's example of hard work and success.[49]

The final characteristics of Willie's personality as he entered young manhood, sadness and hostility, promised no more hope for the future than his past record of academic failure and parential alienation. The drifting boy's sadness may have been composed of contemplative moodiness, loneliness and grief all brought on by his inability to replace his mother's love with affection for a girlfriend. This somewhat normal problem could have become connected in the youngster's mind with his Indian heritage. He possibly felt that girls refused to date him because he possessed Indian blood. Such a thought pattern may have transformed a normal feeling of non-acceptance into a narrowly chan-

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[49]Willie's sister Sallie, whom many biographers relied on for information, viewed her younger brother's youth in a bit different light. She wrote: "As a son he was one to fill his parents' hearts with pride at all times." Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. xiv. Sallie Rogers McSpadden writing the foreword. Ellsworth Collings relied heavily on sister Sallie for his evaluation of Willie's school experiences. He wrote: "Will was never a problem child in school nor was he a poor student. His grades were average and above and in some subjects he made excellent progress. He just simply couldn't fit into the fixed monotony of any one school for any great length of time, and for that reason, changed school several times." And again: "Will like his father before him, never exactly fit. To tie his keen mind and energetic body down to formal, classroom exercises was impossible from the time he entered Drumgoul until he walked out of Kemper Military Academy. . . . It was the case of a bright boy in a dull school. A similar impossible situation developed when Will's father, as a young boy, was sent to school. He, too, was ahead of the schools of the time." Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 42fn, 43 respectively. Betty Rogers balanced Sallie's evaluation to a certain extent when she wrote: "I suspect that Will's modesty had its origin in a tremendous respect for his father and a knowledge that, at least in early manhood, he was a disappointment to his family." Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 27.

nelled overt hostility as evidenced in the young Cherokee's spirited defense of his ancestry. Over-compensating responses of this sort often reflect deep-seated feelings of inferiority.

Whatever the cause, Willie Rogers at age eighteen was an unsettled young man. He found himself running away from conflict with Clem, social rejection and educational failure. His life represented something other than bleakness, however, because to run away from one thing is to run toward something else. Reaching that "something else" proved a long and tortuous journey for Willie Rogers, but he definitely reversed the direction of his life when he fled Kemper. From then on he would be running toward hope and not away from failure. And from then on the young man symbolically became known as Will rather than Willie.

CHAPTER III

Seeing the World: Will's Early Wanderings

> In St. Louis Will Rogers became conscious of what was to him the astounding fact that there were people in the United States who would pay money to see a cowhand rope a horse! [1]

Will's departure from Kemper Military Academy in the early spring of 1898 heralded the beginning of a long and tortuous search for personal identity. Perry Ewing's ranch, located on the Canadian River just outisde Higgins, Texas, became the first stop on his journey. When he reached Higgins, the adventuresome cowboy found the ranch deserted except for a cook and several old-timers. Mr. Ewing and his son, Frank, soon returned and agreed to give the visitor a job. The Texas cattleman, sensing something amiss, wrote Clem Rogers and informed him of Will's presence and activities: "I would advise you to leave the boy alone. He's dong fine here. If it is agreeable to you, he can stay here and I'll keep him at work." Clem's reply reflected pesimism concerning his son's stability: "He likes to roam, but keep him there as long as he'll stay and work. If he needs money, draw on

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[1]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 58.

me."[2] Clem concluded by informing Perry Ewing that "if he /_Ewing_/ could get any work out of Will it would be better than he'd /_Clem_/ ever done."[3]

Will stayed at the Ewing's ranch for four months. The news of a big cattle drive from Amarillo, Texas, to the Mule Shoe Country of Kansas caused him to leave in search of further adventure. The expectant cowboy traveled the eighty miles to Amarillo in three days. His mode of transportation and accommodations resembled something less than the affluent background which bore him. He described the sight to his wife years later: "All I had was the clothes I had on and a few dollars in money, so I bought an old, spoiled horse /_ gray_/ that had been eating loco weed, and he was just as spooky as they made 'em. It was still pretty cold and somebody around the ranch gave me two comforters--we called 'em sugans. The cook gave me a sack of grub. I rolled it up in my sugan and tied it on behind my saddle, and one morning lit a shuck for Amarillo."[4]

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[2]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 123; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 53; Day, Autobiography, pp. 8-9.

[3]Frank Ewing to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 46.

[4]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 53; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 47; Frank Ewing to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 46. Croy makes the following observation concerning the amount of time Will stayed at the Ewing ranch during his first visit: "The motion picture of Will's life blithely assured us that Will spent two years in Texas; that is the Hollywood touch. The time was four months. But, for that matter, the picture had little that was

Will arrived in Amarillo amidst the news that Light Knight and Henry Slaton of Plainview held a large herd outside of town that they planned to drive to Liberal, Kansas. He contacted the outift's trail boss, Pres Burnam, who suggested that the eager Cherokee see Light Knight if he wanted a job. Knight liked Will and signed him on for the trip. When Will reached Liberal, he left the Knight-Slaton drive, sold his horse and saddle, and began touring the Southwest as a stowaway railroad passenger. He usually hid on the front end of baggage coaches or, as referred to by the vernacular of the time, "rode the blinds." This type of transportation carried him to various towns in New Mexico, Trinidad and Pueblo, Colorado, and the famous Miller 101 Ranch near today's Lamont, Oklahoma. Harsh weather and antagonistic train crews made this mode of traveling something less than luxurious. Many times trainmen discovered Rogers and threw him off forcefully only to have him jump on a car farther down the line. The train crew's efforts found a good match in their unknown adversary's determination and contests between the two often continued for hours. During one encounter, Will eluded his protagonists by partially emptying a chicken coop and

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correct." Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 339. On the same topic, Betty Rogers wrote: "Also Mr. Ewing knew Will's father, and he wrote at once to tell Uncle Clem that Willie was there. But before an answer came from Clem, asking Mr. Ewing to put the boy to work, Will had bought a horse and outfit from one of the cowboys on the ranch and had started cross country for Amarillo, Texas." Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 53.

hiding among the birds that remained.[5]

September of 1898 found Will back at Perry Ewing's ranch for another four months. The hapless renegade then returned home for Christmas after a year's rambling. He met a combination of warm greetings and sad news at Oologah. The preceeding August Clem had gotten rid of his cattle, swapped off his horses, began looking for a tenant to run the ranch and transferred his family residence to Claremore.[6] This move away from the home ranch denied the younger Rogers one last symbol of security. As such, it created another void in Will's life at the same time that it deepened the alienation between him and Clem.

Once again Clem seemed to sense his son's antagonism and unhappiness, and responded in the now established manner of presenting gifts as penance. This time the peace offering consisted of a herd of

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[5]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 138-140; Fred Gibson, Fabulous Empire: Colonel Zack Miller's Story (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), p. 232. Keith gives the incorrect impression that Will might have "ridden the blinds" for three straight years. Keith, Boys's Life of Will Rogers, p. 139. The early portions of Day's Autobiography present a rendition of these events in sharp contrast to that related above. Day, Autobiography, pp. 9-11. The Autobiography is disregarded here because of the doubts previously cast concerning its validity.

[6]Progress (Claremore), August 20, 1898, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 102, 129; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p.140. Spi Trent believes that Clem moved to Claremore after Will's return. Trent, My Cousin, p. 45. Harold Keith does an excellent job establishing specific dates during this sparsely treated period of Will's young manhood. Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 138-140.

cattle, two black handy men, Julius Ceasar Bean and Bookertee George Washington Opossum Smith, and the position as manager of the old home ranch. Clem also provided Will with Spi Trent as an assistant. A great deal of money found its way into the entertainment budget of the Rogers' ranch while Will managed it. Clem's inability to understand his son's emphasis upon having a good time contributed further to the alienation between the two.[7]

Will managed the home ranch off and on for approximately three years, 1899-1902. The young cattleman started out by engaging a tenant couple from Illinois to keep the ranch and cook for the cowboys. Things went well at first, but soon the tenant's wife began to change the normal fare of "hot biscuits," "cream gravy" and navy beans by substituting fancy but non-nourishing toast and other eastern niceties. Hostility slowly built up at the main house between Will, Spi and the tenants over this and other problems. The tense situation eventually became unbearable for the young cattleman and plans emerged for him and Spi to move from the main house. Will contracted Hayward, a black man who had worked many years for Clem, and asked him to cut and notch logs and make shingles for a cabin. Will and Spi eagerly collected the housing materials a few days later and attacked the job of constructing their cabin

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[7]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 140-141, 45, 57; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 59; Morning News (Shawnee, Oklahoma) n. d., cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 18-19.

with unparalleled enthusiasm. The energetic builders erected their new home without difficulty, but undertook the messy job of packing mud in the cracks between the logs less enthusiastically. Nevertheless, the completed structure looked so good it even surprised the builders. The two young men triumphantly sent for Hayward to deliver final judgement on their masterpiece. The old black man arrived and surveyed the new edifice closely. Then he began to smile and the smile progressed to a giggle and soon Hayward found himself bent double with laughter. Spi related: "Haywards big eyes look like agates in a china saucer full of water as he sputters, I juss. . . /_Trent's_/ wanter know. . . /_Trent's_/ where. . . /_Trent's_/ where. . . /_Trent's_/ But he gets all choked up an cant finish. . . . Now says Will, YOU JUST WANTER KNOW WHAT? I juss wanter know, says the shaken old darkey, Where am de winders? And He doubles up again."[8]

The new house pleased Will and Spi, but did not represent very ostentatious living. A dirt floor spawned weeds during the warm months which grew under and around the adventurers' beds. Green lizards resided in this grass and the dual purpose boxes which served as both provision containers and living room-dining room furniture.[9] Hot weather forced the outdoorsmen to poke holes in the abode packing between the

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[8]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 48-50.

[9]Ibid., pp. 50, 53-55.

cabin's logs to get fresh air. Due to this innovation, oil slickers provided the best protection when it rained. "Many times durin the year and 1/2 we lived in the cabin," related Spi, "we would come home to find the bed soaked an many a nite we had to sleep on our stommicks to keep the rain from running down our noses and drowin us in our sleep . . ." Each winter the advent of cold weather required replastering of the ventilation holes.

Spi served as the cabin's cook since Will vehemently disliked preparing food. Young Trent's culinary repertoire included "navy beans, cream gravy, hot biscuits" and "navy beans" three times a day seven days a week. The tools of his trade consisted of "one kettle, one skillet" and "one dishpan."[10]

Both Spi and Will loved the outdoors, and as a result, they developed a naturalistic view of the diety. The wonder of a star-studded canopy hanging over an endless prairie gave the young men reverence for the force which created such beauty and majesty. Both of them believed such artistic power represented a supreme type of being and they called it "God."[11] This non-sectarian, simplistic, humanistic philosophy remained the core of Will Rogers' religious belief until he died.

Local steer roping or rodeos became popular in the Mid-West around 1898. These events started as unorganized gatherings on the

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[10]Ibid., pp. 50, 53-55. [11]Ibid., pp. 255, 256.

open prairie. They soon drew Will Rogers' attention by providing an outlet for his unsettled spirit and roping ability. For example, the eager cowboy attended a rodeo at Vinita in 1898, but won no prize. This defeat failed to lessen his enthusiasm and before long he began attending every rodeo held within riding distance. Will's interest in these events represented only one manifestation of a growing restlessness which evidently resulted from his dissatisfaction with the position of ranch manager. Other escapist activities included attending the dog and pony shows in Oologah and stalking around the countryside with his old associate in devilment, Charley McClellan. Bitter arguments soon arose between Clem and Will over the latter's inefficient management of the ranch. Unwilling to change his habits, Will left the ranch and returned to the Ewing Ranch by rail.[12]

Spi received the unenvious job of informing Clem of Will's departure. The elder Rogers' reaction to this news was predictable. Spi recalled it vividly: "Uncle Clem goes, Huhhh!! A funny sound outer his nose. HUHHH! An we ride on in silence. Then suddenly he bursts out: Willie aint never going to amount to nothin-all hes good for is to buy up

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[12]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 142, 148-149; Trent, My Cousin, p. 144. Keith believes Will "rode the blinds," however, Trent specifically states he put his partner on a "passenger car." Trent, My Cousin, p. 144; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 142. It should be noted that Trent believed that Will returned to the Ewing Ranch because things were "gettin a little cramped on this small ranch." Trent, My Cousin, p. 144. Circumstances before and after Will's departure lead one to avoid a literal interpretation of this statement.

these expensive hosses and fool round ropin contests--huhhh! Hes fixin to ruin us, do you know that? Huhhh?!"[13]

The sources dealing with Will's second stay at Ewing's ranch in 1899 present an unclear picture. Nevertheless, it is known that the restless young man spent some time with Frank Ewing at the northwest camp in a one-room sod house. He worked on the ranch and told Frank of his inability to reach an accord with Clem. If Spi Trent's rendition of this period is correct, Will did not return to the home ranch permanently until the spring of 1900--almost a year later. This extended absence probably meant that the younger Rogers did a bit more "riding of the blinds" in addition to working in Higgins, Texas.[14]

Clem reacted to Will's undisciplined wanderings by trying to shame his son into returning home and assuming what the elder Rogers thought constituted his responsibilities. He accomplished this by approaching Spi and offering to pay for his education at the school of his choice. Clem told Spi that he made the offer to "see if youll stay as Willie WONT." Spi selected the Spaulding Business College in Kansas City, since that institution resided in the young man's favorite town. Will did not allow

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[13]Trent, My Cousin, p. 145.

[14]Trent, My Cousin, p. 145; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 143. Will attended a rodeo in Claremore on July 4, 1899, and gave a party at the ranch in mid-August, 1899. Progress (Claremore), August 19, 1899, July 5, 1899, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 121-126, passim. Will's presence in the area does not necessarily mean he had returned home permanently.

his father's action to intimidate him into submission. Rather, when the aggravated wanderer found out about Clem's financing Spi's education, he proceeded to Kansas City and convinced his old saddle companion to leave school and attend the Fair being held in Buffalo, New York. Both men enjoyed themselves during the three months they spent around the Fair grounds and traveling to such places as Canada. One incident which occurred at Buffalo justifies relating. Will and Spi saw the ninety-year old Indian warrior, Geronimo, on public display one day. Will tried talking to him, but he could only illicit unintelligible grunts from the old man. Spi kidded his companion about the encounter: "Boy, your ancesters wasent brothered much about school, neither. All they learnt how to say is UGH. UGHH. Will says, Dont you start monkeying with that ancester business, because the best of us is likely to find our 4 bears hanging by their tails."[15] The sensitivity and possible feelings of inferiority concerning his Indian heritage apparently still haunted Will in much the same way they had at Kemper.

Will and Spi returned to Oologah after their adventures at the Buffalo Fair and met with icy stares of consternation. Will once again assumed management of the ranch and, although the record at this point remains hazy, both men evidently returned to their prairie cabin. Disaster did not wait long to appear. One morning Will tied a tricky old

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[15]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 145-148.

horse named Midnight to one of the cabin logs while he went inside to get a saddle. When the cowboy came back outside, the horse spooked so violently that he jerked the whole cabin down. About this time, the Illinois tenant couple left and Will moved back to the home ranch. Sister Mary and her husband, Frank Stine, moved in shortly thereafter and assumed the tenants' duties.[16]

Will and Clem found it increasingly difficult to get along after the prodigal son's return from Buffalo. Clem insisted that his wayward offspring should settle down and run the ranch efficiently or possibly join him at the bank. Will, for his part, grew restive and desired more and more to go his own way. As previously, his unhappy restlessness found an outlet in traveling, party-going, and participating in rodeos. For example, in the areas of roping events alone he visited Claremore on July 4, 1899; the St. Louis World's Fair in October, 1899; the Rough Rider Reunion in Oklahoma City, July 4, 1900; The Confederate Reunion in Memphis in May of 1901; The Elks Convention in Springfield, Missouri, in September of 1901; and finally, the San Antonio International Exposition held during October of 1901. The traveling roper augmented his escapist diversions with "cake-walks," live music dances and other parties at the ranch.[17]

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[16]Trent, My Cousin, p. 148; Sallie Rogers McSpadden to Ellsworth Collings, August 6, 1941, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 106-107.

[17]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 73; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers,

Clem's displeasure grew as Will's activities broadened. He thought that his gallivanting offspring spent entirely too much money and time on frivolous entertainment. Father and son exchanged bitter words over Will's extensive and expensive recreational pursuits. The clash reached a heated stage, and Clem once again reacted to Will's unhappiness and anger by giving him a gift. This time the surprise came in the form of a trip to California in the fall of 1900. The western adventure almost proved disastrous when one night Will, not being familiar with gas lighting, blew out his hotel lamp upon retiring. A passerby noticed the smell of escaping gas and rescued the unknowing victim just in time to save his life. It took time and a trip to the baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas, to restore Will's health.[18]

One interesting and compelling attraction challenged Will's fascination with roping and rodeos in late 1899--a girl. The young rancher had previously shown interest in several young ladies around Oologah. Belle Price and Mary Bullette received some attention, while Kate Ellis seemed a more constant favorite. A new and extremely attractive

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pp. 143, 148, 165, passim; Progress (Claremore), July 5, 1899; August 19, 1899; June 9, 1900; May 11, 1901; May 18, 1901; all cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 120-128, passim.

[18]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 166; John Smith to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 72-73. Conflicting information relating to the date of Will's California trip is presented in both Day's Autobiography and Roger Butterfield's article. Day, Autobiography, p. 11; Butterfield, "Legend," p. 84.

member of the opposite sex soon appeared in the person of Betty Blake. Betty came from a struggling family of nine children in Rogers, Arkansas, to visit her sister and brother-in-law who ran the railroad station in Oologah. Will Rogers' first meeting with his future wife proved a strange one. Betty found herself tending the railroad station one evening when a train arrived from Kansas City. A "lithe figure" entered the station and went to the ticket window. Betty walked up and asked if she could be of assistance. The young man she faced stared at her for a moment and then simply "turned on his heel and was gone without so much as saying a word." Shortly after the awkward encounter the station master came in with a banjo addressed to Will Rogers. The cowboy's shyness had prohibited him from asking the new girl to wait on him.[19]

Will and Betty met again at a party given by Kate Ellis. The two surmounted the barrier of Will's hesitant nature and enjoyed singing

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[19]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 14 of Introduction; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 55, 63; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 228; Day, Biography, pp. 34-35. There is a conflict between Homer Croy and David Milsten concerning Betty Blake's background. It also might be valuable to note that hard feelings evidently developed when Will Rogers married Betty Blake and not Kate Ellis. Croy cites a letter from Kate: "Your letter has gone unanswered for one reason only--I do not want to contribute any information about my years of friendship with Will Rogers. I feel there have been books and stories written of his life, Betty's book, among others. Since they are both gone, I feel it bad taste on my part to add my bit of the years I knew him. It is their story--Will's life, not mine--and I'm sorry but I can't see it any other way. I have refused before." Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 219.

songs and eating taffy together. Soon after this second meeting the interested suitor showed his attraction for the visitor from Arkansas by trying to impress her. Reflecting the disposition of a gilded peacock, Will appeared in front of the train depot one day with a horse and a bicycle and gave examples of his prowess with both. Some reports of his stunts seem exaggerated, but one normally reliable source related that the smitten cowboy even tried to lasso a calf from his moving bicycle. These exhibitions produced some positive results, for Will and Betty soon developed a friendly association. Their relationship, however, fell short of romantic infatuation. "I don't think," recalled Betty years later, "you would call our meetings there in Oologah incidents in courtship. We simply became very good friends."[20]

Betty saw her early affiliation with Will as merely friendship. The younger Rogers felt very differently, however, for he sent the object of his affections several letters which reflected more than casual interest when she returned to Arkansas. This correspondence presented several predictable facets of the twenty-year old's personality. Will's first communication of early January, 1900, began "My Dear Friend" and evidenced a cautious, uncertain feeling on the young man's part:

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[20]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 15-17 of Introduction; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 70-72; Mayme Obet Peak, "Will Rogers: America's Court Jester" (unpublished manuscript sent to Betty Rogers), p. 14; Jerome Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers (Akron, Ohio: Saalfield Publishing Company, 1935), p. 41.

"I hope if you cannot do me the great favor of dropping me a few lines you will at least excuse me from this for I can't help it." Aside from its shyness, this first note showed a definite sensitivity toward Will's Indian heritage. He made reference to Betty's recent trip "out among the 'Wild Tribes'" and asked for an exchange of pictures. The writer than questioned if his respondent would consider it a "'mammoth inducement'" to have her photograph in an "'Indian Wigwam.'" Will signed the letter "Injun Cowboy, W. P. Rogers." Betty Blake answered her new friend after allowing a proper amount of time to elapse.[21]

Will's reply to Betty's first letter definitely qualified as an affirmation of love. The tone frightened his Arkansas belle and she refused to write her suitor back. This second communication, as the first, projected the maturing young man's sensitivity to his Indian ancestry and an uncertain awkwardness: "I am going to Fort Smith some time soon and if you will permit I can probably come up but I know it would be a slam on your Society career to have it known that you even knew an ignorant Indian Cowboy." The letter's real essence resided in Will's unreserved plea for affection: "I think of you all the time and just wish that you might always have a remembrance of me for I know I cant expect to be your sweetheart . . . ." Before ending, the insecure cowboy

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[21]Letter from Will Rogers to Betty Blake cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 18-19 of Introduction; Ibid., p. 19.

begged Betty to "burn" the letter "for my sake" and not to mention it to anyone. His signature read, "I am yours with love."[22]

The impetuosity of Will's second letter to Betty cooled their relationship and the two did not see much of each other for some time. Their next meeting consisted of a brief encounter at the Elks Convention in Springfield, Missouri, during September of 1901. The Oologah roper participated in the rodeo portion of that celebration with his famous horse Comanche. Betty attended the show with some friends and apparently caught Will'e eye. He joined her in the grandstand, but dampened the occassion with his retiring nature. The two young people got together again a few months later at a street fair in Fort Smith. Betty planned on seeing Will at the Queens Ball which culminated the festivities. The bashful beau attended, but was too shy to enter the dance hall. Betty related the scene clearly: "He was watching the dancers /through a window/ and sometimes glancing in my direction . But did not come in and I did not go out."[23] Will's hesitancy may have reflected the natural shyness of a young man dealing with women. In Betty's case, such apprehensions on Will's part may not have been completely unfounded:

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[22]Letter from Will Rogers to Betty Blake cited in Day, Biography, pp. 37-38; Ibid., p. 36. Day's copy of this letter is used because Betty only included one of the five paragraphs in her work. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 19-20 of Introduction.

[23]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 21 of Introduction; Charles Harris in Tulsa Daily World, cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 27.

"My friends at home," she wrote later, "knew I liked Will a lot and they continually teased me about my 'Wild West Indian cowboy.' It irked Will to know that my friends were teasing me about him. He was very proud of his Indian blood--as he continued to be all of his life--but he was very sensitive and when he was around my friends he was timid in asking me to go out with him."[24] The Fort Smith meeting was the last time Will and Betty saw each other for nearly three years. When they encountered one another again, Will had become a world traveler and entertainer.

The relationship between Clem Rogers and his son reached the breaking point during the latter part of 1901. Will's fanaticism over trick roping and aversion to work had increased after seeing Oropeza, the Mexican vaquero, for a second time at the Elks Convention in Springfield, Missouri, during September, 1901. Aside from his compulsive interest in roping, Will's indifference to work resided in the changing nature of ranching itself. The open range no longer existed and the young cattleman found himself restricted to operating a farm where he nursed a small herd of cows in a fenced-in pasture. Clem's patience neared the breaking point as his ranch manager took less and less interest in his job. As the tensions between father and son rose, news drifted into the southwestern United States of opportunities for large-

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[24]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 21 of Introduction.

scale ranching in Argentina. Farmers and barbwire had not yet penetrated there and the grazing lands remained open and expansive, as in the early days of the American West. Although the evidence once again leaves a hazy picture, Will evidently felt a compelling need to escape his unhappy association with Clem and the sadness of having failed to develop a satisfactory relationship with Betty Blake. These conditions led him to the conclusion that he should try to establish a ranch in Argentina, and he went to inform Clem of his decision. The disappointed patriarch opposed what he considered to be a hair-brained scheme and harsh words resulted. As in the past, the elder Rogers eventually gave in. He presented Will with a three thousand dollar parting gift as supposed payment for the herd at the home ranch. Clem had originally given the cows to Will when the adventuresome young man returned to manage the Oologah range.[25]

Will tried to get his old companion, Spi Trent, to accompany him

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[25]Charles Harris in the Tulsa Daily World, cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 25; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 115, 128-130; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 67-69, 148; Butterfield, "Legend," pp. 84-86; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 47; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers, p. 108; Day, Biography, p. 40; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 176. Roger Butterfield relies on statements by Ed Sunday and intimates that Clem initiated the cattle purchase after an argument with Will over the operation of the ranch. Butterfield, "Legend," p. 86. Donald Day places a great deal of emphasis on Will's difficulties with Betty in explaining the adventurer's departure for Argentina. Such a position definitely makes a good, romantic story. Unfortunately no concrete evidence exists which justifies this narrow explanation of the South American voyage. Day, Biography, p. 140.

to Argentina. Clem talked Spi out of going and persuaded the youth to try and convince Will not to make the trip. This effort on Spi's part proved futile and Dick Paris became the younger Rogers' partner for the South American venture. Will agreed to pay all expenses if Dick would go along and help him start the new ranch. The two young men soon left for New Orleans to catch a boat south. The trip to New Orleans was useless since no travel service existed between there and Argentina. The frustrated pair learned that New York represented the only American port which provided sea travel to Latin America. The adventurers encountered more bad news in New York when they discovered the yearly boat for Buenos Aires had already sailed. Their only possible route to Argentina now lay via London, England. After an additional week's exasperating delay in New York, Will and Dick finally sailed on the Philadelphia for England. The ocean voyage represented a disaster that would find many duplications in Will Rogers' life. He became extremely seasick and only ate " a small part of two lemons on the whole trip."[26]

Upon their arrival in London during April, 1902, the two American cowboys experienced another week's delay before catching a boat for Argentina. They took advantage of the lay-over by visiting such his-

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[26]Day, Autobiography, pp. 16-17; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 108; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 148-149. Due to their nature either Day or Martin seem valid concerning this information.

toric sites as Parliment, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminister Abbey.[27] Will's performing interests led the exploring young men to the London theatres while Dick created somewhat of a scene at Buckingham Palace by trying to talk one of the guards into bucking his horse. The young cattlemen sailed for Argentina via Lisborn, Portugal, Vigo, Spain, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on the Danube.[28]

Will and Dick arrived in Buenos Aires on May 5, 1902. They stayed in the expensive English-speaking Hotel Phoenix for the first week and then moved to cheaper quarters when Will realized the diminishing state of his finances. Travel expenses and lodging had depleted the young entrepreneur's financial resources so much that he did not have enough capital left to buy a ranch. This being the case, the two traveled to the interior and began working as cowboys for the equiva-

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[27]Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, dated April 13, 1902, cited in Alworth, "The Humor or Will Rogers," pp. 80-81. Many of the letters from this period were destroyed when the homr of Mrs. Sallie Rogers McSpadden burned in 1932. Duplicate copies are in the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma

[28]Letter from Will Rogers to Family, April 12, 1902, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 48-51; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 77; Day, Autobiography, pp. 17-18; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 108. Milsten is an excellent source for Will's European correspondence since Sallie Rogers McSpadden let him see some of the originals before her home burned and destroyed them in 1932. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 48-52. Both Cyr Vita and Jerome Beatty present inaccurate information concerning this portion of Will's life. Cyr Vita, I Loved Him Too: An Interpretive Poem in Memory of Will Rogers (Los Angeles: The Book Rancho, 1936), p. 21; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 29.

lent of about $4.20 a month. Both men suffered from deflated egos and viewed the future somewhat pessimistically when they found the gaucho's bolo more than a match for the American cowboy's lariat when chasing cattle. Dick had become homesick as soon as he left home and the negative turn events took in Argentina placed him in abject depression. Will only had enough money left for one ticket home and generously agreed to let his companion return while he stayed.[29]

Things became gloomy for Will after Dick left and the young adventurer reflected this in his letters home: "This is a fine country to stay away from. My parting words are for all you people to fight shy of this part of the globe."[30] In addition to their sadness, the young man's letters from South America reflected clearly his alienation from Clem and the home environment. He evidently received a letter from Clem which chastised him for his reckless behavior and irresponsible spending habits. Will's reaction to this communication defined his dif-

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[29]Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 108; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 151-152; Day, Autobiography, pp. 18-19; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 168; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 78.

[30]Letter from Will Rogers to Family, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 79. It should be noted that some of these letters were published in the Progress (Claremore) and Reporter (Chelsea). Ibid., p. 81; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 73. Copies of the letters which appeared in the Chelsea and Claremore newspapers are on file in the Rogers Collection at the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. Ellsworth Collings makes the following comment concerning the letters: "It should be noted that there are fewer gramatical errors in the letters that were published indicating that the works were carefully edited." Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 73fn, 60.

ferences with Clem: "I have spent a world of money in my time and I am satisfied, as someone else has got the good of it."[31] The younger Rogers could oppose his father, but he showed concern about not meeting Clem's and the community's expectations of him:

> All that worries me is people there all say--'Oh, he is no account, he blows in all his father's money.' and all that kind of stuff, which is not so. I am more than willing to admit that you have done everything in the world for me and tried to make something more than I am out of me (which is not your fault) but as to your financial dealings, I think I paid you all up and everyone else.
>
> I only write these things so we may understand each other. I cannot help it because my nature is not like other people, and I don't want you all to think I am not good because I don't keep my money. . . . I have always dealt honestly with everyone and think the world of all of you and all the folks, and will be among you all soon as happy as any one in the world, as then I can work and show people that I am only spending what I make.[32]

This letter helped to clarify the nature of the differences which drove a wedge between father and son over the years and forced the latter to travel the world trying to find himself.

When Dick Paris reached the Indian Territory and related the conditions under which he left Will in Argentina, Spi Trent went to Clem

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[31]Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, July 31, 1902, cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 68-69; Collings, The Old Home Ranch, pp. 69-70. Some of Will's letters from Latin America were evidently in the old L. M. 'Tex' Edmunds Collection formerly housed in Fort Worth, Texas, and now belonging to Mr. Les DePoy of Schooldraft, Michigan.

[32]Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, July 31, 1902, Buenos Aires, Argentina, cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 68-69.

and asked him to send Will money on which to return home. The stone-faced Rogers remained calm. "I dident ask Will to go," he said, "and if he wants to come home he will have to come without an invitation. But of course, if Willie should write and draw on me, I will honor it."[33] The lines of family conflict reached definition in this fashion.

Will's position in Argentina went from bad to worse. At the end of five months, the young American found himself broke and forced to sleep on park benches. One day the shabby wanderer gravitated to the stockyards near the waterfront. He got a job roping corralled mules which were being loaded on a big steamer for Africa. The pay amounted to a meager twenty-five cents per mule. At the end of the day, the exhausted Will received an offer to care for the load of mules and cows aboard the African-bound boat. Having no other alternative, he hesitantly accepted the position and sailed for Durban, Natal, South Africa, on August 5, 1902.[34]

The thirty-two days at sea as nursemaid to over three thousand cows and mules was a tortuous experience for Will. His usual seasickness caused most of the trouble. After conquering that malady, the young traveler found that the ship's captain provided very little edible food for his crew. The languishing cowboy finally made an arrangement

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[33]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 151-152.

[34]Day, Autobiography, pp. 19-20; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 172.

to supply the cook with milk, a rarity in ocean transit at that time, in exchange for the scraps left from the Captain's dinner. He laboriously acquired the milk by tying calves off from their mothers and milking the wild cows. Such activity proved tedious, dangerous and exhausting.[35]

Reaching South Africa failed to end Will's difficulties and dangers. Two severe storms hit the coast, which almost destroyed the cattle boat, before he could get ashore. Next, the touring cowboy found out that he would be required to have $500 as an entering fee if he planned to stay at Durban. The amount might as well have been $5000, because Will was destitute. He apparently convinced the Englishman who owned the cattle to sign his entrance papers and vouch for him.[36]

Will wrote Clem in October of 1902 that he had acquired work taking care of and training thoroughbred hunting horses at Mooi River. The job seemed satisfactory and he stayed with it for several weeks. Constant harassment from his boss while showing horses to perspective buyers, along with a fall taken while trying to rope a zebra, prompted

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[35]Day, Autobiography, p. 20; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 108.

[36] Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 80; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," pp. 108-109; Day, Autobiography, p. 20; Letter from Will Rogers to the Family, September 22, 1902, Mooi Rivers, South Africa, cited in Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 173. Will intimated in the Autobiography and the interview article with George Martin in 1919 that he entered South Africa illegally. Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," pp. 108-109; Day, Autobiography, p. 20.

Will to move on.[37] He drifted to Ladysmith and procured employment breaking horses for the English Army. The work demanded a great deal and only paid about two dollars a day. This gave Will very little spending money after he had paid his room and board. One day, during a relaxing interlude at a bar drinking beer, Will met a convivial fellow American and established a sporadic friendship with him that lasted over many years. The new acquaintance was W. C. Fields.[38]

Breaking horses eventually proved too wearing and Will got another job helping drive a herd of horses six hundred miles to Johannesburg. There he noticed signs advertising "Texas Jack's Wild West Show." This reference to home naturally attracted the young man and he sought employment with the Wild West Show as a laborer. Texas Jack found that Will came from the Indian Territory and could do some trick roping. The astute showman immediately placed the hesitant cowboy in his wild west show at twenty dollars a week. Will did everything

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[37]Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, October, 1920, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 44-45; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 174; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 152-153.

[38]Letter from Will Rogers to Family, November 3, 1902, Durban, Natal, South Africa, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 71; Letter from Will Rogers to Family, November 17, 1902, Durban, Natal, South Africa, cited in Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 175; Day, Autobiography, p. 21; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Robert Lewis Taylor, W. C. Fields: His Follies and Fortunes (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), p. 104. It should be noted that Betty Rogers believes that Will did not work for the British Army breaking horses while he was in South Africa. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 73.

in the show from riding bucking horses, to playing Indians and Blacks, to performing roping tricks. He eventually achieved billing as "The Cherokee Kid--Fancy Lasso Artist and Rough Rider." Jack taught his young countryman a great deal about show business and may have given Will the idea for his famous vaudeville act in which the Oklahoman lassoed a moving horse and rider on stage.[39]

Will stayed with Texas Jack for over a year, touring all of South Africa from Rhodesia to Cape Town. He became somewhat of a matinee idol since the local inhabitants had never seen trick roping and were immediately impressed by it.

While touring South Africa, the young American corresponded very little, if any with Betty Blake. Their break seemed complete. However, he did write infrequently to his friends and relatives. Moreover, he sent some $450 home to Clem for insurance payments. Having received a raise to twenty-five dollars a week from Texas Jack, Will was clearly determined to convince Clem and the home folks that he could make his own way. His letters home expressed a deep loneliness, but

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[39]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 81-82, 85; Letter from Will Rogers to Family, December 28, 1902, Sanderton, Transvall, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 75; Letter from Will Rogers Clem Rogers, December 15, 1902, Potshefstroon, cited in Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 183; Letter from Will Rogers to Marshall Stevens, cited in Ibid., p. 183; Ibid., pp. 177-185, passim; Letter from Will Rogers to Sallie Rogers McSpadden, 1902, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 52-53; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Day, Autobiography, pp. 22-23.

showed no willingness to ask for help or to return to America. A letter of 1903 to Clem provided a classic example of this sentiment: "I'm getting homesick, but don't know what I would do there, more than make a living." He felt that he worried "no one" and so seemed to be "getting along first rate."[40]

The experience with Texas Jack's Wild West Show was valuable to Will Rogers in many ways. However, as time progressed, the roving American decided to leave Jack's show and to visit Australia. He traveled to Sydney and joined the Wirth Brothers' Circus as the world renowned trick roper, "The Cherokee Kid." Will traveled throughout Australia and New Zealand with this company. At the end of six months, he took his hard earned savings and purchased a third class boat ticket for San Francisco. He arrived back in America in 1904 after having spent almost three years working his way around the globe. Will reached Oologah riding a freight train and so broke that some kidded him about

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[40]Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, 1903, Port Elizabeth, cited in Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 183; Ibid., pp. 180-183; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 85, 343; Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, November 26, 1903, Durban, Natal, South Africa, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 56-57; Letter from Will Rogers to Clem Rogers, November 26, 1902, Durban, South Africa, cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 74-75, 65-67. Croy said that Will sent home $430. Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 88. It should be noted that the November 26th letter referred to in both Milsten and Betty Rogers seemed to be the same letter. However, Milsten states that the letter was written in 1903 while Betty Rogers intimates by her narrative that the year was 1902.

"wearing overalls for underpants."[41]

It was only natural that Clem should have been disgusted with Will when the latter unceremoniously returned to Oologah. Nevertheless, the Rogers patriarch once again placed his prodigal son in charge of the Oologah ranch and gave him a herd of cattle. Spi Trent left his job at Okmulgee and moved in to aid his old rope-throwing partner with the ranch. Will appeared changed to Spi in that he possessed "a kind of sure-footedness about him which comes to a feller who has learned to paddle his own canoe."[42] This confidence, however, did not make living up to the responsibilities of ranch manager any easier for Will than

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[41]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 185; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 86-90; Day, Autobiography, pp. 25-26; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109. A number of serious factual mistakes appear concerning the latter part of Will's early world tour. David Milsten and Spi Trent both state that the Oklahoman traveled to New Zealand and Australia with Texas Jack. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 60; Trent, My Cousin, p. 153. Jack Lait's Our Will Rogers takes the position that Will fought in the Boer War with the Boers and later traveled to Japan and China with the Wirth Brothers' Circus. Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 8, 100-101. P. J. O'Brien repeats the same mistake concerning Oriental travels with the Wirth Brothers' Circus. O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 32-33. The fact that Lait and O'Brien made mistakes in these instances was verified in an interview with Will Rogers, Jr. on March 19, 1971. Ed Sunday states that Will sailed to Chicago on his return from New Zealand and wired Clem for money to get home. Uncle Ed Sunday, "Will Rogers of Oologah" The Ranchman, I November, 1942, p. 19. This would have presented a denial of everything the young man had stood for during his three year sojourn of independence. Similar comments by Sunday are found in Folks Say of Will Rogers. Morning News (Shawnee, Oklahoma), cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 21.

[42]Trent, My Cousin, p. 155; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 89-90.

in the past. The ever restless young man soon fell back into his old behavorial pattern of parties, roping and irresponsibility, much to his father's consternation. He also renewed acquaintances with Betty Blake, and his actions indicated that he had not lost his infatuation for her. Nothing reflected the young cowboy's reversion to his old ways better than a cattle selling trip he made to Kansas City. Will returned to the Indian Territory looking the part of the Cherokee Nation's foremost playboy with a carat and a half diamond ring, derby hat, patent leather shoes decorated with pearl buttons, other fancy clothes and the first rubber-tired buggy in the region. The stylish cowboy felt special pride in his buggy and suspended it in mid-air with ropes that were tied to the barn rafters. This bizarre parking place prevented the rubber tires from going flat when the buggy was not being used. Spi Trent suggested that his comrade had become a dandy in order to impress Betty Blake.[43] This could be true, but one suspects that Will's general nature also had a great deal to do with his acquisitions.

Roping activities once again began taking the restive young Rogers further and further afield. He had made the acquaintance of Zack Mulhall during the St. Louis Fair of 1899. Colonel Zack lived about thirty miles north of Guthrie with his wife and three daughters, Agnes, Lucille and Mildred. As Will grew increasingly unhappy at home, he began

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[43]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 156-159, 165; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 55-56, 90; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 22.

spending a great deal of time at the Mulhall ranch. He developed a great affection for Mrs. Mulhall, who showered him with motherly affection and understanding, and daughter Lucie, whom he courted. St. Louis opened its World's Fair in 1904 and Zack Mulhall received an invitation to present a wild west show at the celebration. The indomitable showman organized the "Cummins and Mulhall Wild West Show" and gave Will a job as a trick roper at somewhere between $60 and $120 a month. The St. Louis engagement did not last long because the Colonel became involved in a shooting incident and went to jail. His show closed as a result, but Zack soon gained his freedom and reopened at the Delmar Gardens. Will Rogers and his famous cow pony, Comanche, again composed part of the show.[44] Colonel Zack's young roping friend put on a good feature at St. Louis as reported by Spi Trent:

> After his act was announced he would come racin into the ring with his heels hooked round his saddle horn an his body leanin way off, one hand draggin in the sand, while the band would be playin music to stir up your blood an old Will would be lettin out that ear-splittin Indian Territory whoop. . . . By the time he did his spinners and butterflies and giant loops, I reckon they were beginning to know that that ole boy born William Penn Adair Rogers was pretty hot stuff.[45]

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[44]Lucille Mulhall to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 64-65, 39-40; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 160-161, 254; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 84; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 187-189; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 92-95. Homer Croy says Colonel Zack paid Will $60 a month while Spi Trent related $30 a week. Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 93; Trent, My Cousin, p. 254.

[45]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 164-165. It should be noted that Will

While performing in St. Louis with Colonel Mulhall, Will unexpectedly learned that Americans would pay money to see trick roping. St. Louis also proved a sad experience for Will in that he found that prejudice against Indians was still strong. Colonel Mulhall asked Will and Tom Mix, another performer, to work on the programs for the show. The two decided to write each other's billing. Mix received the title of "Tox Mixico, the Cowrunner from Mexico," while his associate became "Will Rogers, the Cherokee Indian." One afternoon during a performance, Will began flirting with an attractive girl in a box seat and she reciprocated. Thinking an enjoyable relationship might develop, the roper went to meet the young lady after finishing his part on the program. She seemed extremely cool and Will asked for an explanation. "She showed him the program and said, 'I see you are a Cherokee Indian, I think that closes it.'"[46] This unfortunate encounter was somewhat neutralized when the enthusiastic performer ran into Betty Blake. Will and Betty spent some time together and their relationship seemed more intimate and mutually rewarding than before. The summer of 1904 ended on this positive note.

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also worked in Charley Tompkins's little Wild West Show at this time. Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 194.

[46]Tom Mix to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 348-349; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 52, 82-83; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 51; Tom Mix to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 68-71; Day, Biography, p. 51.

Will gained confidence from his success in St. Louis and began some limited stage appearances. These included a "week at the Old Standard in St. Louis with a stock burlesque" and a seven day engagement at the "Chicago Opera House" which fell through because the new performer did not know to send advance "Billing and Photos." The trip to the windy city proved something less than a complete loss, however, for Will accidentally stumbled into a half-week's work at the Cleveland Theatre on Wabash Avenue. While performing there one night, a puppy from a dog act got loose and ran across the stage. The roper put a deft loop around his unexpected companion's neck and brought down the house with his quick reaction. The audience's response, along with his previous experience while working for Texas Jack, helped convince Will that an act where he caught something on stage would be more successful than simple trick roping. Such thinking prompted him to begin work on roping a moving horse and rider at the same with two different ropes; the act that eventually made the young cowboy a famous vaudevillian.[47]

Will's performing activities during 1904 also included appearances with the Miller 101 Wild West Show. Nevertheless, the trick roper's big break accidentally came when Zack Mulhall took his troop to Madison Square Garden during April of 1905. One night a bizarre incident occur-

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[47]Day, Autobiography, pp. 27-28, 23; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 195-196, 202.

red and, although many varying accounts of the event exist, the basic facts seemed as follows: A large steer used in the roping demonstrations got out of control, leaped the barricades surrounding the Garden floor and charged into the audience. The audience's hysterical reaction forced the steer into a highly confused and active state. Will helped avoid an almost certain panic when he helped rope and subdue the wild beast. This feat brought the young cowboy some degree of notoriety and newspaper publicity. As a result, he decided to stay in New York when the Mulhall show closed and begin a vaudeville career. Will seemed to think that the notoriety connected with the run-away steer incident combined with his new act of roping a horse and a rider with different ropes at the same time would help in this endeavor.[48]

When Will left Kemper Military Academy during the spring of 1898, he fled conflict with his father. Such an unhappy situation had

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[48] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 89; Day, Autobiography, pp. 29-30; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 95, 97-98; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 167-170; Day, Biography, p. 54; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Brown, "Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 223; N. A., "Chewing Gum and Rope in the Temple," New York Times, October 3, 1915, p. 6. The degree of newspaper coverage given to the steer event and the advantage the young performer gained from it have been exaggerated in many places. Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971. For an example of such exaggeration, see Spi Trent's work, pp. 169-170. Although none of Will's numerous biographers considers it, there would seem a chance that the run-away steer incident took place while the young cowboy worked in the Miller 101 Wild West Show. Gipson, Fabulous Empire, pp. 232, 235-237, 240. Since Mulhall and Miller possessed the same first name, such a mistake would have been natural.

developed because of the young man's concern over not fulfilling family and community expectations; especially in the area of formal education. A general cloud of inferiority feelings caused by the teenager's Cherokee Indian heritage added to this emotional pattern. At the same time that Will ran away from his unhappy predicament by clandestinely leaving school, he began moving toward a more suitable realization of himself. It took seven difficult years of adjustment from 1898 to 1905 for him to find out what he wanted to move toward and how he could travel that road of self-realization satisfactorily. Beginning a show business career in New York during 1904 symbolized the end of his search for identity. Will Rogers now knew where he wanted to go and how he could get there "riding his own horse."

CHAPTER IV

Vaudeville

> Life is given to us by God to spend, but given to us to spend well.
>
> We go to war and fight for a cause that a certain few consider the country's duty, and being induced by fife and drums and flag waving we are convinced that it is our patriotic duty.
>
> Will Rogers was a civil soldier who needed no beating of drums to remind him of his duty, but went ahead bringing joy, happiness and enlightenment into the lives of all nationalities.[1]

Will Rogers secretly developed his famous trick of roping a moving horse and rider with two different lariats thrown simultaneously while working for Zack Mulhall and others in St. Louis during 1904. Jim Minnick aided Will in his practice sessions. After Will and Jim achieved proficiency with the double rope stunt, they moved indoors and began working on adapting the new trick to the restricted area of a theatre stage. Will's favorite horse Comanche, although he weighed only nine hundred and fifty pounds, proved too large for the inside work and Teddy, who was a gift from Mrs. Mulhall, was used. Will did not employ his double rope trick in 1904 because he wanted to save it for a more important

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[1]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. vii of the Introduction by Tom Mix.

event. An engagement the next year at Madison Square Garden with Colonel Mulhall's Wild West Show provided that special occasion. Will failed to acquire top billing in New York, but his new trick did not go unnoticed by the newspapers: "Will Rogers, a lariat expert from the Indian Territory," mentioned one writer, "distinguished himself by throwing a rope around the neck of a horse and another rope about the neck of the rider of the horse at the same time."[2]

The publicity that Will's new stunt received, combined with the notoriety connected with the run-away steer incident, convinced him to stay in New York and start a stage career when the Mulhall show closed. Success did not come immediately or easily to the young trick roper. Theatrical agents, through whom he tried to get bookings, doubted that a horse could fit on a stage, much less be roped while racing past with a rider. A few of them offered Will some $75-a-week engagements. Such a meager salary would not have paid expenses, so the hopeful performer held out for $250 a week. Will pestered the booking agents constantly until one harassed victim gave up and called Keith's Union Square Theatre in a fit of frustration and pleaded, "Put this nut and his pony on one of your supper shows and just get rid of him."[3] Keith's theatre

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[2]Ibid., p. 66; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 195, 198, 203.

[3]Will Rogers to George Martin cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Day, Autobiography, p. 31; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 170-171, 254. It should be noted that Donald Day's Autobiography resembles George Martin's 1919 article very closely on this topic.

presented a good quality of vaudeville entertainment, but the "supper show" featured unestablished acts and "extra acts" like Will's which were just auditioning. Appearing at a supper show between six and eight p. m. proved a trying experience for any act since the patrons at that time of evening often gave performers a hostile reception. To the management's surprise, the audience received Will and his horse dressed "with felt-bottom boots buckled on his feet like goloshes" favorably.[4] The new act was soon hired and began performing three times a day.[5]

Will played Keith's Theatre with Teddy and Jim Minnick for a week. At the end of their engagement, Jim left the act to look after business matters. Will replaced him briefly with a small boy and then engaged Buck McKee, a former Oklahoma sheriff, who stayed in the act for the next five and a half years.[6]

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[4]Day, Autobiography, p. 31; Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers, p. 109; Day, Biography, pp. 54-55. It should be noted that David Milsten believes that Will acquired his first vaudeville engagements at this time in the following manner: "He /_Will_/ possessed letters of recommendation from Texas Jack and by reason of these documents he managed to get into the booking agents' office and tell them what he could do with a rope. Lady Luck was with him and he was introduced to Weber and Fields which resulted in his first appearance at the old Keith's Union Square Theatre." Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 75-76.

[5]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Day, Autobiography, p. 31; Day, Biography, pp. 54-55.

[6]Day, Autobiography, p. 31; Day, Biography, p. 55; Buck McKee to Spi Trent, cited in Trent, My Cousin, pp. 171-172; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 204.

A successful three months engagement at Hammerstein's Theatre, the greatest vaudeville theatre of all time, followed the one week booking at Keith's Theatre. Will appeared downstairs in matinee performances and played the roof at night. Disaster almost struck the first evening when Teddy became frightened and momentarily refused to enter the elevator which took performers to the roof stage. The success at Hammerstein's brought invitations for Will to make personal appearances elsewhere.[7]

Although he did not become a bonified monologist for some six years, Will evidently spoke a little in his roping act. During his first week's employment in 1905 at Keith's Union Square Theatre, someone suggested that the audience failed to completely appreciate his double rope trick because it happened so quickly and unexpectedly. The observer then suggested that it might help if Will would announce what the trick entailed. He agreed to give the idea a try. A few nights later the Oklahoman stopped the orchestra and extemporaneously announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to call your sho' nuff attention to this next little stunt I am going to pull on you, as I am going to throw about two o' these ropes at once, catching the horse with one and the rider with the other. I don't have any idea I'll get it, but here goes."[8] The

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 34; Day, Autobiography, p. 32.

audience roared with laughter at Will's bashful, unassuming announcement delivered in his Southwestern twang. Their response surprised, embarrassed and angered the young performer. He thought they were laughing at him rather than at what he said and he tried to cancel the rest of his engagement. The theatre manager and other actors tried to point out what had happened. The young cowboy's embarrassment was so great that it took some time before he could be coaxed into speaking on stage again.[9]

Will registered complete surprise for a second time when sometime later his comments on stage once again evoked laughter from an audience. Several roping efforts had failed and as his frustration increased the young performer somewhat desperately informed his audience that he felt "a bit handicapped . . . /sic/ because the manager wouldn't allow a fellow to cuss when he misses."[10] Will, helped and encouraged by friends and associates, slowly began to see the value of being able to make an audience laugh. He added more comments to his act as this awareness grew. For instance, when he missed a normally easy rope-throw Will became fond of commenting: "Swinging a

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[9]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 34; Karl Schmidt, "The Philosopher with the Lariat," Everybody's Magazine, XXXVII October, 1917, p. 495; Eddie Cantor, as told to David Freedman, My Life Is In Your Hands (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928), p. 134.

[10]Day, Autobiography, p. 32.

ropes all right as long as your neck ain't in it."[11] Oftentimes he got ropes tangled around his spurs when jumping in and out of loops. On such occasions, he quipped in an apologetic fashion: "Well, I got my feet through all but one of 'em."[12] Although he was making some scattered comments to the audience, Will remained shy and delivered most of what he said on stage under his breath where only Buck McKee, the orchestra and a few people in the front rows could hear him. Once again, the encouragement of friends over a long period of time finally gave him enough confidence to address additional quips to the audience. As he used more monologue in his act, it became apparent that the comments he worked up himself met with more success than those he acquired from others. His infrequent use of "Laughing Fred" Tejan as a claquer (a person who sits in the theatre and encourages the audience to laugh at jokes by laughing loudly) reflected Will's continuing hesitancy toward the increasingly successful monologue portion of his act.[13]

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[11]Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 102-105; Jack Lait, complier, Will Rogers: Wit and Wisdom (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1936), p. 19; Charles W. Lobdell, "Will Rogers: The World Laughs with Him," Liberty XIX November 29, 1924, p. 20. Both Lobdell and Lait quote Rogers as having told them that this was the first comment he ever uttered on the stage. See above citations.

[12]Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 58-62. Beatty states this is the first comment Rogers ever made from the stage.

[13]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 34; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 351; Day, Biography, p. 55; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 205-208; Trent, My Cousin, p. 173. Keith and Trent take the position that the under-the-breath comments were

Will eventually developed a good act. In his basic presentation, he came on stage with a coiled rope in both hands. The orchestra played "Cheyenne" as Buck and Teddy came racing across the stage and fell victim to both ropes at the same time. This attention-getter was followed by an extensive exhibition of trick roping. The act closed with the "big crinoline" where the roping artist sat atop Teddy and twirled a ninety foot rope in a gigantic circle. Will added finishing touches of showmanship to this basic act over the years. Sometimes he would move to one side of the stage and throw a rope over his shoulder into the wings and pull an unsuspecting fellow performer out on stage. Other times he would use the chewing gum that he sometimes had in his mouth. If he missed a throw, he would walk to the sign that advertised his act and cover the "W" in his name with the gum. As time went on, he gradually began making more comments in a detached fashion about himself and other acts while he kept his eyes glued on his rope. The Oklahoman's success seemed limited, but it brought steady work and enabled him to employ Mort Shea as an agent. He evidently made about $125 a week at this time.[14]

Will met with moderate success during his first year of full-time

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the first Will ever made on stage and are the real origin of his monologue. Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 205-208; Trent, My Cousin, p. 173.

[14]Day, Biography, p. 56; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 104-106, 109; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 208-209.

performing. He always managed to find employment on the vaudeville circuit, but his efforts failed to meet universal acceptance. One early reviewer of his act wrote: "Spot two on an otherwise farish program is assigned to an alleged cowboy from Oklahoma calling himself Will Rogers. He is supporting a trick horse. He puts the horse through a routine, meanwhile doing some roping stunts and spilling a line of loose chatter. This turn would go better if the cowboy shut up and gave the horse a chance."[15] Despite some criticism, favorable reaction to Will's efforts predominated. He visited the White House sometime in 1905 and toured Europe in late 1905 and early 1906. The continental venture included engagements in Paris, Scotland, The Wintergarten in Berlin, and London's Palace Theatre. He triumphantly completed the English portion of his European trip by appearing at Edward VII's club and receiving a loving cup from the British monarch. In sharp contrast, the German phase of his journey was characterized by two near disasters. The first came when Will roped a fireman standing in the wings of The Wintergarten and pulled him out on stage. Germans respected firemen and the audience became quite upset with Will's presumptiveness. Soon after, the touring American made another mistake while horseback riding in the Tier Garten. Each day, dressed in his ostentatious cowboy regalia, he passed an army officer and waved noncha-

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[15]Irving S. Cobb, Exit Laughing (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), p. 119fn.

lantly. Only later did he become aware that he had created quite a stir by not recognizing the Kaiser and rendering the proper salute.[16]

Returning from Europe, Will played the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit. This took him all over the United States and Canada. During this era, professional baseball players frequented vaudeville theatres. Will developed close friendships with a number of these sports heroes. Oftentimes he would participate in their practice sessions. One summer, probably in 1906, he participated in an outdoor vaudeville circuit that played in baseball parks throughout the country. This entertainment experiment soon failed and Will returned to the normal vaudeville houses.[17]

The trip to Europe in 1905-1906 had proved enjoyable for Will. He believed that a market existed there for western entertainment and in the spring of 1907 he decided to return. He organized an act which included two other riders and horses and embarked for England. The venture failed. Theatres hired his act, but the four-man endeavor only made a little more money than his original two-man show. This situation brought on financial difficulty and Will sent the two additional riders and their horses back to the United States. Buck, Teddy and Will began

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[16]Letter from Will Rogers to Family, October 30, 1905, cited in Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 94; Day, Autobiography, p. 33; Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Trent, My Cousin, p. 174; Letter from Will Rogers to Betty Blake, cited in Day, Biography, pp. 55-56; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 209-211; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 110-111.

[17]Day, Autobiography, p. 34.

performing by themselves once again and returned home to the Orpheum Circuit as soon as they acquired enough money for the trip.[18]

Back in the United States, things went well for Will, but despite success, he felt lonely. He seemed unable to develop a satisfactory relationship with Betty Blake. He later told Spi Trent, "that many a time when he would be swirlin his ole Manila rope out at a audience, inside its circle he would see the blue eyes and sweet smile of Betty Blake. An he says the thing begins to grow on him till he almost believes he is havin the dee-tees an had better do something about it."[19]

Will's and Betty's courtship was a long and difficult affair. They originally met in Oologah during late 1899 and developed a friendship which seemed to be maturing by the time they encountered each other at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. During their St. Louis interlude, Will made arrangements for Betty to visit Claremore. A roping engagement came up in Chicago which forced him to cancel these plans. He asked Betty to write to him in Claremore. Betty did not contact Will for some time and when she finally wrote, she informed him that she disliked being considered second behind a horse and a lariat. The correspondence ended when she told Will that he was only one of many young men she knew. She added that he did not rate very high among those in-

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[18]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 112; Day, Biography, p. 60.

[19]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 176-177.

volved in the race for her affections. Will replied that he was not surprised at what he sarcastically called the many "Railroad Gisables" she dated. He then suggested that both of them, because of age, should already have been married: ". . . . it wouldent do for this young gang to look at our teeth you know." He then let her know that he wanted to marry her and gave concrete assurances that he had not had "a girl since I left on that trip /_evidently his travels to Argentina and Africa._/." Betty's reply criticized Will sharply for his language, but stated that she would possibly look upon his proposal favorably if he would give up performing and settle down to farming, ranching or business. During Christmas of 1904, Will traveled to Navata, Missouri, to see Betty at a party. He told her of his plans to continue vaudeville. Betty informed Will that she would not consider such a life and the two parted company under a cloud of mutual sadness.[20]

Despite their apparent impasse, Will and Betty kept writing. Rogers wanted to get married, but Betty continued to refuse him. Will forwarded her press clippings describing his early vaudeville accomplishments and news of the 1905-1906 European tour. He probably hoped that such successes would capture Betty's admiration and her hand in marriage. All of Will's efforts failed to win Betty and he proceeded to Europe alone. After Will returned to the States, he and Betty contin-

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[20]Letters of Will Rogers to Betty Blake and Betty Blake to Will Rogers, 1904, cited in Day, Biography, pp. 51-53; Ibid., p. 60.

ued their uncommitted relationship. She traveled to Chelsea, Oklahoma, to enjoy a round of parties at sister Maude's during a break the performer had in his show business schedule. Will seemed distant to Betty at this meeting. Thus, the wall of incompatibility which separated the two young people continued to exist. Will stopped off at Rogers, Arkansas, on his return to New York and once again asked Betty to be his wife. She remained adamant in her refusal to marry a stage performer and they parted ways. But as was now their custom, they promised to write.[21]

During the next year and a half, the young couple wrote regularly. Betty would not agree to marry Will, but neither would she end their relationship. This situation created tensions and antagonism for all concerned. Will tantalized her with suggestive allusions concerning relationships he supposedly shared with other women. Finally, he forwarded a letter from a woman "he had been having an affair with" and who desired to see him again.[22] Betty countered with intimations of her own concerning her "Dearest Friend, T. H., the promising lawyer." This exchange resulted in a series of bitter and accusing letters between

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[21]Letters from Will Rogers to Betty Blake, 1905, cited in Day, Biography, pp. 55-56; Ibid., p. 60; Post card from Betty Blake to Will Rogers, August 22, 1906, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 78; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 111-113; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 96-97.

[22]Day, Biography, p. 61; Letters from Will Rogers to Betty Blake and from Betty Blake to Will Rogers, cited in Ibid., pp. 60-62.

the two young people. Finally, Will had taken all the suspense he could stand. He appeared unannounced in Rogers, Arkansas, during November of 1908, and informed Betty that she had best pack her bag since they were getting married. This time his sweetheart of eight years conceded to his wishes.[23] Will and Betty were married on November 25, 1908, in the Blake home in Rogers, Arkansas, with Reverend John G. Bailey officiating.[24] Will was then twenty-nine.

Will promised Betty before their marriage that after one final season in vaudeville, he would quit show business and return to Claremore and ranching. This commitment reflected the idea, held to some extent throughout his entire career, that his performing success represented a stroke of luck and might be only temporary. Will believed that people would eventually "catch onto" him and realize that he received something for nothing. He and Betty, however, continued in show business year after year as increasingly better offers appeared. Regardless of Will's early successes, the idea of returning to Claremore and ranching remained constantly in the young couple's minds. Around 1909,

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[23]Letters from Will Rogers to Betty Blake and Letters from Betty Blake to Will Rogers, cited in Day, Biography, pp. 61-62; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 14-15.

[24]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 23-; Trent, My Cousin, p. 24; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 115. The remarks Damon Runyan made in Folks Say of Will Rogers concerning the Oklahoman's courtship with Betty Blake are gross exaggerations and absolute incorrect. Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 211.

Will bought a twenty acre tract of land in Claremore from Mrs. J. M. Boling as partial preparation for the expected move west and he continued to talk seriously of such plans as late as 1911.[25]

Will's marriage to Betty Blake brought inevitable alterations in his life style. The young couple traveled the vaudeville circuits together during their early years of marriage. Betty insisted that they stay in good hotels and frequent respectable restaurants. This represented a drastic change for Will, who had always patronized the cheap hotels and eating places, a common practice for vaudeville performers on tour. In addition, Betty reinforced an earlier desire that her husband quit smoking. This led Will to begin using the chewing gum which soon became such an intricate part of his public image.[26]

Marriage brought change and adjustment to Will's life, but it also created happiness and a growing sense of fulfillment. Will had come from a "roustabout background" and tended to lead a rough and ready

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[25]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 102, 276; Day, Biography, p. 62; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 28; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 12; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971.

[26]Will Rogers to Jack Lait, cited in Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 38; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 232; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 70; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 17-18. It should be noted that Eddie Cantor presents a different view of how Will began using chewing gum. Eddie Cantor, As I Remember Them (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1963), p. 142. Cantor's comments on this topic must be questioned because of the internal contradictions in his works concerning this period of Will's life.

existence. Betty acted as a "stabalizing and sobering influence" on her husband. She was, as Will Rogers, Jr. remarked years later, a "remarkable woman" who seemed able, through her influence over Will, to keep "him operating on higher planes and with higher type people."[27] Will communicated his realization of Betty's importance to his life to his old friend, Spi Trent:

> He says, But After it was Over /_the wedding ceremony_/, a feelin of courage come upon me like I was bein supported by a mountain an couldent fall. An it was a true and lastin feelin, because I tell you, Spi, whatever success I have made in life, I owe to Betty. . . .
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> As for her, Spi, she was wonderful. She would always talk things over with me so calm-like and she had such a clear way of judgin things that I got so I could take her word against almost Anybodys an I never found her to be wrong. I reckon she was what I had been needin all my life. Sort of a balance wheel, an Gosh, Boy, you know its kinder silly for a tuff ole cowboy that has roped the range an laid at night on his saddle in the shadow of the chuckwagon, for a tuff ole cowboy like me to get so mushy about love, but I just wanter say, that the day I roped Betty into marryin up with me was sure my star performance.[28]

Will's happy marriage to Betty enabled him to overcome one of the basic difficulties and saddnesses of his youth; he had finally replaced the female love and understanding his mother's death had taken from him. Such an accomplishment must be considered a major turning point in his life and great personal victory for him.

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[27]Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; Paula M. Love to S. F. Roach, Jr., February 23, 1971; Jim Rogers (Will's youngest son) to S. F. Roach, Jr., Letter mailed April 14, 1971.

[28]Will Rogers to Spi Trent, cited in Trent, My Cousin, pp. 177-178; Day, Autobiography, p. 35; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 161.

A second major turning point and another triumph over youthful tragedy followed quickly upon the heels of Will's marriage; he began to work out a rapproachement with Clem. This was not an easy thing to achieve considering the wall of antagonism which had developed between father and son over the years. As a matter of fact, Will's embarkation upon a show business career seemed only to reinforce the uncomfortable family atmosphere which already existed. Clem told Jim Hall, President of the Bank of Claremore, that he felt "awful blue" about his son's decision to enter vaudeville. The elder Rogers then requested his business associate's advice in finding a way to deal effectively with his wayward son. Hall replied that he would "knock" Will "in the head, because he'll never amount to anything!" Clem agreed with Hall: "I'm afraid you're right."[29] Clem's unhappiness over his son's vocational pursuits grew into alarm as Will sent more and more money home for deposit in his bank account. The elder Rogers had trouble understanding how an actor could make so much money and he asked William H. Murray at the Oklahoma State Constitutional Convention: "Bill, do you suppose Will is making all that money honestly?"[30]

Curosity got the best of Clem, and he went East with daughters

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[29]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 204-205.

[30]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 54; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 205; Day, Biography, p. 66; Robert P. Brewer to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 83-84; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 119.

Sallie and Maude to see Will's act. After counting the number of people present at the theatre and realizing how much the house took in every night, Clem came to the conclusion that his boy should receive more money: "Will, my son, they are taking down on you; you are not getting enough of the sales of these tickets."[31] Clem's hesitancy toward Will's vaudeville career changed into boastful pride over night. He attended the theatre every evening while visiting Will. When each show ended, the proud father circulated among the audience in the lobby and informed those whom he heard talking about Will of his relationship to the roper. He even went so far as to gather large groups of patrons at the stage door and give them personal introductions to his son.[32] Clem's newly found pride in Will continued after he returned to Claremore. The aging Oklahoman carried newspaper clippings about his son around in his pocket to show inquiring friends. In addition, those seeking loans

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[31]Will Rogers to William H. Murray, cited in Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 54; Day, Biography, p. 66; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 120; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 118-120. Betty Rogers and Croy state that Clem saw Will perform in Washington while Day suggests the site was New York. See above citations for Rogers, Croy, and Day. Perhaps Clem visited his son's home in New York, but had to travel to Washington to see his act. It should also be noted that Croy, Day and, to a lesser extent, Betty Rogers intimate that Clem had some feeling of pride in Will's theatrical accomplishments before his trip East to see his son at work. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 93, 119; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 120; Day, Biography, p. 66.

[32]Day, Biography, pp. 66-67; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 120; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 205; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 119-120.

at the Bank of Claremore soon found out that if they praised Will's accomplishments the amount of security necessary for their transaction might be reduced.[33]

Tragedy and happiness both visited Will Rogers during October of 1911. On October 20th, Betty's and Will's first son, Will Vann Rogers, was born. The Oklahoma performer's elation over this event soon found balance when he learned of his father's death on October 30th. Clem's passing seemed untimely since he and his son were beginning to understand and enjoy each other for the first time. This partial reconciliation probably had something to do with Will's immediate purchase of the old home ranch from his sisters and his later efforts at restoring the Oologah place. Will realized that he had been "a disappointment to his family" during his early years. His efforts to rebuild the Oologah ranch may have been a jesture to try and fulfill what he conceived to be Clem's wishes for him.[34]

In 1910, about a year before Clem's death, Will had tried to ex-

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[33]Day, Biography, p. 66; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 120-121. It should be noted that Croy depicts Clem as a mellowing old man at this juncture in his life. He presents this as a key factor in the rapproachement between Clem and Will. Later on in his presentation, Croy submits evidence which contradicts this position. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 120-121, 352.

[34]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 27; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 124, 131-132; Day, Biography, p. 69; Helen McSpadden Eaton to Ellsworth Collings, February 13, 1943, cited in Collings, The Old Home Ranch, p. 148; Ibid., p. xii, 148-153, passim.

pand his horizons by becoming a producer. The young entrepreneur organized a ten-horse western show which featured the finest female riding acts in America. Unfortunately, his presentation proved too cumbersome and it soon failed financially. Shortly after this, Will abandoned his old roping act with Teddy and Buck McKee and began performing alone as a trick roping monologist. He wrote his own material from the start and worked hard at developing the off-the-cuff style of humor which seemed so casual and impromptu to audiences. The new act met with acceptance and pushed Will another rung up the ladder of success. His name increasingly appeared in vaudeville reviews and reporters began searching him out for interviews. The young comedian described his technique to one newspaper man as follows: "It [his material] ain't written. I just get out there and trust to luck, after figuring out something I think will go. But half the time I don't know what I'm going to say or what I'm saying. Sometimes I get twisted and then again I spring something that makes 'em laugh and I remember it and use it again. But mostly I trust to luck and figure that something will happen."[35]

Will's ascent to fame saw him exercise a taste for personalized relaxation which probably seemed strange to others. He loved to go to

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[35] New York Times, October 3, 1916, section VI, p. 6; Brown "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 208; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. xiii; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 218, 223; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 119, 125-127. William R. Brown presents conflicting dates for the appearance of the article cited above in the New York Times, pp. 207-208.

Madison Square Garden and meet the Wild West Shows when they came into town. The former cowboy spent many hours roping, eating, examining stock and reminiscing with former associates. These visits were balanced by Will's activities with a new friend from vaudeville--Eddie Cantor. The two men met around 1912 and became close friends. They often journeyed to the East Side slums of New York where Eddie introduced his older companion to the facts of ghetto life and the delicacies of kosher cooking.[36]

Shortly after Will, Jr.'s birth in 1911, Will decided that his family responsibilities necessitated finding a job with more stability and less traveling than vaudeville. He decided to seek more permanent opportunities in performing and, if that effort failed, to enter business. Fred Stone a close friend and famous star of many Broadway productions, counciled Will to stay in New York and seek a career on Broadway. The Oklahoman accepted this advice and began auditioning for every Broadway show that opened. This effort resulted in a series of jobs with sometimes ill-fated productions. Will's credits included: "The Wall Street Girl" (1912) staring Blanche Ring, "Hands Up" (1915) and "Town Topics" (1915). While trying to break into Broadway, Will was only able to accept vaudeville engagements which were close by New York. Such restricted

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[36]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 45-46; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, pp. 217-218; Cantor, As I Remember Them, pp. 137, 142; Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, pp. 90, 134.

activity reduced his income and the monologist soon found himself compelled to play smaller entertainment houses under an assumed name and for as little as $75 a week. This clandestine activity proved possible because of Will's good relations with the press and his talent for disguise and mimicry. Financial difficulties eventually forced Will to move his family to Betty's old family home in Arkansas for a while. He traveled the vaudeville circuits once again during this period.[37]

The years between 1911 and 1916, when Will was trying to break into Broadway, represented a period of trial for the young performer. However, while this era presented difficulty, it also saw success and happiness enter the Oklahoman's life. In 1914, he and Betty traveled to England. Will entered a show entitled "The Merry-Go-Round" and had a successful run during which he reached an all-time high in salary of $400 per week. This five year period also saw the birth of two more children, Mary Amelia on May 18, 1913, and James Blake on July 25, 1915. By the time their third child was born in 1915, Will and Betty were back in New York and living on Long Island near Fred Stone. Life was good but hard, and Will continued unsuccessful in his attempts to establish a Broadway career. The Rogers' lives, however, soon took

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[37]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 132-134; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 126-127; Day, Biography, pp. 69, 72-73. Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 33. Folks must be watched carefully. Betty Rogers and Homer Croy disagree in their rendition of this period of Will Rogers' life. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 132-134; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 121-124.

a radical turn for the better, because Gene Buck, Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.'s writer and close confidant, had seen Will perform at the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre and liked him.[38]

Will Rogers unknowingly stood on the threshold of theatrical fame and greatness in 1915. This was naturally important to him in later life. But perhaps more important was the fact that by this time in his life the Oklahoman had begun to deal successfully with two of the basic problems which haunted him during youth--the loss of his mother's love and understanding and his estrangement from his father. Limited triumphs over these old foes opened the way for Will to devote more of his talents to developing what became one of the most successful one-man acts in the history of the American theatre.

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[38] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 121-124; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 77-78; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 84; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 133-135; Day, Biography, p. 73.

CHAPTER V

Going To Work For Ziegfeld

> Before discussing Will Rogers' technique of humor, one should be aware of the fact that in dealing with him, we are dealing with two personalities: Will the professional humorist and Will the man. However, unlike Charles Farrar Browne, Finley Peter Dunne, and other 19th century humorists whose characters contrasted greatly in personality with their creators, Will was virtually the same in private life as he was before the public eye.[1]

Will seemed little different from other successful vaudevillians as he stood on the threshold of performing greatness in 1915. His humor, like that of his associates, had developed in vaudeville and appeared less than unique. The image of a supposedly illiterate cowboy-philosopher espousing his down-to-earth observations in an ungrammatical Western accent merely characterized the Oklahoman as the type of "yokel" that American audiences had traditionally enjoyed. An "infectious grin" and unruly forelock simply added a bit of individuality to Will's presentation.[2] Yet, there was something different about the young monologist that had at-

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[1]Interview with Will Rogers, Jr. by E. Paul Alworth on April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 93.

[2]Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 97.

tracted Gene Buck's attention and led the writer to suggest that Florenz Ziegfeld employ him. In 1915, there were basically two types of funny men in show business: "the 'Dutch' comedian and the blackface" humorist.[3] Buck saw the Oklahoman's act as something unique which represented the outdoor heartland of America. In addition, the showman believed that Will's rustic regalia would present a pleasing change of pace to the satin and silk which adorned Ziegfeld's productions.[4]

Ziegfeld registered adamand opposition to Buck's suggestion. The master showman's forte was beauty and he simply could not visualize or accept the Oklahoman's shabby uncouthness in one of his plush productions. Buck's insistence, however, finally wore down Ziegfeld and he employed Will in the "Midnight Frolic" during 1915. The comedian's salary was $250 per week.[5]

Ziegfeld produced two shows in the New Amsterdam Theatre in

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[3]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 135-136; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 77-78. Billie Burke, Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. 's wife, suggests that Will became connected with her husband in another manner: "During the season of 1915-16 Will Rogers made his first success in the legitimate theatre (he had been a vaudeville roper before that) in "Hands Up." A too-hastily lowered drop which persisted in catching on his rope, causing the audience to refuse to let the show go on until Will finished his trick, had something to do with increasing Will's reputation. As a result, Flo engaged him for his roof show. . . ." Billie Burke, with Cameron Shipp, With a Feather on My Nose (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1949), pp. 177-178.

[4]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 136; Day, Biography, p. 82.

[5]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 136; Day, Autobiography, pp. 37-38;

1915. The famous "Follies" appeared on the first floor and ended about eleven-fifteen in the evening. The "Midnight Frolic" opened on the roof at twelve midnight and continued on into the morning hours. The "Frolic" represented a major production of between fifty and seventy-five people and featured the most beautiful girls in the Ziegfeld entourage. Many of the show's patrons were wealthy insomniacs. Their regular attendance necessitated the presentation of a new production approximately every four months.[6]

Will's entrance into Ziegfeld's "Midnight Frolic" represented a giant professional advance for the cowboy-monologist. However, the Oklahoman did not realize the precariousness of his position. Ziegfeld only employed Will to appease Gene Buck. He literally cringed through his new humorist's early performances. At this point in his career, Will used the same material each night and generally restricted his monologue to comments concerning other acts or the theatre. Somewhere be-

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Day, Biography, pp. 75-76; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128. Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen state in Folks Say of Will Rogers that Will initially made $175 per week in the "Frolic." David Milsten supports the figure of $175 per week. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 79. Spi Trent suggests that Will started working for Ziegfeld at $125 per week. Trent, My Cousin, p. 181; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128. L. W. (Chip) Roberts states in Folks Say of Will Rogers that Will did not enter the "Frolic" until 1916. Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128. Because of the contradictions with other more reliable sources, Roberts' comments must be evaluated with caution.

[6]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 136; Day, Autobiography, pp. 37-38; Day, Biography, pp. 75-76; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128.

tween the first and third week of Will's engagement on the Amsterdam roof, Ziegfeld left town on business. His tolerance for Will had reached the breaking point, and he ordered Buck to dismiss Will by the time he returned. When Buck went to inform Will that his services would no longer be needed, the unsuspecting monologist initiated the conversation by asking for a $50 a week raise. Buck found himself completely thrown off balance and did not have the heart to dismiss his likable employee. As the two men talked, Will mentioned the struggle that he faced in using the same material each night with audiences which oftentimes contained repeaters. He then related that Betty had suggested that he should talk about what he read in the papers; especially public figures. This, Will concluded, would provide new material for his act each evening. Buck feared that such commentary would result in the show being sued, but Will allayed his anxiety. The idea of having a new routine in the show nightly appealed to Buck and he hesitantly agreed to the proposal. If Will could succeed at the box office with this approach, Buck reasoned that he might be able to convince Ziegfeld to retain his out-of-place cowboy.[7]

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[7]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 137; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 14; Day, Biography, pp. 76-77; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128; Day, Autobiography, pp. 38-39; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 78-79. Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen suggest in Folks Say of Will Rogers that Gene Buck originally prodded Will into using new material in his act every few days. Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 128. David Milsten also supports this idea. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 78. Day states that Will had been working a week and a half when Ziegfeld ordered Buck to dismiss him while Croy says it was three weeks. Day, Biography, pp. 76-77; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 137.

Ziegfeld returned to New York after approximately a week's absence. He immediately called in Gene Buck for a conference and during the conversation inquired about how Will had reacted to his dismissal. The news that the humorist remained in the show resulted in sharp words between Ziegfeld and his chief advisor. Buck finally prevailed and convinced his unwilling boss that he should view Will's new act based on daily news items before issuing final judgement. That night Broadway's most imminent producer watched as his cowboy-humorist captivated the audience with his monologue. Ziegfeld could not understand Will's success, but he agreed to keep the comedian for another week while he continued his observations. This type of watchful evaluation went on for several weeks until box office receipts finally convinced the hesitating showman that he should not only accede to Buck's wishes and keep Will, but also give the Oklahoman the $50 raise that he desired.[8]

The first big laugh Will got from his commentary on comtemporary news events dealt with World War I. Henry Ford had devised a somewhat nebulous plan to end the conflict by sending a Peace Ship to Europe in December of 1915. One night while this news was still in people's minds, Will ambled out on stage and commented: "There seems to be

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[8]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 138; Day, Biography, pp. 77-78. Homer Croy gives more details concerning this portion of Will's career than anyone else and from his narrative one can possibly assume that he interviewed Gene Buck. Betty Rogers presented a somewhat simplified version of the early and critical days with Ziegfeld. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 127.

a good deal of talk about gettin' the boys out of the trenches by Christmas. Well, if Henry Ford will take this bunch of girls we've got here tonight, let 'em wear the same clothes as they do here, and march them down between the two lines of trenches, the boys will be out of the trenches before Christmas."[9] Will soon began keeping a record of his most successful jokes. He listed these in a small pad which he referred to before going on stage each night. Some of the jokes he used in the "Frolic" are as follows: "That is certainly a pretty Harp that girl was playing or did you notice the Harp;" "For a peaceful Man Taft takes a lot of chances--Every few days he says something sarcastic about Teddy;" "Then we lost part of our Army the other day, 4 Soldiers swam across the River and were captured in Mexico. Luck other 8 coundent swim. We better go to War soon or we wont have any A--- or Navy. if they let us alone we will lick ourselves."[10]

While working in the "Midnight Frolic," Will developed a philosophy of humor which stayed with him throughout his career. This approach to mirth is clearly presented in an article which he wrote for The

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[9]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 139; Day, Autobiography, p. 38. Croy's rendition of the Peace Ship joke is employed because it is more complete. It should be noted that Billie Burke gives Ziegfeld credit for inducing Will to introduce a humorous monologue into his act. Burke, With a Feather on My Nose, pp. 244-245.

[10]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 85-86. Reba N. Collins found this material in a worn pad which she uncovered at the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. The mistakes are from the manuscript.

Theatre magazine in 1917, "The Extemporaneous Line," and an interview article by George Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers: The Story of a Cowboy Who Became a Famous Comedian," which appeared in The American Magazine during November of 1919. Will believed that his humor rested upon two fundamental factors; current events and what he preceived to be the truth or facts. "I have," he wrote, "found out two things. One is that the more up-to-date a subject is the more credit you are given for talking on it, even if you really haven't anything very funny. But if it is an old subject, your gags must be funny to get over. The first thing is the remark you make must be founded on facts. You can exaggerate and make it ridiculous, but it must have the plain facts in it."[11]

Up-to-dateness and truth provided the basic elements in Will's formula for humor. These two major ingredients were joined by a number of minor techniques which, when added together, produced uniqueness. The maturing humorist, for example, told short jokes, not more than three lines in length, and tried to remain neutral on controversial issues by kidding all sides. George Martin described Will's brand of non-partisanship clearly:

He plays one man off against another. In his Peace Confer-

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[11]Will Rogers, "The Extemporaneous Line," The Theatre, XXVI July, 1917, p. 12; Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 34; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 120; Day, Autobiography, p. 39; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 128.

> ence stuff, kidding the present incumbents, he said the Kaiser seemed to be about as popular in Germany as a Democrat in the next Congress. Of course the Republicans all clapped. Then he said:
>
> 'All right, I'm goin' to 'tend to you Republicans in about a minute." Then he said:
>
> 'Of course you heard about 'em takin' a Republican with 'em to Paris. But you ain't heard nothin' about his landin', have you? They just took that guy along to argue with on the way over.'[12]

Will avoided extremes in humor just as he stayed away from polarized positions concerning controversial topics. He preferred material that produced a chuckle rather than a guffah: "Personally, I don't like the jokes that get the biggest laughs, as they are generally as broad as a house and require no thought at all. I like one where, if you are with a friend and you hear it, it makes you think, and you nudge your friend and say: 'He's right about that.' I would rather have you do that than to have you laugh and then forget the next minute what it was you laughed at."[13]

While in the "Midnight Frolic," Will's act rarely lasted over six minutes. This brevity was possible due to the large number of short jokes he told and necessary because he used different material each evening. Oftentimes when the roper-humorist went on stage, he discovered that the audience was not receptive to his prepared comments. Will responded to this type situation with a frantic exhibition of trick

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[12]Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 106.

[13]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 34; Day, Autobiography, p. 39.

roping which gave him time to reconstruct his thought and come up with some "surefire gag" of proven worth. Frequently his whole act was impromptu.[14] Some evenings, regardless of what Will did or said, things went poorly. He considered himself a salesman and when things did not go well he critically examined himself rather than the audience in an effort to find the trouble.[15]

Another big opportunity came to Will in 1916. The "Ziegfeld Follies" rehearsals that year were top heavy with beauty and satin. Gene Buck suggested to Ziegfeld that Will's act would help balance the production. The toast of Broadway balked at the suggestion. He knew that his cowboy-monologist could succeed at the box office, but he could not accept the Oklahoman's unpolished roughness in his pet production. More rehearsal failed to smooth out the new edition of the "Follies" and Ziegfeld eventually found himself forced to offer Will a place in the show. Before responding to the proposal, Will sought Betty's advice. She felt that the money which had been offered would not be enough compensation for what would, in effect, have doubled Will's work load. He would not only be giving two performances a day in both the "Frolic" and the "Follies" but, since customers from the "Follies" oftentimes stayed over for the roof attraction, he would need two entirely different

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[14]Will Rogers, "The Extemporaneous Line," p. 12.

[15]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 107.

acts each day. These factors, added to the traveling that would have been involved when the "Follies" went on the road, convinced the young couple that it would be best to turn down Ziegfeld's offer.[16]

Will and Betty attended the opening of the 1916 "Follies" with friends. The show moved slowly and finally eased into abject boredom. Will grew aggitated and began to squirm. He commented to Betty a number of times that he could have helped the production and wished that he had not turned down the "Follies" offer. Will's unhappiness over not being in the show continued and he began to feel that it had been a grave mistake to let such an opportunity pass. Fortunately, he was not the only unhappy person concerned. As the 1916 "Follies" developed, Ziegfeld experienced increasing difficulty in trying to increase the show's lethargic pace. The now frantic showman once again offered Will a place in the "Follies" and this time the comedian accepted.[17]

Will received $400 per week (later raised to $600 and then $750) for performing in both the "Follies" and the "Frolic." More important than this, however, was the cowboy-comedian's instant success in the "Follies." A review in the New York Times defined the nature of the

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[16]Day, Biography, pp. 82-83; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 140-141; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 131.

[17]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 140-141; Day, Biography, pp. 82-83; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 131-132. Day believes that Ziegfeld contracted Will at the theatre when he offered the comedian the "Follies" job, while Croy states the initial contact was made by telephone.

Oklahoman's early "Follies" triumph: "Mr. Rogers' act, which forms the most intelligent part of the Follies, is the product of many years of hard work. His sense of satire, which seeks out the very weakest links in every chain of words, is a genuine gift. . . ."[18] Karl Schmidt, writing in Everybody's Magazine, complemented this evaluation by emphasizing the enjoyability of the humorist's contemporary information: "So far as our musical-comedy state is concerned, he seems to be the one person who really finds his material in the things that are happening about him. . . . Will Rogers seems to stand alone for the sort of humor that made light operas popular in the past. . . . He is the unique personality of Broadway."[19] The "Follies" had more of a cross-section of American life in its audiences than the "Frolic," which was basically attended by New York businessmen. Thus, Will's success there began to give him nationwide exposure.[20]

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[18] New York Times, July 1, 1917, section VIII, p. 6; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 30; Day, Biography, p. 84; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 140-141, 152; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 137. David Milsten claims that Will's success in the "Follies" came about by accident: "His big opportunity as a 'single act star' came one night during the Follies. He was doing his fancy roping act. One of the acts failed to show up and when it came time for Will to come off they told him to keep playing to take up time. Will was at a loss to know what to do so he kept talking and each time registered a laugh. From then on Will Rogers was the 'pride' of /sic/ Ziegfeld Follies." Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 81-82.

[19] Karl Schmidt, "The Philosopher with Lariat," p. 487.

[20] Day, Biography, p. 84; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 132.

Will's experience in the "Follies" enabled him to continue developing his unique technique of humor. His contemporary material increased in effectiveness as each night the monologist ambled shyly onto the "Follies" stage and casually announced: "All I know is what I read in the newspapers." By this time, the young comedian was refining his timing and the art of "topping" a joke. When telling a story, he would pause as if not knowing what to say and then deliver the punch line with lightening quickness and subtely. Topping a joke simply meant that there was a series of jokes on one topic. Each joke brought a little more laughter than the preceeding one, and thus topped the earlier material. W. C. Fields, another "Follies" star and a close associate of Will's, recounted some of the cowboy-humorist's favorite jokes when with Ziegfeld: "Three people had killed themselves jumping off Brooklyn Bridge, and Rogers remarked, 'They'll have to condemn Brooklyn Bridge. It's been weakened by suicides usin' it as a springboard.' The newspapers were full of the Allies' spring drive in the war. One day a railroad wreck killed twenty-seven people. 'Well,' said Rogers that night on stage, 'I see the railroads have started their spring drive.'" [21]

Although Will's act only ran from eight or ten minutes in the "Follies," he continued to introduce new techniques which added a per-

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[21]W. C. Fields to Jerome Beatty, cited in Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 72-74; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 30; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 143, 147; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 133.

sonal touch to the Rogers' style. His habit of bringing famous people in the audience up on stage and talking about them proved extremely popular. Also, by this time, reporters were beginning to seek Will out for interviews. Once again, the Oklahoman reacted in a new and unique fashion which added to the Rogers' legend. Instead of telling the reporters funny stories as was the habit of his fellow comedians, Will reminisced about his early experiences as a cowboy in the Indian Territory, his youthful travels around the world and his colorful climb to a position of theatrical prominence through Wild West Shows and vaudeville. He created a romantic legend of success and adventure in this fashion. Touring the country yearly with the Ziegfeld troup provided the increasingly popular humorist with more opportunities for innovation. He varied his monologue in each city to include topics and personalities with which local audiences could identify. In Detroit, Michigan, for example, he talked about Henry Ford: "I don't see why Ford didn't get in the Senate. They are everywhere else." "If Ford had made one speech he would have been elected. All he would have had to say was 'Voters, if I am elected I will change the front on them.'"[22]

Perhaps the most crucial stylistic characteristic that Will per-

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[22]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 106; Will Rogers, "The Extemporaneous Line," p. 12; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 144-146; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 216; Day, Biography, pp. 85-86; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 133.

fected during this early "Follies" era was his political non-partisanship--he made fun of Republicans as well as Democrats. The Oklahoman was a Democrat by conviction, but he felt that he had to remain absolutely impartial in the political sphere in order to retain his self-assumed privilege of satirizing political incompetence wherever it appeared. Will verbalized these sentiments in 1918 when Theodore Roosevelt and Albert D. Lasker, leaders of the Republican Party, tried to enlist him as a political confident:

> I shall be glad to have you consult with me at any time, but I want you to know that I consider that I must ever hold myself an unbiased commentator on public affairs. I can not permit myself to let my reactions become prejudiced. Even though, personally I am a democrat, wherever I consider it in the public weal, I will be glad to cooperate with you; but when it seems to me that your party should be lambasted I will join with the democrats against you as quickly as I would criticise them, if I felt they had it coming.[23]

Success in the "Follies" brought measured wealth and fame to Will Rogers. However, once again, he responded in an unorthodox fashion which added another pillar to his increasingly colorful public image. He refused to dress in the monogrammed shirts and tailored suits which

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[23]N. A. "Teddy Roosevelt as One of the First to See Ability in Rogers," undated newspaper clipping located in the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial; E. Paul Alworth interview with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 37; Ibid., p. 39. It should be noted that L. H. Robbins, "Portrait of an American Philosopher," New York Times, November 3, 1935, section VII, p. 4, mentions the meeting between Will, Roosevelt and Lasker. Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 39; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 1.

most successful thespians of the time wore. Rather, he began dressing in a semi-shabby manner which was reminiscent of his early school days. He frequently wore "a wrinkled store-bought suit, and a ready-to-wear shirt" which "was usually bulgin out of his trousers."[24] The humorist's personal grooming rated little more praise than his wearing apparel. He allowed his cowlick to go unattended with the result that his hair continually flopped in his eyes. A pair of distractingly active jaws which seemed to be continually involved with a large wad of chewing gum complimented his casual hair style.[25]

The cowboy-humorist's work schedule proved just as unusual a response to theatrical success as his dressing and grooming habits. Rather than easing into the leisurely life style that many of his compatriots enjoyed, Will's task of performing in both the "Follies" and the "Frolic" kept him working at a feverish pace and doing much "hard diggin." In order to have new material for both shows each day, Will found himself forced to read newspapers constantly. He usually perused at least two papers before breakfast each morning and two more before going to bed in the evening. When Will examined a paper, he refused to skim it, but rather read it carefully and digested everything possible. In addition to his newspaper reading, he looked at general literature.[26]

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[24]Trent, My Cousin, p. 182; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 138.

[25]Trent, My Cousin, p. 182.

[26]Interview of E. Paul Alworth with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12,

The most interesting thing about the Rogers' style as it developed during the early days with Ziegfeld and as it continued over the years, was that it basically represented Will's own personality. Once some of Clem's old friends from Oklahoma saw Will perform in New York. When they returned home, people asked: "'Well, what's Willie doing now?'" The response was a candid: "'Oh, just acting the fool like he used to do around here.'" [27] The only major difference between Will Rogers the performer and Will Rogers the person, resided in the comedian's pretense that he was a relatively illiterate hayseed. This facade added a great deal to his monologue because it created the humorous incongruity of a supposedly uneducated person perceptively satirizing crucial domestic and world problems. It was this contradiction that enabled Will to criticize the famous and sacred without alienating the good auspices of the public. W. C. Fields realized this facet of the Oklahoman's humor when he commented: "The audience howled at those jokes [Will's]. If I had delivered them, the audience would have swarmed up over the footlights and murdered me. But Rogers can get away with

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1957, and James Rogers, June 6, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 25-26; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 35; Day, Biography, p. 84; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 139. The best information available on Will's reading habits is in the interviews Paul Alworth had with the comedian's sons during 1957. Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 25-26; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 291.

[27] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 27.

anything."[28]

Will's personal relationships and private life were characterized by happiness and closeness during the early years in the "Follies." He developed friendships with fellow workers like W. C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, Bert Williams, Ed Wynn, Leon Errol and Fannie Brice. Will's friendship with Fields once led the Oklahoman to become concerned over his associate's heavy drinking habits: "Bill, aren't you worried? Don't you know those martinis are slow poison?" Fields replied in his inimitable fashion: "I'm in no hurry, son."[29] Will's association with Ziegfeld was evidently somewhat different from that which he enjoyed with his co-workers. Although sometimes antagonistic toward one another, their relationship was basically warm and trusting. Will playfully called his mentor "Mr. Ziegfield." He never had a written contract with the genius of Broadway and when offered one, the comedian refused by saying that a hand-shake had always been good enough for him.[30]

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[28] W. C. Fields to Jerome Beatty, cited in Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 75; Interview with E. Paul Alworth with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 93-95; Ibid., p. 97.

[29] Cantor, As I Remember Them, pp. 30, 29, 139-140; Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, pp. 136-138, 62-63, 196-199, 201-204; Taylor, W. C. Fields: His Follies and Fortunes, pp. 104-105; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 33.

[30] Burke, With a Feather on My Nose, pp. 159, 243; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 51-52; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 143, 152-153, 155-156; Schmidt, "The Philosopher with a Lariat," p. 495; James Whitcomb Brougher, Sr., Life and Laughter: Popular Lectures (Philadel-

Home life remained a joy for Will during this period. Betty continued to be his close confidant and advisor. Will never brought career worries home as do many men. Performing "was simply a job at which he worked." When he came home, the topic of conversation was generally the family and its activities.[31] One peculiar characteristic of Will's personality manifested itself in this home environment. The "Follies" star assumed a definite position as "head of the house" as befitted a man of that day and time. Nevertheless, he found it impossible to punish or schold his children; all discipline was left to Betty.[32]

Will's proudest moment during his Ziegfeld career came in the fall of 1915 when he joined an aggregation of fellow actors in making a tour of eastern cities for the Friars Club of New York. The group planned to play Baltimore but not Washington. President Woodrow Wilson let it be known that he would make the trip to Baltimore for the perfor-

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phia: The Judson Press, 1950), p. 82; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 93-95; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 139; Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, p. 136; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 137. Karl Schmidt and Homer Croy suggest that Will and Ziegfeld did not get along well. Croy then turns around and contradicts this idea by the evidence he presents. See above citations for both Croy and Schmidt.

[31]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 276.

[32]Will Rogers, Jr., "Will Rogers . . . Past, Present and Future," Guideposts, XIII July, 1957, p. 3; Jerome Beatty, "Betty Holds the Reins," The American Magazine, CX October, 1930, p. 114; Trent, My Cousin, p. 195; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 161; Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, p. 135; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 129.

mance. Will was probably the least known of the whole troup. He became extremely nervous before going on stage because he feared that the President might react negatively to his satire on national and international affairs. Friends literally had to shove him before the audience when the time came. The Oklahoman's fears were unnecessary, as President Wilson led the audience in laughing at his jokes and thus helped make "the most successful night" Will ever experienced in the theatre.[33]

A great portion of Will's first performance before President Wilson (the humorist eventually performed for him five times) is preserved and worth repeating because it probably represented the best example available of his early "Follies" act. As he walked on stage, Will was obviously shaken by the challenge of performing before the President. He immediately amused the audience by bashfully admitting what everyone was thinking: "I am kinder nervous here tonight." After this opening remark, Will gradually approached the topic of contemporary politics by alluding to an earlier performance he had given before a powerful politician: "I shouldn't be nervous for this is really my second presidential appearance. The first time was when Bryan spoke in our town once, and I was to follow his speech and do my little Ropin Act. As I say, I was to follow him, but he spoke so long that it was so dark when he finished they couldn't see my Ropin. I wonder what ever became of

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[33]Day, Autobiography, p. 43; Day, Biography, p. 80; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 163.

him." The audience and the chief executive loosened up more with these comments. Gaining confidence, Will next launched into a commentary on current topics by introducing the subject of Pancho Villa, the Mexican bandid that American troops were unsuccessfully trying to capture: "I see where they have captured Villa. Yes, they got him in the morning Editions and the Afternoon ones let him get away." Everyone in the audience looked to the laughing President before responding with a mirthful outburst. Will continued: "Villa raided Columbus New Mexico. We had a man on guard that night at the Post. But to show you how crooked this Villa is, he sneaked up on the opposite side. We chased him over the line 5 miles, but run into a lot of Government Red Tape and had to come back. . . . See where they got Villa himmed in between the Atlantic and Pacific. Now all we got to do is stop up both ends. Pershing located him at a town called Los Quas Ka Jasbo. Now all we have to do is locate Los Quas Ka Jasbo."[34]

After spending some time talking about the Villa problem, Will switched to the touchy subject of preparedness: "There is some talk of getting a Machine Gun if we can borrow one. The one we have now they are using to train our Army with in Plattsburg. If we go to war we will just about have to go to the trouble of getting another Gun. . . . But we are doing better toward preparedness now, as one of my Senators

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[34]Day, Autobiography, pp. 41-43. Irregularities in Will's material all originated with the humorist himself.

from Oklahoma has sent home a double portion of Garden Seed." The joke that President Wilson later told friends was the best he heard during the whole war experience soon followed: "President Wilson is getting along fine now to what he was a few months ago. Do you realize, People, at one time in our negotiations with Germany that he was 5 Notes behind."[35] During intermission, President Wilson went backstage and met all the actors. Will's success in performing before the Chief Executive represented something of a turning point in his career. His triumph naturally gave the humorist confidence, but, more importantly, it opened up broader horizons. If he could successfully satirize the President of the United States in person, then any subject and any person was a fair target for his barbed humor.[36]

America entered the First World War in April of 1917. Will Rogers considered joining the Army but finally decided against such a move because he was thirty-seven years old and had family obligations. The Oklahoman originally opposed American involvement, but, once the decision to participate was made, he supported the war effort completely. He believed that this was the best way to help terminate the contest quickly. In line with this philosophy, Will promised to give one-tenth

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[35] Ibid., p. 43.

[36] Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 20; Day, Autobiography, p. 43; Letter from Will Rogers to Family, cited in Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 95. Also see Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," pp. 107, 110, for comments concerning Will's first appearance before President Wilson.

of his earnings (he now made $250 per week in the "Frolic" and $750 in the "Follies") to the Salvation Army and Red Cross for the war's duration. His pledge card was accompanied by a check for $1,000. The humorist's contribution to the war effort was not limited to financial donations. Rather, he became an integral part of Winfield R. Sheehan's Red Cross fund-raising team. Such activitity gave Will further national public recognition.[37]

Will made noticeable progress in his theatrical career between 1915 and 1919 by performing in Ziegfeld productions and helping with munificent work during the War. At the same time, he tried to spread his humor through the written word. Reba N. Collins reported that the Oklahoma humorist began writing newspaper articles as early as August, 1916. At that time, he did a three part series for the New York American on a rodeo show called the "Stampede" which was held at the Sheepshead Bay Speedway. The material is structurally good and shows many of the characteristics of Will's later work as a columnist. The enthusiastic reporter presented the "Stampede" as an entertainment success which kept the attending New Yorkers "standing up and yelling like drunken injuns."[38] The most humorous portion of the series centered

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[37]Day, Biography, pp. 92-93; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 163; Letter to the Messenger (Claremore) from Mrs. Will Rogers, June 6, 1917, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 73; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 22, 26-27; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 203-204.

[38]Will Rogers, "Stampede Big Event, Says Will Rogers," New

around comments concerning a bucking horse called "I. B. Dam": "I. B. Dam is one that gets his man [anyone attempting to ride him for an alloted amount of time] every time out. I asked Henry Grammer, an old friend of mine from Kaw, Okla, who used to be a great rider down home, what he would take to set on this I. B. Dam bird. Henry says, 'I would want just ten cents less than I'd die for.'"[39] The proceedings received a bit of dignity when Will related that he had met and talked with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Theodore Roosevelt while enjoying the show.[40]

After his initial effort in 1916, Will continued to write infrequent newspaper articles for the next three years. These pieces showed that the humorist could communicate his wit through the written word. For

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York American, August 6, 1916, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 88, 98-99. It should be noted that Donald Day, in both his Biography and the Autobiography, incorrectly evaluated the beginning date of Will's early writing career. Day, Biography, p. 92; Day, Autobiography, p. 49; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 88-92. Day incorrectly gives the year of publication of the "Stampede" articles as 1918. Day, Autobiography, p. 49; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 98. Homer Croy believed that Will wrote his first newspaper article in 1919 for the Kansas City Star, Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 162; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 88.

[39]Will Rogers, "Tossing the He-Oxen With Will Rogers," New York American, August 9, 1916, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[40]Will Rogers, New York American, August 10, 1916, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

example, in 1917 Will wrote several short features for the Detroit Journal. In one, the "Follies" star analyzed the street car problems of his host city by promising "to give all sides to this mess an equal show because they are all so bad I can't pick out the worst." Will then proceeded to satirize the transportation company as follows: "The D. U. R. were the originators of camouflage, by running tractors and calling them street cars. And those stoves they have in the cars--the motorman puts his bottle of beer in there to keep it cool till he gets to the end of the line. Last Monday two women had their feet frostbitten by putting them too close to the stove." After his treatment of the D. U. R., Will considered the City Council or Common Council, by stating that its name appeared quite appropriate. The Council had voted $35,000 to finance an investigation of the street car company. The Investigating Committee's report stated: "'We find the car system in pretty bad shape and recommend additional appropriations to carry on the investigation.' Any man with a nickel," Will concluded, "could have found that out. The Common Council say they will make the company take their cars off the street. The people waiting on the street these cold nights to get home claim the company has already taken their cars off."[41]

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[41]Will Rogers, "Extra! Street Railway Problem is Solved: Will Rogers, Famous Comedian with Ziegfeld Follies, Makes Exhaustive Investigation and Submits His Report to The Journal," The Detroit Journal, December 15, 1917, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. Another 1917 article entitled, "Stuffy M'Innis is Martry to Baseball Profession Declares Will Rogers," was written

Donald Day, in his Autobiography of Will Rogers, presented material that Will wrote in 1918 entitled, "The War on Washington." It is not known if this article was ever published, but one can probably assume that it was part of the humorist's early newspaper efforts. Regardless of this vagueness, parts of "The War on Washington" justify repeating because the piece is an example of early Rogersism. Will first described the two basic challenges a new officer met in Washington; finding a room and choosing a uniform. He advised against getting sharp spurs as boot accessories since they tended to get stuck in automobile clutches. After finding lodging and clothing, Will felt that new officers liked to show off by taking a civilian friend to dinner and the "Follies." At the Ziegfeld production, the young military men made nuisances of themselves by sending notes backstage to chorus girls they falsely claimed to know. The humorist concluded his description of the nation's young military officers with biting satire: "Why the casualty

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for the same paper on December 14, 1917. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 110. A copy of this article was also supplied, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. Will also wrote an article for the Chicago Examiner on February 21 and 23, 1918, entitled "Says Will Rogers." Courtesy, Will Rogers Memorial. Other early newspaper articles include a May 7, 1917, piece in the New York American's, "Ye Towne Gossip" column and several articles whose origin and dates are not know. The titles of these uncatagorized articles are: "Will Rogers Writes a Dry Story and Will Fields Pictures It" and "The No. 2 Peace Ship; An Editorial on President Wilson's Jaunt to France." All these early newspaper articles are courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. Reba N. Collins examines these articles in her unpublished dissertation. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 111-116.

list in one day out of a million and a half officers in Washington was ten wounded getting in and out of Taxi-cabs. Two choked through their collars being too tight, 61 hurt through typewriters choking up, 500 prostrated when they heard war was over the they would have to go back to work."[42]

A big step in Will's early writing career came in 1919 when the cowboy-humorist published two books. Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference came first and, due to its success, was soon followed by Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition. These works were composed of jokes which Will had developed over the years. No continuity existed in them since each quip was treated as a separate entity. Most of the humor seemed somewhat strained, but this often happens to witty material when personality and delivery are taken away through transference to the printed page. Nevertheless, flashes of penetrating wit did remain. For example, Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference, which mainly considered the dealings of President Wilson and the American peace delegation while they were in Paris, viewed the question of war debts as follows: "Everybody around the Table wants a second helping and Germany the

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[42]Will Rogers, "The War on Washington," cited in Day, Autobiography, pp. 52-55, passim. Donald Day says that Will wrote "The War on Washington" in 1918, but fails to mention where, or if, the piece appeared in print. Since Will occasionally wrote for the newspapers at this time, it is assumed that "The War on Washington" appeared in a contemporary publication.

Cook hasent got Enough to go around. They agree on ONE of the 14 points. That was that America went into this war for NOTHING, she expects NOTHING, so they are unanimous that she get NOTHING." Another classic related to the overall settlement in Paris: "The terms of the Armistice read like a mortgage but the Peace Treaty sounds like a foreclosure."[43] Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition showed that Will felt, like many Americans, the inclusion of wine and beer as intoxicating liquors under the Volstead Act was a mistake. This conviction made the radical prohibitionists targets for his barbed satire. The Oklahoman defined a prohibitionist as "a Man or Woman, who is so satisfied with himself that he presents himself with the 'Croix de perfect He.' He gives himself this Medal because he is now going to start to Meddle in Everybodies business but his own."[44]

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[43]Will Rogers, Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), pp. 56, 26; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 21, 31-32, passim. Day, Biography, pp. 95, 101.

[44]Will Rogers, Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), p. 11; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 33-34; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., by E. Paul Alworth, April 12, 1957, cited in Ibid., p. 34. E. Paul Alworth's unpublished doctral dissertation, "The Humor of Will Rogers," is a well-written, scholarly analysis of Will Rogers as a humorist. Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibiton went through two printings and sold a total of 6,000 copies. Letter from Mrs. Emily Dugdale, Harper and Brothers, to E. Paul Alworth, June 28, 1954, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 33; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 229. Although the humor in these first two books may seem strained to the modern reader, contemporary reviewers evidently viewed them favorably. For example, one critic wrote concerning Rogersisms:

In addition to his infrequent newspaper articles and books, Will made a limited sortie into the movie industry during late 1918 and early 1919. The Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma, has a "miscellaneous clipping" from an unknown newspaper which announced this event. The "Follies" star, the article stated, was contracted to present his "wise cracks" weekly in the "Ford Educational Weekly." The "Ford Educational Weekly" represented a short news film that was circulated to movie houses around the country. Participation in these productions promised to give the humorist exposure in some "4,000 theatres" in the United States. This announcement also heralded, if in a somewhat casual manner, the beginning of the next major phase of Will's career; he was "soon to be a star in Goldwyn Pictures."[45]

Will Rogers' career was developing quickly by 1919. Nevertheless he remained pessimistic concerning his progress. This anxiety was dramatically exemplified by Will's traveling habits while in the "Follies." He carried two horses and a rider with him when touring. This allowed the former vaudevillian to practice his old roping tricks and skills daily. One gets the feeling that Will engaged in these activi-

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The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition: "There are very few of those serious points that have been knots to the public mind that he /Will/ does not unravel with his light-hearted philosophy." N. A., "The Gossip Shop," Bookman, XCVIII November-December, 1919, pp. 3-4; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 35.

[45] Miscellaneous Newspaper Clipping, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

ties partially as a search for security. If the success-bubble burst, perhaps he believed that there would always be a place in vaudeville for his roping talents. Hard times were ahead for Will Rogers in the motion picture industry, but the fear of having to return to vaudeville as a lariatier was a needless worry.[46]

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[46]Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 109; Schmidt, "The Philosopher with a Lariat," p. 495; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 152; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 276; The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 16, 1934, p. 18; Day, Biography, p. 259.

CHAPTER VI

New Careers

> Well, she /Mrs. Rex Beach/ climbed out of this royalty on the 'Spiolers' /car/ and chirped above the wail of young rope throwers, 'Will, you are going into the Flickering photos.' Now I live at the same town and its not a coincidence on the island where the Asylum is located, so I winked at her chouffer and said, 'You brought this Woman to the wrong house.'
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> Now, I tried to tell the lady that I had never bothered anybody and never annoyed over one Audience at a time and that these were war times and a man could be arrested for treason as treason meant anything that causes pain to our people thereby giving aid to the enemy.[1]

Will Rogers' motion picture career began in a very casual way. His close friend and neighbor, Fred Stone, traveled to California during the summer of 1918 to make a picture for Paramount Studios. Will rented Stone's Amityville, Long Island, home in the owner's absence. One afternoon Mrs. Rex Beach, Mrs. Stone's sister, visited the Rogers for lunch. As the conversation progressed, Mrs. Beach related some of the difficulties that her husband, Rex Beach, was encountering in modifying his book, Laughing Bill Hyde, for motion picture production. One problem Beach faced at Samuel Goldwyn's studio dealt with the

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[1]Day, Biography, p. 59.

choice of a leading man. As Mrs. Beach continued talking, she began to scrutinize Will and finally announced: "Will, you are the ideal man to play Bill Hyde in Rex's new picture." Will registered surprise and voiced his reluctance to even consider the possibility of motion picture involvement.[2] After a short time, Rex Beach and his wife finally convinced the humorist that he should at least talk with Samuel Goldwyn before making a final decision against doing the movie. Will eventually agreed to appear in the picture when arrangements evolved which allowed him to retain his position in the "Follies" while shooting the film at Goldwyn's Fort Lee, New Jersey, studio.[3]

"Laughing Bill Hyde" failed to achieve greatness or extreme popularity among silent movie audiences, but it was reasonably successful at the box office. Samuel Goldwyn soon offered Will a two year contract to make pictures for him in California. Goldwyn's contract promised to double Will's "Follies" salary the first year and triple it the second. Will and Betty felt that they could not turn down such an opportunity. The chance to own their own home and stay in one place also appealed

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[2]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 143; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 210-211. Milsten is confused concerning the title of Will's first picture. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 211. Jerome Beatty mistakenly states that Will made his first silent movie in 1919. Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 79.

[3]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 143; Day, Biography, pp. 58-59; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 160-161; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 211.

to the travel-weary couple. Will left for California in the spring of 1919, after the "Follies" season closed, and made arrangements for the family to join him in a rented house located on Van Ness Avenue in Los Angeles.[4]

Will's work at the Goldwyn Studios involved him in every aspect of movie-making from acting to writing dialogue and advertising material. The Oklahoman's efforts in the picture "Jubilo" presented a good example of his motion picture activities. The movie represented a cinema adaptation of a story entitled Jubilo which Ben Ames Williams had published in the Saturday Evening Post. The rewrite department, composed of eight supposedly "emminent authors," changed so much that the scenario (the movie script based on the Post article) reflected little of the original story's attractiveness. Will made the unorthodox suggestion to his director, Clarence Badger, that they simply use the original magazine article as a script. Badger adopted the idea and it proved successful. Will wrote all his dialogue in "Jubilo" and even became involved in a dispute with Goldwyn, which he won, over a projected move to change the title to "A Poor But Honest Tramp."[5] When the picture reached completion, Will wrote an advertisement which reflected

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[4]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 143-144, 150; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 161; Day, Biography, pp. 106-108.

[5]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 144-145; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 164-166, 356; Day, Autobiography, p. 60.

his personal style of humor and no doubt helped attract viewers: "Jubilo means a song, an old-time Negro Camp Meeting song IN THE LAND OF JUBILO, I sing this song but fortunately the voice don't register on the film so you need not stay away on that account." Will went on to say that Jubilo, the film's central character, was a tramp and that Sam Goldwyn had picked him for the part after observing his street attire. The technical side of the picture also received consideration. The humorist remembered that the filming was done with "a Brownie No. 2," while the sets included "a Barn showing real Hay" and a "realistic" "Kitchen Scene" with "dirty dishes in the sink."[6]

Both good and bad came to the Rogers' family during Will's first sojourn in the cinema industry. A bad turn of events appeared when Will, Jr., Jim and Fred Stone Rogers, a new eighteen month old addition to the clan, contracted diphtheria. All survived except the baby, Freddie, who died of the dreaded disease. This loss saddened Will and Betty to such an extent that they found it impossible to remain in the house on Van Ness Avenue. As a result, they decided to purchase their first home and make California their permanent residence. The new Rogers residence was located in Beverly Hills, near the Beverly Hills Hotel, and represented the sumptuous life style of most people associated with theatrical stardom. After additions the property included s spa-

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[6]Day, Autobiography, pp. 62-63.

cious house, several acres of land enclosed by a high brick wall, a riding stable and a ring, a swimming pool and two log cabins fit for habitation. The property signified an investment of well over $100,000 and, combined with Betty's new Cadillac sedan and chauffeur, symbolized the affluence which came with Will's early movie success.[7]

Motion picture work opened up a myriad of opportunities for Will during 1920 and 1921. He became involved, for example, in a short weekly movie series called the "Illiterate Digest." This prodiction presented a satire on the popular cinema series, "The Literary Digest Topics of the Day." The "Illiterate Digest" was circulated to movie theatres throughout the country. It contained brief comments by Will which dealt with the current events of the era and resembled closely the contemporary material he used in the "Follies" and his first two books--Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference, and Rogersisms: The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition. The first "Illiterate Digest" films proved quite popular, but they gradually lost their appeal. In addition to the "Illiterate Digest," Will sold some of his short joke material to the humor magazine, Life. His success in this endeavor proved limited as a somewhat antagonistic letter to the Life editors evidenced: "Enclosed find some Volstead or Near Jokes. Now I read

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[7]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 144, 147-149; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 164; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 195-196; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 7.

the ones you used last week (both of them). And you have some man on your Paper whose Genius I don't believe you fully appreciate. The way he can take 48 Jokes and pick out the absolute poorest is positively uncanny."[8]

Will also did his first syndicated newspaper work in 1920. The cowboy-philosopher reported the national political conventions of that year for the Newspaper Enterprise Association. He described the political gatherings in absentia due to the death of his son Freddie from diphtheria. On June 7, 1920, a convention article sounded a note of political realism by announcing that Will planned to "steal a march on the other eminent authors" by visiting Boise Penrose, the supposed kingmaker in the Republican Party, rather than going to that organization's convention in Chicago. The next day, June 8th, the humorist related a talk he supposedly had with Penrose concerning the projected chances of various presidential hopefuls. Will depicted Penrose as commenting on William Cameron Sproul's candidacy as follows: "Well, Will, I will tell you the only way to keep a governor from becoming a senator is to

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[8]Letter from Will Rogers to Mr. Shipman, cited in Day, Biography, pp. 128-129, and also courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 154; Day, Biography, p. 108. Unfortunately copies of the "Illiterate Digest" evidently do not exist and only a few vague references to the jokes sent to Life can be found in the Will Rogers Memorial. Day is vague concerning when Will did the work for Life. Day, Biography, pp. 128-129. Day, in the Biography, believes that Will contracted to do the "Illiterate Digest" before leaving for California. Day, Biography, p. 108.

sidetrack him off to the presidency." In the same manner, Penrose believed that Frank O. Lowden could capture the Pullman vote, "but what we want is a man that can land the DAY COACH VOTE."[9]

Will projected realism in his prefabricated reporting of the Democratic National Convention. He pretended to do his research at the White House rather than at the convention. This supposedly enabled him to confer with President Wilson in order to "get the real advance information on" the "Democratic weegee seance." When the President asked Will for a good Republican quip, the humorist depicted himself as replying: "I know a good one. Nine-tenths of the Republicans never heard it until Chicago--Harding." The choice of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate made Will feel that the New Yorker was chosen "on account of his name, I suppose, figuring that most progressives were so far behind they wouldent know the difference." Will believed that Vice-Presidents mainly served "about the same purpose as a flank cinch on a saddle. If you break the first one, you are worse off than if you had no other."[10]

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[9]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 116-119; Day, Biography, pp. 112, 128; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 222. Donald Day edited a work, How We Elect Our Presidents, in 1952 which excerpted Will's convention articles. Donald Day, editor, How We Elect Our Presidents (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952). Unfortunately there is no documentation in Day's work. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 116-117.

[10]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 120.

The convention articles met with measured success and the Newspaper Enterprise Association suggested that Will try to produce a comic strip series. The projected feature carried the title, "What's News Today," and contained humorous commentary by Will and drawings by Roy Grove of a cowboy twirling a rope. The series was short-lived and unsuccessful.[11]

Will became involved in many business adventures between 1919 and 1921, but his main income during this period came from his movie work at the Goldwyn Studio. The Oklahoman starred in about fourteen two-reel movies while with Goldwyn. The list included the following: "Laughing Bill Hyde," "Jubilo," "Doubling for Romeo," "Almost a Husband," "Jes' Call Me Jim," "Water, Water Everywhere," "The Strange Border," "Cupid, the Cowpuncher," "Honest Hutch," "Boys Will be Boys," "An Unwilling Hero," "Guile of Women," "A Poor Relation," and "The Headless Horseman." "The Headless Horseman" is his only early picture that still remains available at the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. When viewing it, one is struck by the heavy facial, eye and lip make-up which Will wore. This detracted from the

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[11]Ibid., pp. 117-118; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 358; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 154. Croy intimates that "What's News Today" was published for two and a half months, September 29, 1920, to December 15, 1920. Betty Rogers stated concerning "What's News Today": "They [presumably Will and Roy Grove] struggled with it [the projected comic strip] for some time, but Will was never enthusiastic about it, and as far as I know, it was never used." All comments here refer to above citations.

forty-year old actor's handsome features and made him appear extremely young. Will's movements in "The Headless Horseman" seemed exaggerated and at times almost effeminate. Many of these physical characteristics may have been caused by the reproduction techniques of the early movie cameras and the effect of age on the old film.[12]

Working in motion pictures had its drawbacks, but cinema activity generally appealed to Will. Reshooting proved boring and the absence of a live audience created a void. In addition, the comedian felt self-conscious about what he considered to be his lack of good looks. This feeling made Will uncooperative when studio officials wanted him to send out autographed photographs to admiring fans. These negative characteristics of movie-making, however, were offset in the humorist's mind by the opportunity to work outside, get to bed early, arise early and sometimes have weeks of free time between pictures.[13]

Will's silent movie career never elevated him to the position of stardom that he achieved later in sound pictures. Nevertheless, one should not conclude that he was unsuccessful in this medium. Although he was never a great silent screen star, the Oklahoman's pictures be-

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[12]"The Headless Horseman," Famous Players, Lasky Corporation, Paramount, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 166, 322, 356. In listing the pictures that Will made for Goldwyn during this early period, Donald Day, in his Autobiography, leaves out "The Headless Horseman." Day, Autobiography, p. 67.

[13]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 146-147.

came popular enough to make reasonable profits for his employers. The mere fact that he made fourteen movies for the Goldwyn Studios between 1918 and 1921 attested to Will's box office success.[14]

The financial success of Will's early silent pictures left the comedian confident that his contract would be renewed in 1921. Unfortunately, the movie industry underwent basic readjustment during that year. The situation became bad for Will when Samuel Goldwyn left the Goldwyn Studios. Soon after the film giant's departure the Rogers' family received a great shock when the Studio failed to renew Will's contract. By this time, many early film stars had broken away from their original studios and had begun producing their own movies. When no other employment opportunities presented themselves in California, Will decided to follow the trend and make his own films. The whole Rogers family became involved in the project which resulted in the production of three two-reel pictures--"Fruits of Faith," "The Ropin Fool," and "One Day in 365." "One Day in 365" depicted an hourly chronology of activities at the Rogers' home while "The Ropin Fool," the only one of these movies the Will Rogers Memorial possesses, presented an exhibition of Will's trick roping ability. Little, if any, information exists

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[14]Interview, December 30, 1970, with Paula M. Love and Robert Love of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 80-81; Trent, My Cousin, p. 183; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 226; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 76; Day, Biography, p. 115; Day, Autobiography, p. 68.

concerning "Fruits of Faith."[15]

The filming of Will's three pictures cost much more than he had anticipated. The cowboy-philosopher soon found himself in financial trouble and forced to mortgage the family home. Pathé Films agreed to buy his movies for the cost of production. The agreement stipulated that Will would receive a percentage of the profits when Pathé circulated the films. Unfortunately, something went wrong with the arrangement and Will lost more money. This time he found himself forced to liquidate all his remaining securities, including life insurance policies and liberty bonds, and borrow money on the films which were immediately locked in a bank vault for security. The future seemed gloomy for the Rogers' family; however, one alternative remained. Offers to return to performing in New York continued long after Will's move to California. He and Betty now decided that the only way to meet their financial obligations was for the humorist to return to New York alone and work as hard as possible without family incumbrances. The decision made, Will returned to the Gotham city in June of 1921.[16]

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[15]"The Ropin Fool," courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore Oklahoma; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 149-150; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 31-32. Milsten leaves out "One Day in 365" when discussing the pictures which Will produced himself. Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 213.

[16]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 150, 152; Day, Biography, pp. 115-116; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 167; Day, Autobiography, p. 68.

The "Follies" had not opened when Will arrived in the East, so the financially troubled humorist took a three week engagement at Shubert's Winter Garden. When America's favorite extravaganza began its new season, Will once again formed part of the contingent working for the old master, Florenz Ziegfeld. The monologist found it difficult to adjust to a live audience at first. In a short period time, however, he recaptured his old form. Betty traveled to New York frequently during this period. Sometimes she brought one of the children and sometimes the whole family. The strain of separation and Will's proximity to the beautiful "Follies" girls could have created difficulties for a less dedicated couple. None arose for Will and Betty, however, and they even became confessors and advisors to the young women who worked for Ziegfeld.[17]

Will became involved in a public controversy while working with the "Follies" during this period. Several versions of the incident exist, but all agree that developments centered around some of the performer's satirical comments concerning President Harding's golf game. These barbs appeared in a sketch that the comedian presented on the Washington Disarmament Conference, or, as he referred to it, "'The Disagreement Conference.'" When the Ziegfeld entourage played Washington, a White House secretary visited Will and asked him to drop the comments

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[17]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 150; Day, Biography, pp. 119, 123; Day, Autobiography, p. 68.

about the President from his act, since they created bad publicity for the Chief Executive. Will complied with the request in an agreeable fashion. Later, however, he became miffed when President Harding evidently gave vent to his unhappiness over the golf jokes by snubbing the "Follies" in order to attend the performance of a road show that appeared across the street from the Ziegfeld troop's location. "Will was disappointed," Betty later recalled, "and a little peeved. And during one of his curtain call speeches, he indirectly gave expression to his feelings. 'I have cracked quite a few jokes on public men here;' he told the audience, 'both Republicans and Democrats. I hope I have not given any offense. In fact, I don't believe any big man will take offense.'" The representatives of the democratic press seized upon these comments and "a terrific how-do-you-do" resulted.[18] The hostility between Will and President Harding continued, for when the comedian returned to motion picture work in California during the spring of 1923, he fired a parting volly at the Chief Executive in his weekly newspaper column. The statement claimed that Will had decided to return to California so that the President could enjoy the "Follies." The move was necessary because, as the humorist put it, "the humerous relations between the White House and myself being rather strained, he [Harding]

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[18]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 165-168. Variations of this incident appear in the following: Day, Biography, pp. 121-122; Butterfield, "Legend," p. 82; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 155.

naturally feels akind of hesitant about coming [to the "Follies"], for, at the present time you can't see the American Girl being glorified without being annoyed by a jarring presence among them, which I am free to admit is myself."[19]

Will made a good salary with the "Follies" by 1921. Nevertheless, his indebtedness had reached such proportions that he found himself forced to seek additional work in order to satisfy his creditors. He labored "as hard" at this time "as he ever did in his life."[20] One of the comedian's most successful income producing activities became after-dinner and banquet speaking. Will had done some public speaking earlier in his career, but in 1921 he hired an agent to schedule as many of these engagements as possible. Each appearance brought an honorarium of between $500 and $1,000. Will oftentimes made three or four of these presentations a week. He spoke to such contrasting groups as The Ohio Society, West Point Cadets, The American Bond and Mortgage Company, the Furriers Trade Association, the 24 Karat Club (diamond merchants) and the Allied Leather Association. The cowboy-philosopher's stomach reacted negatively to such a continual diet of banquet food. In response to this gastronomic discomfort, he developed the habit of dropping into the El Rancho, a short-order chili parlor located

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[19] New York Times, May 6, 1923, section III, p. 2.

[20] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 150-151; Day, Autobiography, p. 68.

at Broadway and Forty-Seventh Street, in order to fortify himself with chili and enchiladas before reaching the banquet hall. Considering his eating habits at the El Rancho, one can assume that the anxiety of making public appearances created Will's stomach distress rather than the banquet fare.[21]

Will worked extremely hard to develop and refine his after-dinner speaking style. For example, he judged the composition of his audiences very carefully. This enabled him to present material which would bring the best response from a given group of people. Charles M. Schwab, a well-known figure at banquet rostrums, related his observations of Will's careful audience evaluation technique: "Early in the dinner [one which Schwab attended with Will] Mr. Rogers made an excuse to get away from the head table and I noticed that he sat at different tables around the room, studying the acoustics and noticing the

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[21]Will Rogers' Speeches, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 151-152; Day, Biography, pp. 124-125; Day, Autobiography, p. 69; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 167-168. Several points need to be made in connection with the material cited above. First, Eddie Cantor leaves a false impression by stating that Will "never kept" money he received for banquet appearances. Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, p. 136. O'Brien states that Will got $500 for his banquet appearances while Day believes that the amount was $1,000. O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 259; Day, Biography, p. 124. Day and Betty Rogers disagree on how long Will remained actively engaged in full-time banquet work. Betty says that her husband worked the banquet circuit one year while Day writes that the comedian was engaged in this type activity for a year and a half. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 150; Day, Biography, p. 125.

reaction of the audience to different speakers."[22]

Personally, Will liked the last position on a banquet program so that he could poke fun at the earlier speakers. He was not, however, critical or vicious. Rather, the humorist employed a fun-loving considerateness which helped to bolster the feelings of the drab and rambling speakers who preceeded him.[23] Nervousness represented another characteristic of Will's banquet speaking career. He reflected his anxiety by awkardly "fumbling" through the "first few minutes" of his presentation. This unconquerable faltering eventually became identified with the comedian's stylistic approach to humor. It unintentionally added another interesting element to Will's personalized and unique brand of humor.[24]

Perhaps the most colorful part of the cowboy-philosopher's approach to banquet speaking manifested itself in his initial shock-filled remarks. Rather than beginning his presentation traditionally by greeting the dignitaries, visitors and general audience in an appreciative manner, the comedian frequently used a humorous insult to get immediate attention. For example, he hailed the unsuspecting representatives of

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[22]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 126; Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," pp. 106-107.

[23]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 299-300; Will Rogers to George Martin, cited in Martin, "The Wit of Will Rogers," p. 106.

[24]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 152.

the American Bond and Mortgage Company with: "You Birds are so prosperous looking one would think you were buyers of the bonds instead of sellers. . . . Did you ever figure that banking loans, mortgages, interests of any kind are the most non-essential industries in the world. Interest eats up half the earning of the world."[25] The Furriers of America received even harsher treatment: "I read the 'Polar Bear Swindle' sheet or 'The Fur Trade Review.'"[26]

The material in Will's after-dinner speeches was aimed basically at creating humor. Nevertheless, these talks also contained some of the social commentary which the humorist used in the other public communications media. The banquet speeches, however, differed in one way from most of Will's other material--his criticism of people and things took on biting harshness. One wonders how he got away with saying such things until the magic of his personality is remembered. The printed page cannot recapture that intangible factor. Excerpts from several of the talks delivered during this period will exemplify the basic characteristics of Will's banquet appearances. His humorous satire is best shown in comments he made before the Allied Leather Association

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[25]Will Rogers, Speech to American Bond and Mortgage Company, December 16, 1922, Astor Hotel, New York City, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 167-168.

[26]Will Rogers, Speech to Furriers Trade Dinner, January 25, 1923, McAlphine Hotel, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

(Shoe Makers) in February of 1923. He told his audience that he felt they should have invited the paper manufacturers to join them since "leather only" constituted "8% of the material used in shoes." Shoes made out of paper, however, did have some advantages from Will's point of view. If you did not like your footwear, you could simply take it off and read it. And, if you ordered your shoes, you could have "either the editorials or the comic pages" put "on the outside." "They used to put your shoes into a pastboard [sic] box when you bought them," the comedian concluded. "Now they don't do that. There was a lot of confusion. Customers could not tell when they got home which was the shoes and which was the box, as they were of the same material. A great many declared the box outwore the shoes."[27]

Another example of Will's biting criticism was his talk at the New York City Alderman's Dinner in 1923. He censured the Tammany Hall Democrats for the "gas pipe and valve swindle" and asked why they had not given the Republicans a share of the "graft!" This approach launched the humorist into a general attack against dishonesty in New York City politics. "Of course I think, personally," Will stated, "if a man goes

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[27]Will Rogers, Speech to Allies Leather Association, February 20, 1923, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. The mistakes in these manuscripts are transferred from Rogers' work. It should be noted that typed copies of these banquet presentations were supplied by Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial. Many of these speeches have not been available for general public review until this time.

out and buys more votes he ought to have 'em and the New York law has generally protected him." In line with this train of thought, the after-dinner impresario mentioned that he had recently read about a city Alderman being robbed. This surprised him because he had always understood that an "unwritten law" existed among criminals which prohibited them from bothering "each other."[28]

Will worked very hard to pay off his debts between 1921 and 1923. The pressure he labored under and his increasingly busy schedule transformed the comedian into a hard bargaining business negotiator who sought opportunity everywhere.[29] He continued to write occasional articles for various newspapers and began talking with the New York Herald about producing a weekly common-sense article on contemporary events. This projected endeavor closely resembled Finley Peter Dunne's famous Mr. Dooley and Mr. Hennesey series. Will intended to use Powder River Powell, a frontier cowboy, as his main character. He planned for dialogue to develop when Powder River made a weekly trip to see his barber, Soapy, for a shave. The prototypes that Will submitted to the Herald staff failed to meet with approval and the negotiations reached

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[28]Will Rogers, Speech to Alderman's Dinner, New York City, January 16, 1923, Incomplete. The Will Rogers Memorial has only portions of some of Will's banquet speeches. This is the case with the "Incomplete" transcript cited above.

[29]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 188; Charles W. Lobdell, "The World Laughs with Him," p. 21.

an impasse. At this juncture, V. V. McNitt, head of the McNaught Newspaper Syndicate, entered the picture. The exact events are unknown, but apparently McNitt had been interested in getting Will to develop a series for some time. The two got together and Will submitted some of his Powder River Powell material to the McNaught staff. Their evaluation reinforced the Herald's previous judgement--Powder River Powell remained unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, Will continued to stay in contact with McNitt. Their talks finally produced an agreement whereby the humorist contracted to write a weekly syndicated article for $500 per week. These articles were to resemble Will's "Follies" routine by presenting the cowboy-humorist's comments on contemporary events.[30]

The McNaught Syndicate released Will's first weekly article on December 31, 1922. It proved immediately popular and in a short time the humorist's work was appearing in Sunday newspapers throughout the nation. The price that individual papers paid McNaught for Will's piece varied according to each publication's circulation. For example, during the first year the New York Times paid $150 per week, the Chi-

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[30]Will Rogers, "Cowboy Ropes and Ties Our Critic: Will Rogers Avenges the Drama for All Ashton Stevens' Indignities of 25 Years," Herald Examiner (Chicago) March 26, 1922, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 172-177; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 123; Day, Biography, pp. 127-129; Jack Lait in his, Our Will Rogers, and Folks Say of Will Rogers, present additional information concerning this period and area of Will's life that seems somewhat questionable. Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 110-111; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 155-158.

cago News' bill came to $25 and the Kansas City Star received the material for $7.50. The Syndicate supplied topical headlines with each article; however, a great deal of variation developed in this area since many subscribers chose to use their own titles. During the first two years, these headlines ranged from the New York Times', "Slipping the Lariat Over," to the Los Angeles Examiner's, "Roping the News." Will's early weekly articles usually contained 1,500 to 1,700 words. Over the years, as his commitments grew, the weekly pieces tended to grow shorter. They varied from 650 to 1,300 words by the mid 1930's.[31]

Will intimated a number of times over the years that his newspaper articles received no editing. These statements fell short of the truth since the comedian always showed much of his work to Betty. He held her opinion in high esteem and if she questioned a piece's efficacy Will revised it. "Her dictum was final," wrote Will Rogers, Jr. some years later, "and her influence was such that a whole daily wire could be scrapped and a new one submitted, if she felt that the first was out of line."[32] In addition to Betty's editorial influence, both the humo-

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[31]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 229; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 179-180; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 292; Trent, My Cousin, p. 183; Day, Biography, p. 129; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 17; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 123-126. E. Paul Alworth intimates that Will's contract with McNaught concerning the weekly articles called for a piece containing 2,500 words. Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 35-36, 98. Day in his Biography states that Will's first article appeared December 30, 1922. Day, Biography, p. 129.

[32]Will Rogers, Jr., Beverly Hills Citizen, November 28, 1941,

rist and McNaught's editors penciled in corrections on the original typed copy of each week's article. The Syndicate's alterations usually concerned "punctuation, spelling, capitalization and paragraphing."[33] Sometimes peoples' names and the names of nationally known manufactured goods were modified or omitted. After 1928, the number of corrections imposed by the McNaught staff declined rapidly and took the form of apostrophes which denoted possession and proved necessary for coherence. Will wrote his first articles in longhand, but he soon taught himself to type with an awkward "hunt-and-peck" system that produced a messy product with many words "X-ed" out. His early typed work was single spaced, written on any available paper, and contained a combination of lower case and capital letters. Over the years, his approach changed to the double space technique, all capital letters and western union telegraph blanks.[34] Betty found herself responsible for saving Will's completed material. The comedian never saved anything once it reached the point of submission for publication.[35]

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cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 18; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 130-131.

[33]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 126-130; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 293.

[34]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 126-130; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 293-294; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 124.

[35]Beatty, "Betty Holds the Reins," pp. 113-114.

E. Paul Alworth took the position that Will's regular journalistic efforts, starting with the weekly articles in late 1922, did well because of both their "form and content." In essence, the humorist succeeded in using the written word because he developed the ability to transfer to the printed page the style of humor that had proved so successful on the "Follies" stage. His Oklahoma drawl, infectious smile and unruly forelock naturally defied newspaper reproduction but, with substitutions and adaptations, he basically recreated the Rogers' tone and personality on paper. Alworth correctly preceived that, as in his stage work, Will "employed in his written work" "the same homely and colorful mode of expression, the same characteristic qualities of simplicity and directness, and the same pretense of ignorance and illiteracy." In addition to these basic elements, the cowboy-philosopher's written material also reproduced in one form or another the "exaggerations and incongruities," the "shocker" element of "surprise," the "satire," "the punch line" or "snapper," and the "colloquialisms, puns, and comic metaphors" which characterized his live audience presentations.[36]

The weekly articles, as most of Will's prose, appeared in a "homely, low-colloquial" style which possessed an abundance of spelling, grammatical and punctuation mistakes meshed with an excessive use of slang. It remains impossible to determine how much of this literary crudeness

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[36]Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 97, 102-116, passim.

Will used intentionally, how much originated in his lack of ability, and how much resulted from indifference. Regardless, when these characteristics combined with the weekly articles' "frequent digressions," poor transition, and lack of unity, a totally unscholarly product emerged which reached the hearts, minds and emotions of many people in a uniquely successful manner. Structurely, the weekly articles usually followed an "expository" format, however, on occasion, the pattern varied to include public letters, interviews and short comedy skits.[37]

The first part of Will's show business career, the time he spent in vaudeville and his early days with the "Follies," found the entertainer primarily interested in presenting his rope tricks and, as his star rose, producing humor. However, by the time he left the "Follies" for Hollywood in 1919, the cowboy-humorist had taken on the airs of a cracker-box philosopher. His extensive comments on current events in the "Follies" led him to gradually realize the importance of the issues that he dealt with in his monologue. Slowly but surely he became more serious about his humor. Will, while living, and Betty, in the biography which she wrote after the Oklahoman's death, presented conflicting statements concerning the seriousness of the humorist's public statements.[38] Never-

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[37] Ibid., pp. 97-102, passim; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 294.

[38] Interview with Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 30, 1970. Statements by Will and Betty which denied that the cowboy-philosopher was serious in his

theless, it remained obvious that the former comedian had become a humorist-satirist and constructive social critic by the time he began producing his weekly newspaper column in late 1922.

The weekly articles which Will began writing for the McNaught Syndicate in 1922 represented the first real nationwide exposure for his philosophy. They also contain the earliest material which exists in abundance pertaining to the performer's thought. As such, these pieces show what Will thought in the early twenties, in addition to reflecting many of the unrecorded ideas and values which the humorist projected from the Ziegfeld stage in the early days.

The weekly newspaper articles that Will wrote between 1922 and 1924 presented a number of basic characteristics relevant to his thought. First, he assumed an anti-establishment position on domestic topics by assaulting wealthy individuals and groups in the United States. He accomplished this while criticizing war profiteering as a causative factor in bringing on World War I, favoring the veteran's bonus after the war,

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public statements can be found in the following sources: Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast, November 26, 1933, and January 21, 1934, transcripts courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 165, 291. Will's and Betty's comments which support the seriousness of the comedian's material can be found in the following places: the New York Times, February 8, 1933, p. 21; The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, January 8, 1933, p. 18; Ibid., March 18, 1934, p. 16; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 178, 185, 195, 222, 282-284. The New York Times stopped publishing Will's weekly article in October of 1924. The Atlanta Journal's reproductions of the weekly pieces are used after that date.

attacking those involved in the Teapot Dome scandal and supporting the publication of income tax returns as a way of exposing what he believed constituted income tax evasion by the rich. Will's comments concerning war profiteering provided a good example of his feelings concerning certain wealthy members of the establishment. Seizing upon a statement made by President Harding, the columnist suggested that war profiteering in future conflicts could be avoided by drafting the nation's financial resources in addition to its human wealth. In essence, he thought that the government should control all the country's money during wartime. When hostilities ended, the monetary resources that remained would be divided among the rich. This would place the affluent sectors of society in a position similar to that of the draftee who gambled life and limb in time of national need. "When the Wall Street Millionaire knows," Will logically pointed out, "that you are not only going to come into his office and take his Secretary and Clerks, but, that you come in to get his dough, say Boy, there wouldn't be any war." After presenting his plan, Will pessimistically reflected upon its chances of being implemented: "The rich will say it ain't practical, the poor will never get a chance to find out if it is or not."[39]

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[39]New York Times, June 10, 1923, section VIII, p. 2; Ibid., December 30, 1923, section VIII, p. 2; Ibid., February 10, 1924, section VIII, p. 4; Ibid., March 30, 1924, section IX, p. 2; The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, November 9, 1924, p. 12. Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, believes that the most authentic reproduction of Will's original articles appeared in the

Will projected a realism which assumed a nationalistic flavor when he considered international affairs. He strongly favored military preparedness and the development of an air force, while exposing the myth of disarmament and peace. The tone of his thought concerning the international situation found voice in a general statement written on July 22, 1923; "I am only an ignorant Cowpuncher but there ain't nobody on earth, I don't care how smart they are, going to make me believe they will ever stop wars. . . . The only way to do is just stay out of them as long as you can, and the best way to stay out of them for quite a while, instead of teaching a Boy to run an Automobile, teach him to fly, because the Nation in the next war that ain't up in the Air, is just going to get something dropped on its Bean."[40]

The weekly newspaper articles projected Will's humor at the same time that they evidenced the columnist's entrance into the area of social criticism. His treatment of the 1921-1922 Washington Disarmament Conference presented an excellent example of humor being combined with an attack against American diplomacy for its lack of military preparedness.

Tulsa Daily World. Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, on March 13, 1966. This study will employ the versions used by the New York Times because of the vast circulation that paper enjoyed.

[40]New York Times, July 22, 1923, section VII, p. 2; Ibid., December 30, 1923, section VIII, p. 2; Ibid., August 10, 1924, section VIII, p. 2; The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 14, 1924, p. 16, Ibid., September 21, 1924, p. 6.

He thought that the Conference originated in the Republican Party's desire for a "publicity stunt." Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, received credit for suggesting that the meeting should discuss "sinking Battleships." The negotiations resulted in an arrangement whereby America agreed to destroy one of her battleships for every new vessel that England and Japan promised not to build. This accord seemed unique to Will, since up until that time "Battleships had always been sunk by the enemy." "Sinking your own boats," he criptically remarked, "is a military strategy that will always remain in the possession of America." The consequences of the Washington Disarmament Conference concerned the humorist: "Now they are talking of having another Naval Disarmament Conference. We can only stand one more. If they ever have a second one we will have to borrow a Boat to go to it." Will finally concluded that the disarmament treaty reflected the United States' desire to never "have the start on any Nation in case of war. We figure it looks better to start late and come from behind."[41]

Political non-partisanship represented another theme in the early weekly articles. This carry-over from the beginning "Follies" days appeared in a realistic vein when Will speculated upon the approaching Presidential election of 1924. He experienced difficulty in determining any "difference" between the two major political parties--the Republicans

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[41] The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 14, 1924, p. 16.

and the Democrats. He depicted Calvin Coolidge and the Republicans as "so hard up for an issue" that they finally chose a platform based on "Common Sense." This selection seemed a mistake since the Democrats would also include common sense in their platform. "Do you think," Will continued, "They [the Democrats] will call their campaign 'Darn Foolishness?'" John Davis, the Democratic Presidential candidate, announced that he would base his campaign upon "Honesty." This platform statement appeared no more satisfactory than the Republicans' since honesty represented more of a "Miracle" in politics than an issue. Will concluded: "The only thing I see now that the two old line parties are divided on is 'Who will have the Post Offices?' . . . No matter how many parties you have they are all fighting for the same thing--SALARY. You abolish salaries and you will abolish Politics and TAXES."[42]

Will returned to New York during the spring of 1921 in order to meet his financial obligations. After nearly two years of working day and night, and due mainly to his after-dinner speaking engagements, the humorist reached his goal. Relative economic solvency, however, represented only one of several positive developments that emanated from the eastern sojourn. This period also saw a new breadth injected into the cowboy-philosopher's after-dinner speaking career and the initiation of an entirely new endeavor--syndicated newspaper commentary. One

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[42]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, October 26, 1924, p. 10; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 218.

final achievement capped the stay in New York. Some evidence indicates that Will felt that he discovered the weakness in his motion picture career while performing in the "Follies" one evening. He realized that he projected his own personality in the Ziegfeld production while he had presented an artificial image when working at the Goldwyn Studios. Suddently, the fault in his Hollywood work appeared as a flash of lightening; he needed to be himself rather than trying to project a false image.[43]

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[43] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 150-151; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 168-169; Day, Biography, pp. 115-116; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 31-32. The story of Will's suddenly realizing the weakness of his movies while on stage in the "Follies" evidently originated with comments L. W. "Chip" Roberts wrote in Folks Say of Will Rogers. Donald Day repeated the story in his Biography. The opinions of Mr. Roberts, because of the many falacies they contain, must be used with extreme caution.

CHAPTER VII

More of Hollywood and the "Follies"

> From the beginning Will was ambitious. . . . He strove for perfection in whatever he tried; he was restless and impatient when he felt he had fallen into a rut and that he wasn't going ahead fast enough. And he was keenly alert when a new opportunity presented itself.
>
> It was not so much that he sought the new opening as that he never failed to seize it when it came his way. His whole career was the development and unfolding of a personality through the various vehicles that seemed to be constantly and almost miraculously presenting themselves. His comment on the stage during his roping act was incidental at first, if not accidental. His writing came the same way. His entrance into the movies, too, was not of his own seeking. But once started in these new fields, he made the most of each, giving to them the same enthusiasm and energy he had given to the rope in the early days.[1]

The syndicated newspaper audience which enjoyed Will's weekly column read in June of 1923 that the cowboy-philosopher planned to return to his motion picture career in California. An offer from Hal E. Roach to make a series of two-reel comedies at his Culver City Studio precipitated this decision. The contract with the Roach Studio called for Will to receive $3,000 per week in salary. The humorist could hardly have turned down the Roach offer. It gave him the opportunity to re-

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[1]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 23-24.

join his family and have another chance at the profitable motion picture industry. In addition, his syndicated newspaper work now made it possible for Will to keep in contact with his admirers across the nation, and especially the old "Follies" clientele from New York, while residing in California.[2]

During 1923 and 1924 the Roach Studio produced thirteen pictures which featured Will. The list included the following: "Two Wagons, Both Covered," "Hustlin' Hank," "The Cowboy Sheik," "The Cake Eater," "Going to Congress," "Our Congressman," "Big Moments from Little Pictures," "Just Passin' Through," "Gee Whiz, Genevive," "Highbrow Stuff," "No Parking Here," and "A Truthful Liar." Although the comedies which Will made for Hal Roach met with more public acceptance than his earlier productions for the Goldwyn Studios, none of them proved great successes.[3]

The same problem plagued Will's Roach Studio films that had previously hindered the pictures he made for Goldwyn--the directors would not allow the humorist to project his own personality. Rather, they tried

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[2]New York Times, June 24, 1923, section VIII, p. 2; Day, Biography, p. 134; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 157; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 169; Day, Autobiography, p. 74.

[3]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 169-171; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 80; Day, Autobiography, p. 74. Homer Croy and Donald Day diagree on the title of one of Will's Roach Studio films. Croy calls is "No Parking Here" while Day refers to it as "No Parking There." See above citations.

to make him perform within the successful slap-stick tradition of Charlie Chaplin and the Keystone Cops. Robert Wagner, one of the studio's directors, recognized the problem. He and Will finally got Roach's permission to let Will dramatize his own personality. They chose to try a satire on Jimmy Cruze's classic, The Covered Wagon, as their first endeavor. Both Will and Wagner worked tirelessly on the script. The comedian contributed "brilliant flashes" of humor and insight, while it became the director's task to add continuity and a "straightforward story." When production finally began, the staff that worked on "Two Wagons, Both Covered" experienced difficulty in relating to the picture since it substituted a subtle and somewhat sophisticated form of humor for the traditional slap-stick variety. Increased hesitancy developed among many members of the production crew and some studio officials when filming finished ahead of schedule and below budget. The company hierarchy reacted to the initial showing of "Two Wagons, Both Covered" in a solemn and negative fashion. They were certain it would be a failure. Will, on the other hand, possessed confidence in the film and offered to purchase it. Studio officials were eager to sell, but they had already finalized release arrangements. They vented their extreme displeasure with Two" Wagons, Both Covered" by firing director Robert Wagner.[4]

"Two Wagons, Both Covered" surprised everyone at its preview

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[4]Day, Biography, pp. 136-138; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 157-158; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 169-171.

showing except Will Rogers and Robert Wagner. The audience appreciated the film's indirect humor and reacted with rare applause when the feature ended. As a result, Wagner found himself reinstated as a director at the Roach Studio and scheduled to make another Rogers' film. Nevertheless, problems continued to inhibit the director and his innovative star. Company administrators accepted the success of "Two Wagons, Both Covered" but, being steeped in the tradition of overt, physical buffonery, they failed to attribute the picture's public acceptance to Will's subdued brand of comedy. Rather, they concluded that the film's success represented a "fluke" that would not appear again. As a result of this conviction, studio officials once again instructed Will and Wagner to employ slap-stick comedy in their films. This situation created difficulty for Will. Two "gag men" and a supervisor tampered more and more with each film's script as movie after movie declined in humorous content. Will's disgust finally went beyond the toleration point, and he returned to New York and the "Follies."[5]

The Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma, possesses four of the silent films that Will made for the Hal Roach Studios during 1923 and 1924. The list includes "Two Wagons, Both Covered," "Going to Congress," "A Truthful Liar" and what was originally entitled "No Parking Here." These films illustrate an interesting point concerning

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[5]Day, Biography, pp. 137-138.

Will's silent movie career. They show that the Oklahoman, who helped write many of the pictures' subtitles, projected his social and political satire through the cinema. He aimed barbed remarks at a variety of targets which oftentimes formed part of the institutional structure, or establishment, of American society during the 1920's. He specifically pointed his verbal rapier at diplomacy, diplomats, politics, politicians, California real estate men, prohibition and the modernization and mechanization of society. The movie, "Going to Congress," for example, presented a satire on politics and politicians. In it, Will played a rural office seeker, Alfalfa Doolittle, who captured a Congressional seat. Alfalfa placed part of his winning platform before the people in a speech which stated: "Everybody is talking about what this country needs--/dashes are in film's subtitles/ What this country needs is rain--An if I'm elected I'll personally see to it that you get it--"[6]

Alfalfa Doolittle also represented the central character in the film, "A Truthful Liar." In this movie, Will portrayed Doolittle as a United States Ambassador to an unspecified foreign country. The Am-

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[6]Will Rogers in "Going to Congress" Hall E. Roach Studios, Inc. Pathé Exchange Inc., 1924; Will Rogers in "Two Wagons, Both Covered" Hal E. Roach Studios, Inc. Pathé Exchange Inc., 1923; Will Rogers in "A Truthful Liar" Hal E. Roach Studios, Inc. Pathé Exchange Inc., 1924; Will Rogers in "No Parking Here" Hal E. Roach Studios, Inc. Pathé Exchange Inc., 1924, all courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial. The "Movie Museum" evidently reissued "No Parking Here" under the revised title, "Don't Park Here." "Don't Park Here" is the title under which this author viewed the picture.

bassador's office occupied a room "right over the arsenal." Alfalfa hedged on wearing formal diplomatic attire in his new post until his wife convinced him that such clothing was necessary. "Being a diplomat," the caption read, "Alfalfa compromised--He put on the clothes--" The film's concluding scene showed Will (Alfalfa Doolittle) summing up his diplomatic mission to his home constituents with the following comment: "--An' outside o' teachin' the King to shoot craps that's about all that happened. --"[7]

The Ziegfeld "Follies" of 1924 opened in June. Will returned to the East a short while earlier to view activities connected with the presidential election of that year. He visited the Republican Nominating Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, but had to leave early in order to begin performing in the "Follies." Fortunately, the Democratic Nominating Convention of 1924 met in New York. This enabled the columnist to continue working for Ziegfeld while he attended the convention. The convention became deadlocked. In order to breathe life into the proceedings, Will's weekly column announced that the humorist had decided to offer himself as "a sacrifice" Vice-Presidential candidate. The days that followed saw the tedium of convention politics lightened when two delegates cast their half-vote in favor of Will's candidacy.[8]

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[7]Will Rogers in "A Truthful Liar." The dashes in the above quotations come from the original captions.

[8]Day, Biography, pp. 144-150; New York Times, May 25, 1924,

Will's contribution to the 1924-1925 "Follies" was so essential that his weekly salary rose to $3,500. The cowboy-philosopher's economic success failed to affect his life style however, and he continued to avoid New York's night life. And, as before, his and Betty's relationship proved more than strong enough to withstand the strain of separation. Will spent much of the little time that he had to himself sitting in a secluded corner of the Friars Club perusing newspapers for material which he could use on stage or in his syndicated column. Betty visited frequently, but usually stayed away from the theatre and show business people. On special occasions, however, she would accompany Will into the celebrated world of New York's night life.[9]

Much of Will's continued stage success relied, as in the past, upon the comedian's ability to make satirical comments concerning contemporary events and personalities without alienating large groups of people. Just the way he said things softened his remarks and enabled him to deal with normally unapproachable topics. "There was something neighborly

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section IX, p. 2; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 161; Day, Autobiography, p. 68.

[9]Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands, p. 182; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 84; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 178-179, 254; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 47-49; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 34-35; O. O. McIntyre, "Our Will" Cosmopolitan Magazine, October, 1931, pp. 82-83, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. This article does not appear at the time indicated by the Will Rogers Memorial. Nevertheless, it is accepted as a valid document.

about him," Betty wrote years later, "Something that made you feel as though you had always known him. And it was this something, of course, that had been in a measure responsible for his success. . . ."[10] Contemporary reviewers of Will's act also noticed that the comedian's success rested partially upon the atmosphere which he created with his personality. Charles W. Lobdell, writing an interview article for Liberty Magazine in 1924, believed that Will's stage triumphs continued apace because "half the people in the house get the impression that Rogers is talking to them alone."[11] Joan Crawford reported a different facet of the same phonomenon in the New York Times. She said that Will's drab clothing and awkward appearance made people "feel sorry for him" and apprehensious about his performing ability. "When he begins to make the ropes writhe like snakes," Miss Crawford concluded, "and strike [sic] the bulls-eye time and again with his quaint homely wit, you are as proud of him as if you had done it yourself."[12]

Will's literary career complimented his stage accomplishments. In 1924 he published a third and highly successful book, The Illiterate

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[10]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 26.

[11]Lobdell, "The World Laughs with Him," p. 20; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 26.

[12]Joan Crawford, "Will Rogers," New York Times, December 14, 1924, section III, p. 2; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 19. Linda Nelson suggests, but does not support, the idea that Will created "goodwill" with an audience by combining "the serious and the gay" in his presentations. Linda Hodges Nelson, "An Analysis of Will Rogers's

Digest. This volume contained thirty-six of the humorist's weekly newspaper articles. These entries dealt with a variety of subjects which included "poems and bathtubs, Follies girls and income tax, chewing gum and one-piece bathing suits, oil scandals and political conventions."[13] The satire that Will presented in the Illiterate Digest found classic representation in the volume's last selection, "Taking The Cure By the Shores of Cat Creek." The article began with a testimonial concerning the curative powers of the mineral water, the "Aladdin of health waters," sold in Claremore, Oklahoma. Will described the liquid as possessing such healing power that it would "cure you of anything--just name your disease and dive in." He depicted Claremore's location as "about 17 hundred miles west of New York (either City or State, depends on which ever one you happen to be in). You bear a little south of west, after leaving New York, till you reach Sol McClellan's place, which is just on the outskirts of Claremore." The achievements and applications of Claremore's curative water appeared next and in a random fashion. The miracle elixer admittedly spread a "pecular odor" similar to "Sulphur." This negative characteristic found balance however, when "visitors from Kansas City," being accustomed to "a Stock Yard Breeze," realized they

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1933 Radio Broadcasts; A Study in Ethos" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of South Dakota, 1970), pp. 155-157.

[13]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 225; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 157; Will Rogers, The Illiterate Digest (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1924). pp. 8-9.

could employ it "as a Perfume." A "one armed man" from Kansas, who "had heard in a roundabout way of people bathing," mistakenly emersed himself in Claremore's "Radium Water." His missing arm grew back as a result and, in addition, he became "the Pioneer of Bathers of Kansas." The liquid's restorative powers reached a high point of perfection when a "man come there once entirely Legless and stayed a week too long and went away a Centipede."[14]

The Illiterate Digest achieved instant success with reviewers and purchasers alike. A critic for Current Opinion viewed favorably the "soundness of judgment which cuts deeply into the most sacred supersitions and exposes with genial sarcasm a good many human frailties."[15] W. E. Woodward's evaluation in The Nation sounded a more qualified note, but concluded by encouraging all to read the book since its author seemed a "jolly and sharp-eyed rotary-club member turned into cynical philosopher."[16] If reports are correct, the Digest became an immediate best seller and quickly went through five printings which totaled 65,000 volumes. One hundred and fifty-four reviews commented favorably on

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[14]Will Rogers, The Illiterate Digest, pp. 345-350, passim.

[15]N. A., "Will Rogers' Literary Round-Up," Current Opinion, LXXVI January, 1925, p. 140; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 219-220.

[16]W. E. Woodward, "Humor Dead or Alive," The Nation, CXX February 11, 1925, p. 160; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 220-221.

the volume, while none registered major criticisms.[17]

Shortly before the publication of The Illiterate Digest in December of 1924, Will had entered another area of literary endeavor through the advertising industry. The American Tobacco Company signed him to write "26 pieces of Bull Durham copy, each to be signed by you," during September of 1924. The contract specified that each advertisement should approximate "150 words in length and to permit /sic/ the publication of an illustration of yourself as a part of each advertisement."[18] Will wrote these articles every two weeks and received $500 apiece for them. H. W. Kastor & Sons Advertising supervised the American Tobacco Company's work. The firm gave Will complete freedom to promote Bull Durham's merchandise in whatever manner he chose. The resulting prose represented very strange advertising material.[19]

Will's Bull Durham advertisements closely resembled his newspaper articles. They drastically differed from standard advertising since the humorist seldom mentioned Bull Durham Tobacco and blatantly admitted that he did not smoke. A classic postscript made an offhand

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[17]Courant, January 18, 1925; "Literary Gossip," Nashville Banner, January 11, 1925, both cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 221. Similar reviews are cited in Day, Biography, pp. 158-159.

[18]Letter of Frank W. Harwood to Will Rogers, September 29, 1924, cited in Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 17; Day, Biography, p. 158.

[19]Letter from Frank W. Harwood to Will Rogers, September 29, 1924, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 245-246; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 245.

reference to his sponsor's product: "I like to forgot to tell you what I was advertising. Its Bull Durham. I don't smoke it myself. I don't smoke anything, but somebody does or else what happened to all those bags?" The American Tobacco Company piece appeared under the title, "The Bulls Eye." Will was designated as "Editor and General Manager." "A Miracle, A Truthful Add" constituted a typical Rogers' advertisment. After asking his readers how frequently they experienced truthful advertising, the humorist continued: "No you never did, You read where some Guy endorses an Overcoat, and to prove it he has one on, (Or one they loaned him for the Picture), No, even if he did like it, what has that got to do with You, Peoples tastes are not alike, . . . You are no kindergarden, you know what you wore last year and if it pleased you try it again. . . ." Will concluded by casually suggesting that the reader should not allow insincere endorsements to lure him away from using Bull Durham Tobacco if he liked it.[20]

The years between 1919 and 1924 stood for success, growth and variety in Will Rogers' career. During this era, the humorist contin-

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[20]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 246-248; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 18. Information relating to the American Tobacco Company's advertisements is located in Scrapbook Number Seven at the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 246. Will evidently became involved in advertising a certain brand of chewing gum at this time. He also participated in a "postal card campaign" advertising Goodyear Rubber Company products in 1929. Unfortunately, very little information exists in connection with these activities. Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 22; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 209.

ued to develop a commanding personality through his eclectic life style. He only dressed once a day and rarely made any adjustments in his wearing apparel to accommodate special occasions or individuals. A somewhat wrinkled and worn blue serge suit became publicly recognized as his formal evening attire. The cowboy-philosopher's well-deserved reputation for munificence complimented his clothing habits. He seldom encountered beggars or those in need without responding to their plight. In addition, he gave unsparingly of his time to assist a variety of charities. Will's dressing habits and empathy for the needy were offset by one luxurious and colorful indulgence for which he developed a taste--he became an avid polo player. Although several conflicting stories exist concerning the origin of his initial contact with polo, there remains little doubt that he was a fanatical enthusiast by the middle 1920's.[21]

Will Rogers' income tax returns for 1923 dramatized his rise to fame and fortune--he made $167,956.99 that year. The next year Charles W. Lobdell, writing in Liberty Magazine, described him as the "highest paid comedian in America."[22] This success reflected the cowboy-

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[21]Love, The Will Rogers Book, pp. 163-165; McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 83; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 172-173; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 57-58; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 203, 207-208; Day, Autobiography, p. 46; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 158-159; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 264-265. Conflicting reports concerning Will's initial contact with polo are presented in Trent's, O'Brien's and Croy's work. Trent, My Cousin, pp. 207-208; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 264-265; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 158-159.

[22]Lobdell, "The World Laughs with Him," p. 19; Collins, "Writer

philosopher's "ambitious" nature and "determination to win" in all areas of endeavor.[23] Nevertheless, his accomplishments rested upon an ability to capitalize upon breaks as opposed to basic aggressiveness. He played hunches and took advantage of every opportunity that allowed him to project his humor before the public. Betty Rogers perceptively described this facet of Will's life in her book, Will Rogers: The Story of His Life Told by His Wife:

> From the beginning Will was ambitious. . . . He strove for perfection in whatever he tried; he was restless and impatient when he felt he had fallen into a rut and that he wasn't going ahead fast enough. And he was keenly alert when a new opportunity presented itself.
>
> It was not so much that he sought the new opening as that he never failed to seize it when it came his way. His whole career was the development and unfolding of a personality through the various vehicles that seemed to be constantly and almost miraculously presenting themselves. His comment on the stage during his roping act was incidental at first, if not accidental. His writing came the same way. His entrance into the movies, too, was not of his own seeking. But once started in these new fields, he made the most of each, giving to them the same enthusiasm and energy he had given to the rope in the early days.[24]

Will's ability to give his ambition its full reign partially rested upon the relative freedom from worry which typified his outlook on life.

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and Journalist," p. 123fn.

[23]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 23; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. xiii.

[24]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 23-24; Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 31, 1971; Love, The Will Rogers Book, pp. 65-66.

This, in turn, enabled him to meet an unbelievably busy work schedule with relative ease. The exact motivation behind the cowboy-philosopher's energy defies precise definition. Nevertheless, some obvious elements seem apparent and bear mentioning. These include the desire of a wealthy man's son to repeat the family tradition of financial success, a possible natural instinct to excell, the necessity of achieving prominence as a way of compensating for feelings of racial inferiority, failure in the eyes of a respected parent (in this case Will's father, Clem), or a combination of all these factors. Regardless of its origin, by the mid-1920's Will had developed a driving ambition which dominated his person until his untimely death.[25]

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[25]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 23-24; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 188; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 129.

CHAPTER VIII

Public Lectures and Journalistic Activities

> What all of us know put together don't mean anything. . . . We are just here for a spell and pass on. Any man that thinks civilization has advanced is an egotist. . . .
>
> And don't have an idea to work for. That's like riding towards a mirage of a lake. When you get there it ain't there. Believe in something for another World, but don't be too set on what it is, and then you won't start out that life with a disappointment. Live your life so that whenever you lose, you are ahead. [1]

The famous lecture-tour manager, Charles L. Wagner, observed Will Rogers' assent to fame and fortune during the early 1920's. By 1925, he had decided that the Oklahoman could succeed on the lecture circuit. Wagner wrote Will and offered to sponsor him on a country-wide tour. The lucrative proposal offered the comedian $1,000 per night, traveling expenses and a guarantee of six appearances per week. Will failed to respond to Wagner's offer. This confused the concert manager and he contacted Will through mutual friends. Much to his amazement, Wagner discovered that the cowboy-humorist had considered his letter a practical joke. When Wagner and Will finally met, the comedian expressed doubts concerning his ability to perform on the lecture circuit.

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[1] The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, July 12, 1931, p. 19.

Specifically, since Will's act had seldom lasted over ten minutes, he questioned whether he could entertain people for extended periods of time. He also doubted that he could attract auditorium size audiences. Wagner described how these problems could be solved. After contemplation, consultation, and some hesitation, Will finally agreed to accept the promoter's offer. Boredom with Broadway and a desire to see America first-hand motivated his decision.[2]

Will's first lecture tour began on October 1, 1935, in Elmira, New York, the home of Mark Twain. The De Reszke Singers accompanied him in order to add variety to the show. The opening performance in Elmira and those which followed for the next sixteen days were failures. Wagner lost money and Will sank into depression as it became apparent that much of the material which he used from his old "Follies" act was unsuitable for a road show. If the contracts had not proved binding, the humorist would have probably cancelled the tour at this juncture. Wagner suggested that he omit material from his act which referred to the "Follies" or New York personalities and concentrate on national and international political developments. Will reacted positively to this idea and found that it brought success. Audiences began responding better, the crowds grew larger, and Wagner finally started to realize a profit.

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[2]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 188-189; Brougher, Life and Laughter, p. 194; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 183; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 22-23.

The first eleven week tour resulted in an overall success and netted Will $82,000 in salary.[3]

During his lecture tour Will visited many small towns and he performed in a variety of places including "theatres, schools auditoriums, concert and lodge halls--even churches."[4] A twenty-five cent program which contained ten pages of pictures, sketches and prose concerning the cowboy-humorist and the De Reszke Singers advertised his show. The pamphlet's outside cover depicted Will as "America's Greatest Humorist - The Prince of Entertainers and Entertainer of 'The Princes.'"[5]

On the platform, Will presented a sharp contrast to most speakers. He "lolled first on one foot and then another, the idle leg thrust slightly forward and away as he rested on the other; he jammed his hands into his coat pockets, and made an acute angle with his shoulder line. Thus placed, he looked the part of the conventionfree, friendly, at-ease speaker."[6] This informal stance found reinforcement in the ever present

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[3]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, October 11, 1925, p. 27; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 189-190; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 184-185, 188; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 22-23; Day, Biography, p. 175. It should be noted that Betty Rogers described Will's first lecture tour as extending from "September" of 1925 to "mid-April" of 1926, and including a total of "151" lectures. Homer Croy's and Donald Day's versions of this tour differs sharply from Mrs. Rogers's. See above citations for Rogers, Croy, and Day.

[4]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 185.

[5]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 252-253; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 137.

[6]Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 196-197.

chewing gum and lariat which represented carry-overs from the "Follies" days. Will's restless, nervous temperament prohibited him from remaining stationary on stage. Rather, he wandered around, sat on piano stools or leaned against props, usually a piano, as the mood struck him. The end of his act oftentimes found him sitting casually on the edge of the stage informally swinging his feet and legs.[7]

Will's relaxed stage presence camouflaged the many hours of hard work that went into preparing his shows. Bruce Quisenberry, Will's cousin, business manager, and traveling companion for three years, described the humorist's special research techniques for the lecture series: "When we would get to the town, he would go to see some person he knew. If he didn't know anybody, he would go to the newspaper and get what he called 'the dope.' He would ask about paving, street lights, traffic, the city council, the police, the bond issue, bootleggin."[8] While gathering information, the humorist made notes on scratch paper and took care to include the names of local citizens. He consulted this material prior to going on stage, but never referred to it before his audience. This technique made his presentation seem impromptu. In each performance, the cowboy-philosopher dealt first with local topics,

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[7]Ibid., pp. 346-347; Bruce Quisenberry to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 195-196; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 186-187.

[8]Bruce Quisenberry to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 195.

then with points of interest on the state level, and, finally he turned to the national and international scene. As earlier, he always possessed some "sure-fire stuff" around which he built the evening's entertainment. The length of his act varied according to the reception he received from the audience. He sometimes performed for more than two hours before a receptive crowd.[9]

Once Will became accustomed to the lecture platform, it became one of his favorite entertainment forms. He liked the stimulation of a live audience and thrived on traveling and learning what the "men in the field," or the "regular Bird" as he called the average citizen, actually felt about national and international affairs.[10] The information which he gathered while covering the country provided excellent material for his newspaper columns and they in turn advertized his public appearances.[11]

Will's first lecture series ended successfully in December, 1925. A highlight in this initial tour came in November when the comedian

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[9]Ibid., pp. 195-196; McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 82, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 186-187; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 171.

[10]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, October 11, 1925, p. 27; Ibid., October 25, 1925, p. 24; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 181-183; Charles L. Wagner to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 191.

[11]Day, Biography, p. 173.

triumphantly performed to an overflow crowd of his old neighbors in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Exhilarated by the experience, Will shared his elation with his newspaper audience:

> Now I will tell you why I am happy and nothing don't matter to me now. After acting a fool all over the world and part of Iowa, I have been back home, and they seemed glad to see me, and they laughed at me.
>
> They laughed at me more than New York or London or Omaha. Now that don't mean anything to you. . . . But it meant something to me. My home folks thought I was good. I know lots of theatre goers what will disagree with them. But what do I care for them? What do I care for anything? The old home state and the old home town and the old ranch people I was born and raised with, I got by them. Twenty years of doubt and expectations as to just what they would think of you.[12]

The end of his first lecture tour in December of 1925 allowed Will to enjoy the Christmas holidays with his family in California. Charles Wagner soon offered to sponsor another tour between February and April of 1926. Will eagerly agreed to the proposal and opened with an enthusiastically accepted two hour and fifteen minute program in Miami, Florida. He held the celebrity-studded audience, as observer, O. O. McIntyre, recalled, "completely spellbound and sent it away exhausted from laughter."[13] The second lecture series ended victoriously with a performance in prestigious Carnegia Hall, New York. Will became extremely nervous about appearing in such a formal setting, and only filled the date be-

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[12]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, November 22, 1925, p. 27; Day, Biography, p. 173.

[13]McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 82; Day, Biography, p. 175.

cause there seemed no way out of the contractual obligation.[14]

One final matter warrants consideration before leaving the topic of Will's early lecture-tour career. That concerns the humorist's relationship with his manager of three years, Charles Wagner. Wagner, in interviews that he granted to Homer Croy, harshly condemned the Oklahoman's personality and actions. He described how Will had cost him thousands of dollars by unilaterally cancelling tours in both 1928 and 1931 for what Wagner thought represented "self-advertising" reasons. In addition, after Will dropped the De Reszke Singers as part of his show in 1928, he proved hard to trace. He developed the habit of arriving for appearances "at the last moment" and frequently he darted on stage before dignitaries could introduce him. Wagner's problems worsened with the humorist's growing prominence. His evaluation of the comedian reeked with hostility: "But I must point out that Will was not all sunshine and jolliness, as so many people have portrayed him. He was the most temperamental, and hardest-to-deal-with star that I ever handled, and I have managed more than fifty of the biggest and most important stars who have ever performed in America. He was money mad."[15]

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[14]Day, Biography, pp. 176-177; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 190-191. Donald Day clarifies exactly when the Carnegia Hall appearance took place.

[15]Charles L. Wagner to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 191-192; Day, Biography, p. 207. It should be noted that Will cancelled his 1928 tour to fill in on Broadway for his critically injured friend, Fred Stone. Similar action in 1931 enabled Will to undertake a

The years 1925-1926 witnessed not only the development of Will's public lecture career, but also the expansion of his writing activities. He now received $1,000 each for his weekly syndicated articles. In June, 1925, arrangements evolved which eventually resulted in the McNaught Syndicate increasing this weekly salary to $1,300. The additional income represented remuneration for a daily column entitled, "The Worst Story I Heard Today." The "Worst Story" was a relatively short-lived effort--it ran from May 15, 1925, to January 15, 1927--which Will grew tired of quickly and gave up unexpectedly. McNaught had contracted with a number of papers to run the feature, so they continued it under Will's name until their obligation ended.[16]

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tour of the Midwest and South in an effort to raise money for flood victims. Wagner found it difficult to hold Will to his obligations since, as in the Ziegfeld days, the comedian still refused to sign contracts and relied on oral agreements. Charles L. Wagner to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 192. Wagner's experience with Will places Betty's following comment in somewhat of a different light: "Weeks ahead /before an emergency gallstone operation in 1927/ Will had promised to help /Occidental College raise money for new athletic fields by speaking at dinner at the Biltmore Hotel/, and he hated to let the sponsors down. He had never disappointed an audience before--when Will said he would come, he always did. It was a rule on which he prided himself." Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 211.

[16]Will Rogers, "The Worst Story I Heard Today," October 29, 1925, in the Rogers Manuscript Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 154-155; Letter from F. J. Murphy, treasurer of The McNaught Syndicate, Inc., to Will Rogers, June 22, 1925, and Statement of Payments for Will Rogers' Daily and Weekly Features from the McNaught Syndicate, January 20 to May 20, 1926, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 151-152; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 122, 151-154; Betty

"The Worst Story I Heard Today" contained opening comments in the Rogers style concerning some prominent person. The article concluded with a humorous story which Will credited to the celebrity. The series failed to create a high degree of humor, but some individual articles proved funny. One of the best concerned a "Doc Maurer" who could "cure you of anything." Will related how he had once visited the doctor with what seemed to be "appendicitis." The doctor cured the malady by gluing "three Mustard Plasters" on Will's stomach. He charged "a fee for one visit instead of a mortgage on the home for an operation" and the incident ended happily for all. Will concluded the piece by relating one of Maurer's stories which concerned an "Old Lady" patient who "started in with a long riga morole of things. He [the doctor] asked her to hold out her tongue. She did, and he kept writing and writing. When he finished he said, 'That Will do.' She said, 'Why Doctor, I held it out all that time, and you didn't even look at it.' 'I know I didn't. I only wanted you to keep it still while I wrote the prescription.'"[17]

Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 187-188; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 177-179; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 18. It should be noted that Homer Croy and Betty Rogers differ in their views concerning the origin of the "Worst Story" articles. See above citations for Croy and Betty Rogers.

[17]Will Rogers, "The Worst Story I Heard Today," October 29, 1925, in the Rogers Manuscript Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 154-155; Letter from F. J. Murphy, treasurer of The McNaught Syndicate, Inc., to Will Rogers, June 22, 1925, and Statement of Payments for Will Rogers' Daily and Weekly Features from the McNaught Syndicate, January 20 to May 20,

Another step in Will's writing career took place in the late spring of 1926. At that time, he wrote two lengthy articles for The Saturday Evening Post dealing with the general American scene. These pieces contained about 6,500 words each and were somewhat rough and awkward. Their quality stemmed from Will's failure to transfer his perfected short style found in the weekly columns which contained only 1,500 words each during this period, to a more extended format. The flaws in these features failed to hinder their popularity, however, and George Horace Lorimer, the Post's editor, offered Will a contract to produce several special articles while touring Europe as his correspondent. The idea of traveling and meeting famous people strongly appealed to Will and he enthusiastically accepted Lorimer's proposition. The trip, he believed, would prove entertaining and, in addition, provide excellent material for his syndicated newspaper column.[18]

The European trip and preparation of the Post articles presented a challenge for Will. He prepared for the task carefully by acquiring

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1926, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 151-152; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 122, 151-154; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 187-188; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 177-179; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 18.

[18]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 172-174; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 200; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 188; Will Rogers, "My Rope and Gum for a Democratic Issue," Saturday Evening Post, CXCVIII May 1, 1926, pp. 3-4, 201-202, 205-206; Will Rogers, "Florida Versus California," Saturday Evening Post, CXCVIII May 29, 1926, pp. 10-11, 70, 72; Day, Biography, p. 196.

letters of introduction to prominent Europeans from Charles G. Dawes, Congressman Sol Bloom and Alice Roosevelt Longworth among others. He headed the series, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," and created a humorous air of supposed suspense by employing the fabricated code-like signature of WILLROGER."[19] Will later claimed that the trip originated through a telepathic understanding he had with President Coolidge who "needed a foreign Diplomat that could really go in and dip. . . ."[20]

The "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President" series warrants careful consideration because it contained some of Will's lengthiest pieces and therefore reflected a fuller development of his philosophy than many of his shorter efforts. The European odyssey began with what shortly became a classic bit of Rogers humor. This centered around Will's predicated difficulties in acquiring a passport:

> Well, I said I should like to get a Passport to go to Europe: 'Here is the application and here is an affadavid that someone that we know will have to swear that they know of your birth and you will have to produce your Birth Certificate.'
>
> Well, I told here Lady I have no birth certificate; and as for someone here in New York that was present by my birth and can swear to it, I am afraid that will be rather difficult.

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[19]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX July 24, 1926, pp. 10, 126; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 200-201.

[20]Will Rogers, Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1926), p. xiv.

'Havent you somebody here that was there?' she asked. You know the old-time Lady's of which I am a direct descendant. They were of a rather modest and retiring nature, and being born was rather a private affair, and not a public function.

I have no one here in New York that witnessed that historical event, and I doubt very much if even in Oklahoma I could produce any great amount of witnesses. My Parents are dead, Our old Family Doctor, bless his old heart, is no more. So what would you advise that I do? Will it be necessary for me to be born again, and just what procedure would you advise for me doing do? I remember Billy Sunday /a well-known revivalist of the time/ once remarking to us just before a collection that 'we must be born again.' I dident take it so literally until now. Billy had evidently been to Europe. You see, in the early days of the Indian Territory where I was born there was no such thing as birth certificates. You being there was certificate enough. We generally took it for granted if you were there you must have at some time been born. In fact that is about the only thing we dident dispute. While you were going through the trouble of getting a birth certificate you could be raising another child in that time.

Having a certificate of being born was like wearing a raincoat in the water over a bathing suit. I have no doubt if my folks had had the least premonition at my birth that I would some day wander beyond any further than a cow can stray, they would have made provisions for a proof of birth. The only place we ever had to get a Passport from in those days was to go into Kansas. And I looked to have the average amount of intelligence of a child of my age and they knew that I would never want to go to Kansas.[21]

The lighthearted introduction to Will's European travels was balanced by some serious observations about local and international affairs. Traveling through England, Italy, Ireland, Russia and many other continental nations brought forth definite feelings from the columnist concerning a variety of topics which included European governmental systems and leaders, the nature and avoidability of war and the question of

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[21]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX July 10, 1926, p. 54.

active American participation in the international community. The humorist's glowing evaluation of the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, probably remains the most surprising and interesting portion of his travelogue to contemporary Americans. Will, like many of his countrymen, formed a favorable impression of Il Duce because of the efficiency introduced by the Italian leader. He registered special approval of Mussolini's ability to "put everybody in Italy to work" and create a society where one failed to notice "a single beggar on the street." The technique of waging war against political opponents with "'Castor Oil'" constituted another positive development since it exemplified a facility for engaging in conflict with "'fine discrimination'" as opposed to "'brute Force alone.'" Italy's "No Strike plan" based on a large "Trust" which consisted of "a Corporation" made up of "Labor, Capital and the Government" also brought favorable comment from Will since it prohibited both strikes and lock-outs. Mussolini's accomplishments impressed the cowboy-philosopher so much that he even justified his military dictatorship. The Post's special correspondent in Europe thought that Italy's ruler represented "the man that has done more for one race of people in three years than any man living ever did; A Napoleon, but with peace," and "the only idealist that ever could make it work."[22]

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[22]Ibid., CXCIC July 31, 1926, p. 82; July 24, 1926, pp. 10, 130; August 28, 1926, pp. 16, 17, 123, 124, 126; October 2, 1926, pp. 6-7, 170-173; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 188-189; Day, Biography, pp. 184-189; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr.,

Will's reaction to the Communist experiment in the Soviet Union contrasted sharply with his evaluation of Italian Fascism; he did not like Stalin's Russia. He viewed critically the Communists' know-it-all attitude toward all problems, their enthusiastic support of artistic projects while people starved, the lack of freedom in Soviet schools and society in general, the slovenliness of the Russian Army, the cult of Lenin and its attendant repression of traditional religions, the spending of money to attract outside investors while suffering gripped the Russian masses, the international revolutionary activities of the Comintern, and the general failure of the new system to function successfully. Will's harshest attacks against Russia's new government centered on the regime's brutal suppression of all opposition and the general poverty of the people. He saw the Communist oppression as being so severe that "what they needed in their Government was more of a sense of humor and less of a sense of revenge." And poverty, as always, caused him concern: "You see a great deal of poverty among the people along the streets, a great many ragged little children begging. 'Course, you can see these things in lots of cities besides Russian ones, but it's worse there."[23]

April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 90; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 90.

[23]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX November 6, 1926, pp. 233, 229, 230, 234; December 4, 1926, pp. 6-7, 222, 226, 230.

The trip to Europe in 1926 reinforced Will's unromantic view of international affairs and war. He informed his Post readers that he opposed military conflict since the destruction inherent in war made it apparent that armed hostilities represented "the only game in the world where there is absolute no winner--everybody loses."[24] Nevertheless, the humorist remained realistic concerning international affairs and the unlikely prospect of achieving world peace and disarmament. Human nature combined with the geographic proximity of the European nations and their military vulnerability to each other represented the basis upon which this evaluation rested: "Between you and I, there ain't any of them [the European nations] got any use for the other one, and you can't blame 'em for looking out after themselves. . . . There is a lot of things talk good in a speech, but you come to working it out when you are up against hundreds of years of previous wars and hatreds, she don't pan out."[25]

Will's candid view of war's destructive nature, and Europe's inability to avoid further holocost, convinced him that America should follow an isolationist policy. Bitterness over the European countries' unwillingness to pay their war debts to the United States and failure to

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[24]Ibid., CXCIX October 2, 1926, p. 170.

[25]Ibid., CXCIX August 28, 1926, p. 125; July 17, 1926, p. 7; October 2, 1926, pp. 7, 170, 173. See also the interview with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers, p. 60.

"conscientiously appreciate" America's contribution in World War I were important factors in developing his line of thought. The hostility which European nations projected toward the United States concerning the war debts and America's contribution to the war effort threw Will into a frenzy of indignation: "If a few millions of dollars is going to part our friendship, why, the friendship was never very deep. . . . I could have prevented this whole debt argument, and all this hatred would never have come up. I WOULDENT HAVE LET THEM HAD THE MONEY IN THE FIRST PLACE!" The cowboy-humorist summed up his feelings with an isolationist plea to President Coolidge: "All we have to do to get in bad is just to start out on what we think is a good-Smaritan mission, and we wind up in the Pesthouse. . . . Will you please get all organizations and people belonging to them to stay at home and just for the novelty of the thing tend to our own business for a while?"[26]

The "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President" became one of the most successful series that the Post ran during the 1920's. The poignant Rogers style forced the magazine's editors to censor his material in much the same way that the McNaught Syndicate dealt with his newspaper articles. This caused no great difficulty, however, and Will continued to write sporadically for the Post.[27]

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[26]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX October 2, 1926, p. 173.

[27]John William Tabbel, George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1928), p. 145; Col-

Will's trip to Europe constituted a period of unbelievable productivity. He wrote the Post articles, his weekly syndicated column, and the daily "Worst Story" series, in addition to vacationing with his family. Such a schedule would have exhausted most people; it only stimulated Will. Once in Europe, he launched into a number of new business activities.[28] While in London during the summer of 1926, the comedian made a motion picture, "Tip Toes," appeared on the radio, and performed in the Cochran "Revue", England's equivalent of the "Follies," for four weeks. The latter engagement caused somewhat of a stir when some critics attacked their American guest for his aggressive attitude toward world affairs. Such criticism represented a minority position, however, and most observers viewed Will's efforts favorably. His presence gave a lift to the Cochran "Revue" and when he refused a $16,000 check for his services English theatre-goers responded with appreciation and accolades.[29]

Perhaps the least publicized portion of the European escapade was

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lins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 6, 194-195.

[28]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 188.

[29]Ibid., pp. 188, 189, 192-196; N. A., "Will Rogers in London," Literary Digest, XC August 28, 1926, p. 22; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 208; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 193; Day, Biography, pp. 184-189. It should be noted that Harold Keith creates the false impression that Will went to England primarily to make the motion picture, "Tip Toes." Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 193.

a series of one-reel travelogue films which Will made for an independent company. The pictures depicted his visits to various countries and each scene's caption recorded the humorist's reaction. The series, entitled, Strolling Through Europe with Will Rogers, included "Will Rogers in Dublin," "Will Rogers in Holland," "Will Rogers in Paris," "Hunting for Germans in Berlin," "Through Switzerland and Baveria," "Will Rogers in London," "Roaming the Emerald Isles," "Prowling Around France," "Winging Around Europe," "Exploring England," "Reeling Down the Rhine," and "Over the Bounding Blue." "Will Rogers in Paris" illustrated the point that in these productions, as with everything else the humorist did, he could not separate his philosophy from his satire. The two went hand in hand. The subtitles without the pictures fall short of the original production, but they still communicate Will's basic ideas. The following captions illustrated the cowboy-philosopher's hostility toward France over the question of war debts and the degree of America's contribution to the Allied war effort: "Well, folks, here we-all are in 'Gay Paree,' but 'count of the Frency custom of throwing rocks at American tourists I'm going to disguise myself as a 'Frog;'" "This chateau on the right is the Cafe de la Paix (pay)--and if you are an American, you will;" "First, I'll show you the most thrilling spot in Paris--the place where Americans go every day to see if their friends back home have cabled the money."[30]

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[30]Will Rogers, "Will Rogers in Paris," cited in P. J. O'Brien,

The most important event in Will's foreign journey took place in late July. Adolph S. Ochs, publisher of the New York Times, and an admirer, had talked with the comedian before he sailed for England. Ochs told Will to cable collect any material that struck his fancy which the Times might be able to use. This arrangement produced a cablegram which appeared in the Times on July 29, 1926: "Nancy Astor, which is the nom de plume of Lady Astor, is arriving on your side about now. She is the best friend America has here. Please ask my friend Jimmie Walker to have New York take good care of her. She is the only one here that don't throw rocks at American tourists. Yours respectfully, WILL ROGERS." The public responded favorably to Will's comment and the Times calbed the Oklahoman and requested a daily contribution. Larry Winship, an editor for the Boston Globe, saw the despatches and asked the McNaught Syndicate if the Globe could use them. Frank Murphy of the McNaught organization contacted the Times and received a negative answer. The Gotham paper took the position that Will's cables belonged to it, exclusively.[31]

Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 77-78; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 213; Trent, My Cousin, p. 244; Day, Biography, p. 180; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 203-204; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 207. There is a discrepancy between David Milsten and Homer Croy concerning the number of travelogues which Will made at this time. Since both men present questionable information concerning this period in Will's life, evaluation becomes eclectic. See above citations for Milsten and Croy.

[31]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 179-181; Collins, "Writer and Jour-

The McNaught Syndicate, realizing the potential of Will's daily telegrams, reached him by mail in Europe. They proposed a new contract which would enable him to substitute his daily comments on contemporary events for the "Worst Story" series. Will responded favorably and on October 15, 1926, the first syndicated daily column, under the famous "Will Rogers Says" caption, appeared throughout the country. The new arrangement provided that Will's weekly salary be increased to $1,700. The Syndicate's confidence in the daily piece was justified; 92 papers subscribed to it immediately.[32]

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nalist," p. 156; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 193; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 150-151; Day, Biography, p. 184; Love, The Will Rogers Book, pp. 18-20. It should be noted that Betty Rogers takes the position that there was no agreement between Ochs and Will concerning the first daily wire as described above. In doing so, she disagrees with both Homer Croy and Reba Collins. See above citations for Betty Rogers, Croy and Collins. A third version of this incident is related by A. H. Sulzberger of the New York Times in Folks Say of Will Rogers. See above citation for Folks Say of Will Rogers.

[32]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 155-157; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 181; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 194; Love, The Will Rogers Book, pp. 20-21. Reba Collins points out that much of the misunderstanding which exists concerning the origin of Will's daily column probably started with an interview Charles B. Driscoll, editor for the McNaught Syndicate at the time of the cowboy-philosopher's death, gave to the Associated Press in August of 1935. A copy of Driscolls' comments appeared in the Tulsa Daily World on August 18, 1935. Similar misleading information can be found in Mayer Berger's, The Story of the New York Times and P. J. O'Brien's, Will Rogers: Ambassador of Good Will; Prince of Wit and Wisdom. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 94-96. L. H. Robbins suggests that "40,000,000" people eventually read Will's daily column religiously. L. H. Robbins, "Portrait of an American Philosopher," New York Times, Magazine Section, November 3, 1935, p. 4.

The daily articles varied in length from 150 to 200 words, and took on the characteristics of an editorial. They usually ended with a signature of either "Yours, Will Rogers," or "Will." The "daily," as Will liked to call his new column, varied from paper to paper as had its weekly predecessor.[33] Some papers employed the heading "Will Rogers Says," some changed the spelling of the final word to "Sez," and still others used topical headlines. Many papers utilized a syndicate- supplied stamp with Will's signature on it to end each article to attract attention. The daily articles quickly became Will's "favorite medium" of expression.[34] As this happened, the humorist lost interest in the weekly piece and would have dropped it a number of times except for the exortations of the McNaught officials. His work load continually increased during these years and, as a result, the burdensome Sunday articles oftentimes represented a mere summary of the dailies.[35]

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[33]Beatty, "Betty Holds the Reins," p. 114; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 158; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 98.

[34]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 194; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 158.

[35]Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 31, 1970; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 139. Some difference in opinion exists concerning whether or not Will ever missed sending his daily articles. Betty Rogers takes the position that Will "never missed a newspaper deadline," while Homer Croy states that Will failed to get his daily piece off several times while traveling around the isolated portions of the world. Croy notes, however, that when conditions prevented Will from getting a cablegram to the Syndicate, the McNaught editors simply pieced "parts of two or three old

The writing and filing of the "daily" frequently developed into a harrowing experience for Will and his associates. He regularly waited until the last minute to begin composing, and consequently, worked wherever he found himself. Oftentimes, the back of his car served as an office. He wrote on a small typewriter which rested upon his knees. The prose flowed easily sometimes, but came with extreme difficulty at others. If time allowed, he would try his material on someone and modify it if they reacted unfavorably. Many days the Syndicate received a telegram on time only because Will or some designated messenger had made a mad, last minute dash to a telegraph office.[36]

Will's tour of Europe during the spring and summer of 1926 was a great success. The Rogers family returned to America on the Leviathan during late September and early October. On October 10th, the world-traveler greeted his newspaper audience with a statement which helped to explain how he could criticize so much in American society and still remain a nationalist: "Well, I am back in Cuckooland, I am not going to pull the old gag about 'America looks pretty good to me.'

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personal telegrams together." Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 24; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 182-183. One can logically assume that Croy is probably correct on this point.

[36]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 23; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 24; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 177-178; N. A., "The Cowboy Philosopher," New Republic, LXXXIV August 28, 1935, p. 62; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 95-96; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 184, 194-195.

It don't look good it looks 'Perfect.' We are better off than any nation. . . . Just looking at it fresh like I am now after being used to those others over there, why she looks pretty near good enough to live in."[37] Shortly after arriving home, Will contacted the White House and asked for an appointment with the President so that he could make his diplomatic report. An invitation to visit Coolidge soon arrived by wire.[38]

A lecture tour followed Will's meeting with the President. It ended early enough in December to give the Rogers family a shopping holiday in New York before they returned to California for Christmas. When their train arrived in the Los Angeles terminal, a celebration was taking place. Will left the passenger car to find himself enguifed by a group of enthusiastic friends who had decided to make him the Honorary Mayor of Beverly Hills. Placards held by the jubilant crowd read, "The Kiddies Pal" and "The Dog's Best Friend."[39] A parade whisked the cowboy-philosopher down Wilshire Boulevard to a platform errected near his home in Beverly Hills. There he received his appointment, had his photograph taken with members of the police and fire departments and made a brief unaugural statement. He said in part: "I am by no means the first Comedian Mayor. . . . That seems to be the one requirement

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[37]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, October 17, 1926, p. 24; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 204; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 209; Day, Biography, p. 181.

[38]Day, Biography, p. 193. [39]Ibid., pp. 200, 195, 197.

of a Mayor. . . . I have never seen a Mayor that wasent funny, and the minute he puts on a Silk Hat he becomes Screamingly Funny. . . . I may make a good Mayor. . . . I have tried everything else. . . . I am what you call 'Groping in the Dark,' and I am reaching for everything. . . ."[40]

In January, 1927, Will started another cross country lecture tour. This series ran through the early summer. As he neared the end of the circuit, the comedian began to suffer from intermittent but increasingly severe stomach pains. The first serious attack occurred in Bluefield, West Virginia, and was followed several weeks later by a second seizure in Claremore. After the pain subsided, Will enjoyed a short stay with the home folks and then resumed his rail trip to California. A third paralyzing attack struck him the last night on the train and he arrived home in extreme discomfort. When normal medication failed to bring relief, Doctors P. G. White and Clarence Moore were called to examine him. Their prognosis suggested possible gallstones and they advised an immediate operation. Will told the story from this point in two colorful articles he wrote for Post: "Then he [Dr. White] turned and exclaimed with a practiced and well-subdued enthusiasm, 'It's the Gall Bladder--just what I was afraid of.' Now you all know what the word

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[40]Ibid., p. 200; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 215-216; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 205-207; Trent, My Cousin, p. 197. Since Will's handwritten statement possessed no punctuation, it was felt necessary to insert periods in this quotation for the sake of clarity.

'afraid of,' when spoken by a doctor, lead to. It leads to more calls." Will entered Swedish Lutheran Hospital for surgery and graphically related his impression of the operating room: "There was a kind of a little balcony up above the operating-room where people with a well developed sense of humor could sit and see other people cut up." The operation disclosed that Will's difficulty came from a blockage in the main duct leading from the liver rather than gallstones. He became seriously ill when the stoppage reacted slowly to the corrective surgery: "I dident have sense enough to know it, but I was in pretty bad shape, for this drain was over two days and nights showing up. Well, the doctors slept right there at the hospital. They were trying everything from glucose to Murphy's Drip. As bad as I felt, I could tell that something wasn't breaking just right. . . . Finally, it showed up. Doctor Moore got one look and shouted, 'If I was a drinking man I would try some of my own prescriptions tonight.'"[41] The crisis passed, but the clogged duct continued to pour poison into Will's system and he remained very ill with a high temperature. Recovery came only gradually and after his sister, Sallie, had been summoned from Oklahoma. Few realized

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[41]Will Rogers, "A Hold in One," Saturday Evening Post, CC November 12, 1927, p. 7; November 5, 1927, pp. 6-7, 72, 74; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 215-217; Day, Biography, pp. 203, 210-211. Mayme Obet Peak in her unpublished article, "Will Rogers: America's Court Jester," incorrectly states that Will's illness was caused by an "appendicitis" attack. Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 13. Homer Croy believes that Will suffered from stomach pains long before the attack in Bluefield, West Virginia. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 215-216.

the gravity of his illness since he had written his daily and weekly articles early, thinking that he might become incapacitated for a while. He never missed a deadline during this period.[42]

Will's slow recuperation required that he stay at home and rest during the summer of 1927. In August, he received news that the State Legislature had deposed him as Mayor of Beverly Hills through a technical manuver. This development got nationwide press coverage and the National Press Club in Washington, D. C., responded by facetiously electing the Oklahoman as United States Congressman-at-Large. On the way to the Capitol to attend a formal induction dinner, the Ex-Mayors Association caught Will at Union Station and added to his political laurals by electing him president of their organization. Will received his appointment as Congressman-at-Large with traditional Rogers' satire. "More Congressmen have talked themselves," he stated in his inaugural statement, "out of a job than ever talked themselves into one. . . . I certainly have lived, or tried to live my life so that I would never become a Congressman, and I am just as ashamed of the fact I failed. . . ."[43]

The return of his health allowed Will to make a motion picture during the fall of 1927--"The Texas Steer." This was the cowboy-philo-

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[42]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 212-213; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 217; Day, Biography, p. 211.

[43]Day, Biography, p. 212; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 216.

sopher's last silent film and, like those that had preceeded it, "The Texas Steer" was only moderately successful. With work commitments filled, Will planned to take a short vacation during the late fall of 1927. These plans vanished when a communication arrived from Dwight Morrow, America's newly appointed Ambassador to Mexico, asking Will to engage in a goodwill tour of Mexico with the recently returned "Lone Eagle" of the Atlantic, Charles Lindbergh. This opportunity to meet prominent men appealed to Will and he accepted the invitation.[44]

Will reported his Mexican visit in the newspapers and also in a series of five articles that appeared in the Saturday Evening Post some six months later during May and June of 1928. The Post articles once again provided the most satisfactory source concerning the humorist's thought during this period because their extended length allowed a more extensive development of his philosophy.[45]

The trip to Mexico offered excellent grist for Will's commentary and included visits with Dwight Morrow, Charles Lindbergh, General Obregon, President Callas, a flight with "The Lone Eagle" and an extensive train trip through the countryside with many of Mexico's political leaders. As Will traveled throughout Mexico and talked with it's

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[44]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 217-218; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 213, 215; Day, Biography, pp. 216, 219; Day, Autobiography, p. 146.

[45]Day, Autobiography, p. 146.

people, he began to voice criticism of powerful nations' imperialistic exploitation of less advantaged nation's natural resources without just compensation. Will had no time for America's "Colossus of the North" attitude toward her southern neighbors and the traditional diplomat, who, unlike the capable Dwight Morrow, gauged "his results by how successful his dinners turned out."[46] He singled out United States military intervention in foreign nations for an especially blistering attack.

He particularly criticized General John J. Pershing's 1917 sortie into Mexico after Pancho Villa. Since America's traditional "calling card to Mexico or Central America had been a gunboat or a bunch of Violets shaped like Marines, Will's negative reaction concerning his country's response to the Pershing expedition developed because most citizens "couldent figure out why they [the Mexicans] dident appreciate the fact that they had been shot in the most cordial manner possible. . . ." The 1917 difficulty originated when the Mexicans "got to passing laws, what they could do with their own lands and their own Natural resources" without consulting the United States.[47]

The Pershing expedition into Mexico still aggravated Will, but the continued existence of American Marines in Nicaragua absolutely incensed

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[46]Will Rogers, "More Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CC May 19, 1928, pp. 11, 10, 108, 109, 110; June 2, 1928, pp. 173-174; June 9, 1928, pp. 18-19, 40, 42.

[47]Ibid., CC May 12, 1928, p. 4.

him. He failed to understand how the United States could assume responsibility for holding "'Moral' elections" in a foreign nation when corruption characterized so many facets of its own political process. This reasoning led to the startling suggestion that Marines be sent to Chicago in order to end that city's election irregularities: "We took 'em [U. S. Marines] into Mexico, Haiti, and Nicaragua, and let's don't make any exception with Chicago just because it's bigger." Will's analysis of the Nicaraguan situation led him to make a caustic plea for withdrawal: "Who was the Guy that figured out the way for us to go in there in the first place? Get him; he must be kinder original. So see if he can't think of some unique excuse to get us out like he did to get us in."[48]

Once started on his vendeta against American imperialism, Will expanded his attacks to include the Far East and America's failure to live up to its promise to grant the Philippines independence: "I thought we was going to give 'em [the Philippines] up soon as they was ready for independence. How can you tell when anybody is ready for independence? Can't judge by us."[49]

The blistering criticism which Will levied against American aggression in his Post articles acquired added validity when he refused to

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[48]Ibid., CC May 26, 1928, pp. 173-174; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 204.

[49]Will Rogers, "More Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CC May 12, 1928, p. 198.

simply assume the role of an iconoclast, but went on to suggest positive alternatives to the conditions he assaulted. Will believed that America could improve its image in Latin America and continue to make money there by engaging in constructive economic activities that would not only produce profits, but also aid the region's people. "That's the way to get to understand all our neighbors on the south--," he summed up, "do it with Engineers and Road builders and our fine Doctors."[50]

The mid 1920's witnessed the dramatic expansion of Will's writing activities, movie career and the development of his public lecture tours. As his popularity continued to grow, the cowboy-philosopher had increasingly assumed the characteristics of a major social and political critic who exposed what he saw as inequalities and inefficiency on the domestic scene, and criticized what he believed represented American mistakes in foreign affairs. More and more he sided with the weak and disadvantaged against the powerful and wealthy forced in society. As he did so, vast numbers of Americans found themselves attracted by his human empathy, realistic candor and unashamed honesty. Will Rogers, whether he realized it or not, was quickly becoming a great American folk hero in the established democratic-republican tradition of his people, nation and hemisphere.

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[50]Ibid., CC May 26, 1928, p. 173.

CHAPTER IX

Radio Performing and Writing

> 'I [Robert E. Sherwood] certainly did run Will Rogers for President in 1928, when I was still editor of Life. . . . He named it "'The Anti-Bunk Party.'". . . We distributed thousands of campaign buttons with Will's picture and the party slogan, "'He Chews to Run'" . . . .[1]

The 1920's represented an era in which Will became involved in an increasing number of mass medias. One area of endeavor which he entered during this period and which has not been previously mentioned was radio broadcasting. Will's initial involvement over the airways came early in the decade and proved a trying experience. He broadcast from an isolated studio with the famous Graham McNamee as his announcer. After introducing the humorist, McNamee stepped behind him in order to avoid creating any distraction. Will experienced difficulty in getting his monologue going and began looking back over his shoulder at McNamee in an agitated fashion. The latter soon realized that Will needed an audience by which to gauge his timing, so he moved to the front of the studio where the cowboy-philosopher could view his reactions. This

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[1]Robert E. Sherwood to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 232.

maneuver brought the desired result as Will regained his composure and moved into a humorous presentation.[2]

After his first tortuous experience in an isolated broadcasting room, Will decided that he needed to perform before a live audience. Thereafter he always tried to arrange for a studio full of people when broadcasting over the radio. This technique proved successful and the humorist cautiously increased his radio involvement. Nevertheless, he never felt fully comfortable with this media. Betty Rogers described this feeling when she wrote: "Will always insisted on an audience in the studio, but even so, it wasn't quite the same. He had to talk into the microphone and he couldn't tell whether the people listening in were getting it or not. . . . He was never quite happy with radio, although he was one of the very few on the air who submitted to no censorship."[3]

The radio offered Will another chance to expand his career and he hesitantly grasped the opportunity by becoming one of the early pioneers in the field. In 1925, he headed a group of star-studded entertainers who performed before the annual meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters. The show's nationwide broadcast represented the largest

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[2]Day, Biography, pp. 123-124; Trent, My Cousin, p. 186; McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 83. Eddie Cantor takes credit for having introduced Will to radio work. This claim must be critically evaluated. Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 140.

[3]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 181-182; McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 83; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 93.

such presentation up to that time in the history of American radio. The year 1927 saw Will taking part in a special program for the National Broadcasting Company along with Mary Garden. Both performers received the unprecedented fee of $25,000, or $250 per minute for their services. Will made radio history again in January of 1928 when he took part in a transcontinental broadcast which connected the four geographic corners of the United States in one program. The cowboy-philosopher broadcast from Hollywood while the other participants included Fred and Dorothy Stone in Chicago, Al Jolson in New Orleans and Paul Whitman and his orchestra in New York. The program represented "one of the most ambitious feats" attempted up to that time in broadcasting and cost and "estimated $1,000 a minute."[4]

The nationwide broadcast in which Will took part from Hollywood during January of 1928 embroiled him in a controversy which resulted from his mimicking Calvin Coolidge. Graham McNamee introduced Will to the radio audience and announced that the humorist was speaking from his home in Beverly Hills. Will began by commenting on a number of random topics and then informed his listeners that he had a friend who wished to say a few words. At this point, the humorist raised the pitch of his voice to resemble President Coolidge's New England twang and

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[4]New York Times, January 5, 1928, p. 1; August 21, 1927, section VII, p. 5; August 27, 1927, p. 19; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 212; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 141-142.

made a somewhat lengthy statement which included disparaging comments concerning the Congress, dishonesty in government, American policy in Nicaragua and Prohibitions as follows:

> Mellon [Andrew Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury] has saved some money, for the country, and done very well for himself. . . . He is the only Treasurer that has saved faster than Congress could divide it up. . . . Congress is here now though to grab what he has got. . . . It would have been cheaper to have sent each Congressman and Senator his pro rata share and saved the expense of holding this Congress. . . .
>
> Just a few words on the public issues of the day. . . . They wouldn't seat two Republican Senators. . . . The Democrats dident mind them buying their seats but it was the price they paid. . . . It would establish a price that would have made it prohibitive for a Democrat to even get standing room much less a seat in the Senate. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> . . . Nicaragua, we are still having a little trouble down there, but I think we will gradually get it all Burried. . . . Prohibition, prohibition is going down about as well as usual. . . .[5]

Will's impersonation proved so good that many people thought the President had actually been speaking. A great deal of criticism flooded the White House. The humorist had always liked Coolidge and became unhappy over the unexpected turn of events. If any antagonisms developed between the two men over the incident, it ended soon.[6]

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[5]Day, Biography, pp. 225-226; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 169-170. It should be noted that Betty Rogers mistakenly states that this broadcast took place in 1927. See previous citation.

[6]Day, Biography, pp. 226-227; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 169; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 155. Betty Rogers deemphasized the President's unhappiness over this incident while several sources take the position that Coolidge did not get angry at all. Betty Rogers, see above citation; Butterfield, "Legend," p. 82; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 185-186; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 140.

A second unusual development, in addition to the Coolidge controversy, occurred in 1928. During his winter lecture tour, Will appeared before three thousand Cherokee Indians in North Carolina. The Cherokees listened in their stoic fashion to the humorist's presentation and responded enthusiastically to his repertoire of rope tricks. At this point, and without warning, Will launched into a three minute tirade against the white man's abuse of the American Indian. The scene ended when the crowd's silence was pierced by a single ravaging war cry which immediately swelled to a crescendo of a thousand voices. As hysteria gripped the audience, Will "stood, white, trembling, and actually aghast at himself." His transformation had been "terrifying" and his "furious" anger shocked not only those in attendance, but the humorist himself. Evidently bitter memories of the ostracism and feelings of inferiority he had experienced early in life because of his Indian heritage remained imbedded in his personality. One observer of the bizarre incident, Ben Dixon MacNeil, reported: "But instinct, the sudden preeminence of his Indian blood, it must have been."[7]

The late twenties witnessed a continuing expansion of Will's activities. Involvement in radio broadcasting constituted one facet of this growth, while extension of his writing represented another. Will had

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[7]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 116-117; Donald Day, in his Biography, recounts this incident, but he twists MacNeil's observations to some extent. Day, Biography, pp. 227-228.

authored three books earlier in his career: Rogersisms, The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition (1919), Rogersisms, The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference (1919), and The Illiterate Digest (1924). The late twenties saw three more titles added to the list of Rogers' publications. All of these volumes basically represented collections of articles which the humorist had previously written for the Saturday Evening Post. The list included Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President (1926), There's Not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts (1927) and Ether and Me, or 'Just Relax' (1929). The first two books generally consisted of articles written during Will's trip to Europe for Post in 1926, while Ether and Me represented the comedian's description of his 1927 gall bladder operation.[8]

Will's latter publications received favorable public reception and enjoyed reasonable success. A few reviewers however, did assail his work. For example, F. P. Adams' analysis of Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President in The New York World projected disgust with the cowboy-philosopher's "obvious" and "impudent" views. "It is as though," Adams concluded, "somebody had told Rogers, who is

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[8]Trent, My Cousin, p. 245; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 207; Day, Autobiography, p. 131; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 233, 239-240; Day, Biography, p. 211. Linda Hodges Nelson incorrectly states that "'The Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President' were the first of the daily wires which Will supplied to newspapers throughout the United States." This represents only one of many mistakes in Nelson's work. Linda H. Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," p. 40.

simple and naive, that he was a great satirist; and as though he began to take himself too seriously."[9] Such derisive comments were more than balanced by favorable evaluations such as John Carter's review of Letters for The New York Times Book Review. "America has never produced anybody quite like him," Carter stated, "and there has rarely been an American humorist whose words produced less empty laughter and sober thought."[10] Reba N. Collins, who did more work on the critical reaction to Will's later works than anyone else, emphasized the positive response they enjoyed: "For every adverse criticism found in periodicals and newspapers during Rogers' lifetime [concerning his books], dozens of favorable ones could be cited--this with no effort at selectivity on the part of the researcher." Those who criticized Will's later volumes, as with his earlier works, generally attacked the impotency of his writing style in comparison with the dynamic nature of his stage presentations.[11]

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[9]F. P. Adams, The New York World, October 31, 1926, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 229.

[10]John Carter, "Will Rogers Takes His Lariat to Europe," The New York Times Book Review, October 31, 1926, section III, p. 2; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 228.

[11]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 229-230. The following reviews of Will's books may prove of interest. Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President: Gilbert Sedes, "Satire, Death of . . ." The New Republic, XLIX January 5, 1927, p. 193; The Los Angeles Record, December 9, 1926; Archibald Cory Coolidge, "A Self-Appointed Diplomat" Saturday Review of Literature, III December 25, 1926, p. 456. There's Not a Bathing Suit in Russia & Other Bare Facts: Edwin H. Blanchard, The New York Sun, May 28, 1927; The Herald-Tribune (New York), July 10, 1927; The Saturday Review of Literature,

Furthermore, during the late 1920's Will wrote a number of book introductions. He wrote these pieces as favors for close friends and as a civic service. Their length and quality varied. The books for which Will wrote introductions included: Charles M. Russell, Trails Plowed Under (1927) and Good Medicine (1929); Chester Byers, Ropin, Trick and Fancy (1928); Beverly Hills Woman's Club, Fashions in Foods in Beverly Hills (1926); Wiley Post and Harold Gatty, Around the World in Eight Days (1921); Courtney Ryley Cooper, Annie Oakley, Woman at Arms (1927); Eddie Cantor, My Life Is In Your Hands (1928); and Karl K. Kitchen, Pleasure--If Possible (1928). Some of Will's book introductions represented short statements of less than 200 words while others were twice as long or more. His best effort in this activity, and one which represented a classic example of the human emotion and empathy which led so many people to become Rogers' devotees, was his introduction to Charles Russell's, Trails Plowed Under. Russell's western paintings and writings established him second only to the great Frederick Remington as a frontier artist. Will respected Russell greatly and he eagerly accepted the challenge of introducing his friend's posthumous

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III May 28, 1927, p. 869; New York Times , June 26, 1927, section III, p. 11; The Specatator (London, England), September 3, 1927. Ether and Me or 'Just Relax': The Herald-Tribune (New York), September 8, 1929; The Los Angeles Times, July 14, 1929; The Saturday Review of Literature, V July 13, 1929, p. 1181. All the reviews mentioned are cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 227-241, passim. The content of Will's later books is not discussed here since they have been previously considered in the chronological narrative.

work. Will's comments assumed the form of a personal letter to the departed Russell and contained the following sentiments:

> There aint much news here to tell you, You know the big Boss gent sent a hand over and got you so quick Charley, But I guess He needed a good man pretty bad, I hear they been a working shorthanded over there pretty much all the time, I guess its hard for Him to get hold of good men, they are just getting scarce everywhere. . . . I bet you hadent been up there three days til you had out your old Pencil an was a drawing something funny about some of their old punchers. . . . I bet you Mark Twain and old Bill Nye, and Whitcomb Riley and a whole bunch of those old Joshers was just a waiting for you to pop in with all the latest ones, What kind of a Bird is Washington and Jefferson, I bet they are regular fellows when you meet em aint they? most big men are. I would like to see that bunch that is gathered around you the first time you tell the one about putting the Limberger Cheese in the old Nester's Whiskers, Dont tell that Charley til you get Lincoln around you, he would love that, I bet you and him kinder throw in together when you get well acquainted, Darn it when I get to thinkin about all them Top Hands up there, If I could just hold a Horse wrangling job with em, I wouldent mind following that wagon myself.
>
> . . .
>
> You will run onto my old Dad up there Charley, For he was a real Cowhand and bet he is running a wagon, and you will pop into some well kept ranch house under some cool shady trees and you will be asked to have dinner, and it will be the best one you ever had in your life, Well, when you are thanking the women folks, You just tell the sweet looking little old lady that you know her boy back on an outfit you used to rep for, and tell the daughters that you knew their brother, and if you see a cute looking little rascal running around there kiss him for me. . . .
>
> Course we are just hanging on here as long as we can, I dont know why we hate to go, we know its better there, Maybe its because we havent done anything that will live after we are gone.
>
> from your old friend,
> WILL [12]

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[12]Charles M. Russell, Trails Plowed Under (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1927), Introduction by Will Rogers, pp. xv-xvii, passim.;

Will's personal life as well as his career grew and changed during the middle and late 1920's. In attempting to remodel the Beverly Hills home contractors found that termites had infiltrated the whole house. Will then decided to build a new house on a ranch plot he had acquired in the Santa Monica Valley. This decision came in late 1927 and the family moved to the ranch, where Will had always secretly wanted to live, in 1928.[13] The Santa Monica Ranch became a dreamland as Will developed it over the years. He bought adjoining land and expanded the original 100-acre tract until the ranch eventually consisted of about 300 acres. The site commanded "a beautiful view of the Pacific Ocean, Santa Monica Bay and far-off Catalina Island." The Rogers' new home originally consisted of "three small bedrooms, one great big room and a patio."[14] It rested on a gradual slope which blended into a polo field in the front yard and a four-hole golf course to one side. The Ranch contained all the items of frontier existence with a forty-horse stable, barns, corals, bridle trails and numerous kinds of livestock and animals.[15]

Trent, My Cousin, pp. 257-258; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 253-269, passim. It should be noted that Paula Love omitted several books for which Will wrote introductions in her work. Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 22.

[13]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 229; Day, Biography, p. 207; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 7; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 247. Croy incorrectly intimates that the move to the Ranch took place in late 1929. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 246-247.

[14]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 266-268.

[15]Ibid., pp. 268-269; Trent, My Cousin, p. 201; Peak, "Ameri-

The Ranch's interior decor carried out the motif of its natural surroundings. The large living room had a beamed ceiling and knotty pine walls. Framed letters from dignitaries around the world adorned walls along with a saddle, a gift from an Arabian Sheik, and a vast collection of ropes. A wagon-wheel light hung from the ceiling and illuminated a large fireplace and lighted glass cabinet which contained a covered-wagon procession. Spurs, quirts and horns existed everywhere and colorful Navajo rugs covered the floor. The house encircled a patio which was used mainly for eating. This area possessed a giant old-time breakfast table surrounded by numerous chairs.[16]

The Santa Monica Ranch helped Will hang onto a kind of artificial frontier existence. His love for this type life reflected the humorist's inability to break with his heritage and a continuing feeling that the cowboy's life represented the best of all possible worlds. An additional factor in Will's development of the ranch may have been a desire to appease Clem for his early failures as a cattleman. Will's old companion, Spi Trent, spoke of these facets in his cousin's personality when he wrote: "When I used to go up to see him [Will] he would spend hours with me

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ca's Court Jester," p. 1. Several sources place the size of the Santa Monica Ranch between 250 and 350 acres at this time. See above citations. Roger Butterfield's statement, "the ranch consisted of 600 acres," must be considered incorrect. Butterfield, "Legend," p. 92. Jack Lait's estimate of 1,500 acres falls into the same catagory as Butterfield's. Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 33-34.

[16]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 200-201.

just talkin about ole ranch times. You see I understood Wills restless nature and even after he had bought the Santa Monica ranch, I heard from some real estate fellers that he was sort of playin with the ideer of buyin a cattle ranch somewhere in the southwest that would be the largest in the world. So in a way, he was a person who was always torn between his raisin and his longin."[17]

The Rogers' family moved into the Santa Monica Ranch during early 1928. Once settled, Will accepted an offer from Robert E. Sherwood, editor of the old humor magazine, Life, to serve as a presidential candidate in the election of 1928. Life agreed to sponsor the cowboy-philosopher's candidacy under the banner of a humorously orientated Anti-Bunk Party. Will's obligation consisted of writing a weekly campaign speech in exchange for $500. He fell short of meeting his commitment several times, and occasionally he presented Life with very sketchy material which the magazine's editorial board had to complete. On several occasions he failed to produce anything and Sherwood's staff was forced to write a complete article. Regardless of this situation, the Life articles basically represented Will's work and should be considered as a prime example of his political satire.[18]

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[17]Ibid., pp. 199-200.

[18]John Mason Brown, The Worlds of Robert Sherwood (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), pp. 196-200; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 204-207; Letter from Robert Sherwood to Homer Croy n. d., cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 232-233; Day, Biography,

Life's "Rogers-for-President" campaign began in May. It became immediately popular and assumed cover status for the humorous weekly. The magazine and its keynote speaker, Judge Ben B. Lindsey, stated that Will was chosen as the Anti-Bunk Party's candidate because of a ground swell of favorable public opinion as reflected in straw votes taken throughout the country, his successful performance as a roving ambassador abroad, his ability to make people both "think" and "laugh," his facility for creating "love" and "trust," and the "humanity" and "homely virtues" which characterized his person. The Anti-Bunk Party's platform attacked the "bunk" which typified the two major American political parties, the Republicans and Democrats, and the similarity between those organizations.[19]

Will accepted the nomination of his party in characteristic fashion: "I think I can accept defeat in as poor English, and with as well hidden 'Sour Grapes' as anyone you could have chosen."[20] His campaign began

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pp. 231-233; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 277-278.

[19]Judge Ben B. Lindsey, "Will Rogers for President; A Keynote Speech by Judge Ben B. Lindsey," Life Magazine, XCI May 31, 1928, p. 4; "What This Country Needs Is A Bunkless Party," Life Magazine, XCI May 17, 1928, p. 5; "For President: Will Rogers, 'The Invincible Candidate of the Dissatisfied Voters of Both Parties,'" Life Magazine, XCI May 24, 1928, pp. 4-5; Cover, Life Magazine, XCI June 4, 1928; June 21, 1928; May 21, 1928; June 7, 1928; "The Revolution Against Bunk Has Started," Life Magazine, XCI May 31, 1928, p. 5.

[20]Will Rogers, "I Accept The Nomination," Life Magazine, XCI May 31, 1928, p. 3.

immediately and projected a satirical view of American political institutions. Life published a cosmopolitan list of Rogers' supporters which included Henry Ford, Babe Ruth, Nicholas Murray Butler, Grantland Rice, General William (Billy) Mitchell and William Allen White. Thousands of campaign buttons embossed with Will's picture and his slogan, "He Chews to Run," flooded the country while numerous local radio stations gave the Anti-Bunk Party time for weekly broadcasts. Stars such as Eddie Cantor and Amelia Earhart appeared on these shows in Will's behalf.[21]

Each week propaganda notes, sometimes entitled "Anti-Bunk Bulletins" and always written by Life's staff, accompanied the cowboy-philosopher's article.. The two pieces together created a humorous campaign in behalf of Will's candidacy. One propaganda article, for example, reported by Robert Benchley stated:

> Interview No. 5. 41 years old. White male. Is against Hoover because he is a negro.
>
> . . .
>
> Interview No. 14. (There were no interviews numbered 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13). Is for Hoover because Hoover has been President for eight years and knows the ropes. To put a new man in would be folly. Besides, Smith is so mixed up with the Mohammadans that we would all have to be facing east every morning if he got in and this particular voter likes to face west.[22]

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[21]Letter from Robert Sherwood to Homer Croy, n. d., cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 232; "For President: Will Rogers, 'The Invincible Candidate of the Dissatisfied Voters of Both Parties,'" Life Magazine, XCI May 24, 1928, pp. 4-5; "Anti-Bunk Bulletin," Ibid., XCII September 28, 1928, p. 4.

[22]Robert Benchley, "Significant Results in Second Week of Our

Will's campaign articles complimented the propaganda pieces produced by Life. He laid his platform before the American people as follows:

> OUR SUPPORT WILL HAVE TO COME FROM THOSE WHO WANT NOTHING AND HAVE THE ASSURANCE OF GETTING IT. THIS MEANS THAT WE WON'T PAY A CENT FOR VOTES. WE WANT VOTERS BUT THEY MUST BE AMATEURS.
>
> WHATEVER HOOVER OR SMITH PROMISE YOU WE'LL RISE 'EM AT LEAST 20%.
>
> WE'RE GOING TO ELIMINATE PARTY LEADERS, SLOGANS, BOLLWEEVIL, LUNCHEON CLUBS, VICE-PRESIDENTS, SAND FLEAS, CONVENTIONS, GOLF PANTS AND LOTS OF OTHER THINGS.
>
> AS I HAVE SAID REPEATEDLY, THERE WILL BE NO EFFORT AT SEX APPEAL. A CANDIDATE CAN WIN WITHOUT SEX APPEAL, AS WAS PROVED IN 1924.
>
> WE ADMIT THE EXISTENCE OF THE PROHIBITION ISSUE, AS WHAT'S ON YOUR HIP MUST BE ON YOUR MIND. SO OUR PLANK IS: 'WINE FOR THE RICH, BEER FOR THE POOR, AND MOONSHINE LIQUOR FOR THE PROHIBITIONISTS.'
>
> WE WILL NOT ONLY GIVE THE FARMER RELIEF, WE WILL CURE HIM OF BEING A FARMER.
>
> IF ELECTED, I POSITIVELY AND ABSOLUTELY AGREE TO RESIGN.
>
> NO MATTER WHAT'S ON OUR PLATFORM NOW, ON NOVEMBER SIXTH WE WILL HAVE A BONFIRE AND BURN THE PLATFORM.

After presenting his platform, Will assured his readers that additional planks could still be added and that "anybody who can give us ten votes

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Own Straw Votes," Life Magazine, XCII October 26, 1928, p. 4; "Final Anti-Bunk Bulletin," Ibid., XCII November 2, 1928, p. 10; "The Rogers Campaign Is Going Strong: All We Need Now Is A Few Votes," Ibid., XCI June 7, 1928, p. 10; "Is Will Rogers Too Big for the Presidency," Ibid., XCI June 28, 1928, p. 4; "They're All Imitating Will Rogers; Both Hoover and Smith are Joining the Anti-Bunks," Ibid., XCII August 9, 1928, p. 4; "Anti-Bunk Bulletin," Ibid., XCII August 16, 1928, p. 4.

can have a plank of his own in the Platform."[23]

Righteous, personal criticism entered Will's comments in 1928 as the political conflict degenerated into what the humorist considered a mud-slinging campaign. He always became depressed and bitter over political vulgarities as elections matured and 1928 proved no exception. He attacked both Republicans and Democrats for trying to attract wet and dry support through fence-sitting techniques concerning the issue of prohibition. "HOW CAN A MAN BE," he thundered, "FOR TWO OPPOSITE THINGS AT THE SAME TIME?" This situation led Will to the conclusion that "when you speak of talk, you just about have spoken of all Politics, For that's all it is."[24] The humorist especially criticized those Republicans who had used religious bigotry as a vehicle for attacking Al Smith's Catholicism:

> Then the only white Republican in Alabama felt called on to instruct what few constituents he had that could read, that in case of Al's election the Protestants would be called on to meet a Lion in a catch as catch can combat in the arena for the follification of Tammany Hall and the visiting Cardinals.
>
> Well, Mr. Work promply said that he dident tell this Alabaman to produce any such pamphlet, Work said he was 'exceedingly sorry,' but dident say whether his tears was caused by the insult to Al's religion or the fact that the story had leaked out in northern papers.
>
> Well, it's a sure thing that somebody must have told that

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[23]Will Rogers, "This Campaign is Getting Hot," Life Magazine, XCII August 2, 1928, p. 3.

[24]Will Rogers, "Analysing the Political Hooch: What's on Your Hip Is Bound to be on Your Mind," Life Magazine, XCII July 26, 1928, pp. 3-4.

> Alabaman to fix up the pamphlets, for he wouldent have known enough to do it alone in fact he dident know what church Smith belonged to.[25]

Will's overall evaluation of the presidential contest reflected his pessimistic view of politics: "Well the Campaign is degenerating into what I thought it would. It started out to be honorable, But honor in politics is just as much lost as John W. Davis's platform of 'honesty' was in '24. It was a 'noble' experiment, but it just couldent bring home any soup bones."[26]

The Anti-Bunk Campaign represented a notable achievement for Life and added yet another laurel to Will's accomplishments. Dorothy Van Doren summed up the country's favorable reaction to the cowboy-philosopher's candidacy when she wrote in The Nation: "All this [the Anti-Bunk Campaign] is as invigorating as a bright fall day. In place of the stale windiness of political promises, we have wind, it is true, but wind of a refreshing sort. The Rogers wind blows cobwebs away, cobwebs that both major parties have been guilty of weaving."[27] One aggravating point did develop in connection with the campaign. Some

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[25]Will Rogers, "Our Candidate Has No Religion; So the Anti-Bunk Party Has No Opposition and No Support," Life Magazine, XCII October 9, 1928, pp. 3-4.

[26]Will Rogers, "Our Candidate Won't Sling Mud! 'The Things They Whisper Ain't as Bad as What They Shout Our Loud,'" Life Magazine, XCII October 12, 1928, pp. 5-6.

[27]Dorothy Van Doren, "Will Rogers, the Bunkless Candidate," The Nation, CXXVII October 3, 1928, pp. 314-315.

people started to take Will's candidacy seriously and began, as they had in the past and would again in the future, urging the humorist to seek political office. Such suggestions "outraged" Will and he would hear nothing of them.[28]

Will planned another lecture tour for the fall of 1928, but disaster altered his schedule. His close friend, Fred Stone, was in rehearsals for a Broadway musical called "Three Cheers." The production included Fred's daughter, Dorothy, and intended to open during October. On August 4th, Stone broke both legs when his private plane crashed in Connecticut. Will realized the importance of "Three Cheers" to the Stones and the show's cast. He offered to take his friend's place, leaving Dorothy Stone as the production's star, if such an arrangement proved acceptable to producer, Charley Dillingham. The distraught Dillingham immediately accepted the cowboy-philosopher's offer. Will spent a scant two weeks in rehearsal before the show opened "in the round." He did not know his lines, so he carried the script in his back pocket and unabashedly consulted it while on stage. Before long, the humorist began taking great liberties with the dialogue which enabled him to employ his famous topical brand of humor. For example, Will developed the habit of introducing his songs by commenting: "When I sing, I feel that is as far as any

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[28]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 278; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 233. William R. Brown considers some of the efforts to run Will for political office in his unpublished doctoral dissertation. Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 1-2.

man has ever gone for a friend."[29] "Three Cheers" became successful and Will received great acclaim for his act of friendship toward Fred Stone. Burns Mantle, writing the New York Sunday News, voiced this sentiment: "Let them who will grow mushy over the incident. Fred and Will know what it means and what it stands for. They do that sort of thing, make that kind of sacrifice, in the Western ranch country from which these boys came, every day in the week and never think anything of it. There is never any questions of money involved, nor any mention of it."[30]

Burns Mantle's statement concerning the financial arrangements connected with Will's appearance in "Three Cheers" created a false impression. The humorist definitely made a financial sacrifice in order to take Stone's place, for he cancelled a lecture tour that would have made him an estimated half million dollars. Nevertheless, Will received $5,000 weekly and a great amount of extremely favorable publicity. The Oklahoman stayed in "Three Cheers" for eight months until the musical closed in June of 1929. Soon after, Will returned to California to begin yet another successful career--acting in the talking pictures[31]

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[29]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 230.

[30]Burns Mantle, N. T., New York Sunday News, October 28, 1928, cited in Day, Biography, p. 242; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 238; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 228-231; Day, Biography, pp. 235-238; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 51. Linda Nelson makes the mistaken assumption that Will learned his lines. Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," p. 44.

[31]Day, Biography, pp. 235, 242; Betty Rogers, The Story of His

Rather than moving immediately into an examination of Will's sound-movie triumphs, it is necessary to reflect upon additional developments that took place in connection with his career during the middle and late 1920's. Those years witnessed a refinement of both the comedian's domestic philosophy and individualistic public image. Each of these areas warrants attention.

Will's unhappiness with the dishonesty that characterized American politics found easy expression in the comments he made during Life's Anti-Bunk Campaign of 1928. In addition, the humorist became concerned over the country's political radicals and society's false, materialistic orientation. He was intensely serious when dealing with such subjects.[32]

Political radicals of both the left (Communists) and the right (the America Firsters) who appeared during the 1920's upset and disgusted the cowboy-philosopher. Specifically, he did not agree with the Bolshevik's "denouncement meetings" but favored letting them have their say as the easiest way of disarming them: "It's just like an exhaust on an Automobile. No matter how high priced the car, you have to have an exit for its bad Air, and Gasses. They have to come out. It don't do any particular harm, unless you just stand around behind smelling of it

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Life Told by His Wife, p. 234; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 238; The Los Angeles Examiner, August 22, 1928, cited in Love, The Will Rogers Book, pp. 164-165; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 88-90.

[32]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 54-55, 119-120.

all the time. . . . "[33]

The nativist orientated America First Society, which opposed everybody who was not white, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon, came in for more criticism than the red plague. The humorist's comments concerning the selectivist organization seethed with indignation as he observed that the founding fathers had considered every gentleman a fulfledged citizen who worked and fought for America. "As long as you did that," he concluded, "you could worship what you wanted to, talk any language you wanted to, in fact it looked like a pretty liberal layout. But after 150 or more years, it was immediately seen that this plan was no good, that the old boys that laid out the Constitution dident know much, that the country should be divided up in various Societys and cliques."[34]

The political extremism of the 1920's that many people feared might destroy the United States failed to scare Will. He possessed an undying

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[33]Day, Autogiography, pp. 108-109. As with much of Will's material which he quotes, Day does not say where these comments appeared. They do not come from printed sources such as the humorist's newspaper column and magazine articles. Therefore, it is assumed that these views appeared in Will's public lecture series. Day presumably had access to such material. He is evidently the only person who has been allowed to view this evidence. It may no longer exist in a usable form since Day apparently destroyed some material when he put it together in a "cut and paste fashion." (He cut it with scissors.) Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 30, 1970. This type of material will be cited as Day, Autogiography, Uncatagorized Manuscript from Rogers Family Collection in future references.

[34]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, November 20, 1927, p. 26.

belief in the collective strength of "common sense," and goodness of the of the nation as reflected in the average citizen, or, as he called them, "the big Normal Majority." "No Element, No Party, not even Congress or the Senate," he delcared, "can hurt this Country now; it's too big."[35]

America's high standard of living and the changing values imposed by such a life seemed more of a threat than the country's political radicals from Will's vantage point. He frequently voiced belief that America's abundant wealth represented an unrealistic and insecure world whose gilded encasement would eventually shatter because of the false value system which supported it. A sense of impending, divine retribution, combined with yearning, colored his feeling. "The Lord has sure been good to us," he wrote, but "the way we are acting, the Lord is liable to turn on us any minute. . . ." These sentiments appeared when he bemoaned the fact that American society enjoyed the advantages of automobiles, trusts, golf clubs, but had failed to increase schoolchildren's academic performance or produce any more Thomas Jeffersons or Teddy Roosevelts. "Suppose Teddy had took up putting," he continued, "instead of horseback riding. It's also a question what we can convert these 4 billion filling Stations into in years to come. But it ain's my business to do you folks' worrying for you. I am only tiping you off and you-all are supposed

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[35]Day, Autobiography, pp. 110-111. Uncatagorized Manuscripts from Rogers Family Collection.

to act on it."[36]

Will's public image, like his career, continued to develop. As previously, he projected a unique public personality which struck a peculiarly responsive cord in the American public. The aid he gave to public causes and his identification with human problems made the Oklahoman both different and popular.

Will identified with society's intellectual and physical expansion when he became an avid supporter of commercial aviation and its corollary, military air power. He took his first, hesitant flight at the Atlantic City Boardwalk during 1915 by purchasing a five dollar ticket which allowed him to take a short ride in a Glenn Curtiss flying boat. Proud of his accomplishment, he had a picture taken while standing beside the aircraft. Nevertheless, ten years passed before the cowboy-philosopher became a supporter of air travel and a dedicated adherent of air power. He took his stand in favor of a powerful air force by defending General Billy Mitchell when the aviator was stripped of his command for publically criticizing governmental officials who opposed the expansion of American Air Power: "He [General Mitchell] knows that some day America will have to have a tremendous air force, but he can't understand why we are not training now. But it does seem a strange way to repay a man who has fought for us through a war, and who has fought harder for us

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[36] Will Rogers, "More Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President," Saturday Evening Post, CC June 2, 1928, p. 170.

in Peace to be reprimanded for telling the truth."[37] Will assumed a cautious enthusiasm for air transportation while traveling in Europe for the Saturday Evening Post during 1926. Flying simply proved the best way to get around the continent. Late in 1927, he set a transcontinental record for passenger flight in a mail plane by going from Los Angeles to New York and back again in 82 hours. He recounted this experience in a two-part article for The Saturday Evening Post which extolled the advantages of commercial air transportation. When he went on the lecture circuit alone during 1928, the comedian traveled a great deal by air and thereby gave the commercial aviation industry some positive publicity.[38]

Involvement in charitable causes had always been a Rogers' char-

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[37]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, May 17, 1925, p. 27; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 200; Day, Biography, p. 74; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 129; Ruth Mitchell, "The Saga of General Billy Mitchell," Readers Digest, LXIV May, 1954, p. 178; Day, Biography, pp. 165-166.

[38]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 200-201; Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast for Gulf Oil, December 30, 1934, verbatim copy; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 203, 227; Day, Biography, pp. 190, 207; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 147; Will Rogers, "Flying and Eating My Way East," Saturday Evening Post, CC January 21, 1928, pp. 3-4, 110, 113-114, 117; Will Rogers, "Bucking a Head Wind," Ibid., CC January 28, 1928, pp. 6-7, 36, 38, 40; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 233, 395-396. Mayme Obet Peak stated in regard to Will's flying activities: "So far Rogers--described as aviation's best friend, has flown thousands of miles and never met with anything resembling an accident." Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 25. This statement is incorrect. Will crashed four times, not including the death flight, during his life. Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 200-202; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 233-234; Day, Biography, p. 229, 248-249; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 133.

acteristic. Nevertheless, Will expanded and dramatized these activities during the middle and late 1920's. For example, while in Europe during the summer of 1926, he made a highly publicized trip to Dublin, Ireland, to give a benefit for the survivors of forty-eight people who died in the tragic Drumcollogher theatre fire. Some £ 2,000 reached the relief fund due to this performance. Returning to the United States on the Leviathan, news reached Will of the tremendous damage inflicted on Florida by a tornado. The humorist contacted his traveling companion, Secretary of State, Charles Evan Hughes, and the two presented a shipboard show which raised somewhere between $40,000 and $50,000 in relief funds for the Florida sufferers. Perhaps the cowboy-philosopher's most publicized philanthropic action during this period came in connection with the disastrous Mississippi River flood of 1927. John McCormack, the famous Irish tenor, joined the Oklahoman in putting on a flood benefit at the "Ziegfeld Theatre" in New York. Will later traveled to New Orleans to view the disaster scene from the air and put on another fund raising show. These two appearances earned $60,000 for the flood victims. In addition, between late April and mid-June, Will waged a vigorous campaign through his newspaper columns for further flood relief funds. He engaged in many smaller and less publiclzed acts of charity as well. These included the purchase of gymnasium equipment and building of a handball court for the Beverly Hills Police Force, aid in the construction of ten dormitories and a main build for the Salvation Army's

Shagbark Camp, the donation of numerous banquet and radio appearance fees to needy causes and unnumbered acts of personal benevolence. Recognition of his concern for the underprivileged came to Will in a 1927 telegram from John Barton Pay, Red Cross Chairman: "You are unanimously elected a life member of the American Red Cross and entitled to all the joys and benefits which result from devotion and distinguished service."[39]

Other characteristics and actions reinforced Will's position as a unique member of the entertainment industry. For example, a casualness toward personal appearance and social status remained his standard. He often bought his clothes in "second rate clothing stores" and simply "put on" a necktie "and wore it out."[40] The entertainment world's society-conscious cliques continued to hold no attraction for him and when it came time to get a pair of glasses he nonchalantly took those of a friend rather than visit an optometrist. The unbelievable Rogers'

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[39]New York Times, June 28, 1927, p. 12; April 26, 1927, p. 29; April 27, 1927, pp. 12, 27; April 28, 1927, p. 3; May 3, 1927, pp. 2, 29; June 2, 1927, p. 27; April 29, 1927, p. 23; May 2, 1927, p. 23; May 14, 1927, p. 21; May 25, 1927, p. 25; June 3, 1927, p. 23; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 367-369; Day, Biography, pp. 192-193, 208-209, 212; Peak, "America's Court Jester," pp. 26-27; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 198-199, 206-209; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 139; Trent, My Cousin, p. 204; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 130; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 164; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 216, 208-209; The Tulsa Daily World, Magazine Section, June 9, 1927, cited in Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 369. David Milsten states that the Leviathan benefit raised $50,000 while Spi Trent put the figure at $40,000. See above citations for Trent and Milsten.

[40]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 214; McIntyre, "Our Will," p. 82.

stamina increased over the years and Betty could still say: "I have never heard Will say he was tired."[41] Much of Will's energy originated with a nervous temperament. He jingled coins regularly and had a habit of continually chewing "gum--the ear-pieces of his glasses, rubber bands, or even paper clips. . . ."[42] When eating dinner at home, the humorist's highstrung nature often forced him away from the table to engage in a bit of living room roping. A "stuffed calf on rollers" which stayed "under the stairway" oftentimes provided a target on these occasions.[43] Such activity occupied Will's perpetually active hands and pacified a body that found it difficult to sit still. O. O. McIntyre, a friend for years, described Will's tenseness: "Cobb and Carter [Irving Cobb and Amon Carter who accompanied Will on frequent visits in McIntyre's apartment] lounging back in easy chairs and Rogers walking up and down, twisting, turning, jiggling things on the desk, peeking into the kitchen, tearing up match flaps--always like a fighter on edge."[44] Playing polo remained

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[41]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 214; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 162; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 237-238; Bruce Quisenberry to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 193-194; Cantor, As I Remember Them, pp. 141-142. Homer Croy believes that Will acquired his cheap glasses in a random fashion in a dime store. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 229-230.

[42]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 117, 238.

[43]Ibid., p. 270; Day, Biography, p. 259.

[44]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 126; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 113, 114.

one of the Oklahoman's favorite recreational pastimes and he read newspapers continuously, even while dining.[45]

The Santa Monica Ranch eventually provided Will with his most popular diversion and became "the joy of his life." "Every tree and shrub on the place was planted under his direction," wrote Betty. "Even when he was flying around the country or traveling abroad, the ranch was not out of his mind, and he was seldom gone for any length of time without sending back long telegrams and letters of instruction about things he wanted done." On the ranch, his greatest pleasure centered, as in childhood and early youth, around his roping activities. He would pen calves up in the corral and spend hours roping them. He especially enjoyed such play "when one of his old friends, Ewing Halsell, Eddie Vail or Big Boy Williams, would drop in to rope with him."[46]

Will was both philosophic and religious. Religiously he believed in God, but remained nondoctrinaire and nondenominational.[47] "I have worked at affairs for every denomination in the World here in New York," he wrote, "because one is just as worthy as the other. . . . I haven't

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[45]Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 245; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 24-25.

[46]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 266-269; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 33-34; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 245.

[47]Day, Autobiography, p. 114, Uncatagorized Manuscript from Rogers Family Collection; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 297-298.

been able to see where one has the monopoly on the right course to Heaven."[48] The Rogers' children received Protestant religious training and Will helped build the Community Church in Beverly Hills. The following comment by Will Rogers, Jr. helps to define his father's religious feelings:

> 'The basic ideas of faith do not change,' my father said, 'but how you adapt those ideas to a changing world is the important thing, and will determine the durability of your faith.' . . . My father gave me the notion that it's nice to believe in God because it will tend to make you honest, but it's more important to believe in God because a symbol bigger than yourself is essential to morality. Otherwise everything is as small, limited and fallible as you are.[49]

Will also portrayed deep personal and human emotions. The introduction of Charles Russell's, Trails Plowed Under, and his frenzied tirade in 1928 against the white man's victimization of the Indians typified this trait. Sometimes, harsh attacks by theatrical critics could bring Will to tears. Nevertheless, it was human tragedy that most frequently brought the Oklahoman's basic sensitivities to the surface. The newspaper column he wrote at the time of sister Maude's death in May, 1925, presented a classic exposition of Will's basic humanness:

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[48]Day, Autobiography, Uncatagorized Manuscript from Rogers Family Collection, p. 114.

[49]Will Rogers, Jr., "Will Rogers . . . Past, Present and Future," pp. 4, 3; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 297. James Whitcomb Brougher's statement concerning Will's religious alliegiance should be used with extreme caution. Brougher, Life and Laughter, pp. 200-201.

> Today, as I write this, I am not in the Follies, the carefree comedian who jokes about everything. I am out in Oklahoma, among my People, my Cherokee people, who don't expect a laugh for everything I say. . . . Back home, at the funeral of my Sister. . . . I have just today witnessed a funeral that for real sorrow and real affection I don't think will ever be surpassed anywhere. They came in every mode of conveyance, on foot, in buggies, horseback, wagons, cars, and trains, and there wasn't a soul that came that she hadn't helped or favored at one time or another. . . . Some uninformed newspapers printed: 'Mrs. C. L. Lane sister of the famous Comedian, Will Rogers.' They are greatly misinformed. It's the other way around. I am the brother of Mrs. C. L. Lane, 'The Friend of Humanity.' . . . And all the honors that I could ever in my wildest dreams hope to reach, would never equal the honor paid on a little western prairie hilltop, among her people, to Maude Lane. If they will love me like that at the finish, my life will not have been in vain.[50]

After Maude's death, Will never entered Oklahoma without taking time to visit his last remaining sister, Sallie, and the other members of the Rogers family.[51]

The increasing fame that Will acquired during the 1920's lessened the awe he had previously held for famous figures. When going in to meet the somber Calvin Coolidge for the first time in 1925, the humorist bet Nicholas Longworth that he could make the Chief Executive laugh. "I beg your pardon," Will stated as he shook hands with Coolidge, "I did not catch the name." The usually tacturn New Englander lost his composure in mirthful laughter.[52] At about the same time, the cowboy-phil-

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[50]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, May 31, 1925, p. 30; Day, Biography, p. 166; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 178-180; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 152-153, 214-215.

[51]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 12.

[52]Day, Biography, p. 164.

osopher also became involved in a public dispute with a Congressman. The public official had objected to the remarks of a "Professional Joke Maker," being read into the Congressional Record. The humorist responded by chiding his adversary for referring to him as a "Professional." "They [the Congress] are the Professional Joke Makers," he fired back. "Read some of the Bills they have passed, if you think they ain't Joke makers. I could study all my life and not think up half the amount of funny things they can think of in one session of Congress."[53] Will's most precocious affront to positioned people occurred when the wealthy E. L. Doheny invited the performer to a party and subtly forced him to entertain the guests by an embarrassingly open request for a performance. The irate Will later presented Doheny with a $1500 bill for his services and justified the charges by stating that he only performed free when Betty also received an invitation.[54]

Will's personality became more complex as his fame increased during the 1920's. In some ways, he remained humble and unable to perceive his own importance. This characteristic found expression in the comedian's refusal to employ a secretary to take care of the voluminous correspondence which flooded the Rogers' home. In contrast, he

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[53]Day, Autobiography, Uncatagorized Manuscript from Rogers Family Collection, pp. 111-112.

[54]Trent, My Cousin, p. 179; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 28.

could become indignant when others challenged his opinions and possessed an increasingly fanatical desire to perform before an audience, regardless of whether the group consisted of five people in a chili parlor or a packed auditorium. Will's humor always dominated his personality when entertaining others. However, if anyone successfully challenged him for the attention of a crowd, he "would stomp off and leave the people."[55] The humorist's private actions added to the Rogers enigma since they frequently conflicted with his public image. Specifically, he was frequently very serious when speaking alone with another person.[56]

Some people, like Charles Wagner, the lecture tour manager, disliked Will intensely. Knowledge of such animosities always surprised the comedian, but he refused to worry about these situations. He dealt with hostile people by avoiding them. The Oklahoman's love of money remained, but as of old, once he possessed financial resources, generosity characterized his actions. Pride also symbolized several facets of his character. He bragged on his strong, white teeth and evidenced equal fondness for his 'Injun eyes' until forced to use reading glasses. Will also showed a certain amount of egoism in the way he enjoyed fame. He continually watched to see how many people recognized him and had a

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[55]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 228, 230-231; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 163; Paula M. Love to Reba Collins, July 3, 1966, cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 23.

[56]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 327; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 54-55, 119-120.

habit of trying to lead unknowing individuals into making derogatory remarks concerning the comedian, "Will Rogers."[57]

Will Rogers was a complex individual by the mid-1920's and one who projected many varying and sometimes conflicting moods and views. Such an evaluation does not weaken the humorist's stature, it simply makes him a human being. The likable and the distasteful, the good and the bad, the serious and the frivilous all characterize him. Afterall, it is unlikely that anyone with a sterile personality could have captured the hearts and minds of millions of Americans as Will Rogers did.

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[57]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 229-231.

CHAPTER X

Mass Media Stardom

> In 1929, at the age of forty-nine, he [Will] came into his own. . . . At no time, in this period, did Will ever dream that in one sensational year, before hard times became really hard, the movies and radio and newspapers would pour into his pockets a sum that has been estimated to have been almost a million dollars.[1]

The year 1929 began the last major phase of Will Rogers' assent to fame and fortune. Despite his forty-nine years, Will did not slow his pace. Rather, he expanded his activities to include sound motion pictures and more extensive radio work. These involvements catapulted the humorist into that elite group of entertainers known as superstars.[2] The year 1929 began as many other busy years for Will. He continued to take Fred Stone's place in "Three Cheers" and sought additional outlets for his humor by writing magazine articles for both the Saturday Evening Post and a new client, The American Magazine. In two articles written for the Post, Will criticized the Democratic Party's leadership

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[1]Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 83-85, passim.

[2]Ibid., pp. 83-84.

for the mistakes it made during the presidential election of 1928. The comedian then announced that he planned to "take . . . over" leadership of the party and "see what" he could "salvage out of it." He desired to make the Democratic organization "into a Party, instead of a memory." The Democrats' self-appointed campaign manager then introduced a program which consisted of taking the "Popular side, instead of the Right side" of public issues, doing away with "old fashioned ideas," traditions and leadership and publicly supporting "nonpartisan" programs which would help the country. A private letter to George Horace Lorimer, the Post's editor, accompanied the first of these articles and proposed that Will produce a series dealing with the political scene from his supposed vantage point as Democratic Party manager.[3] Lorimer's negative response to this suggestion probably reflected the editor's Republican Party affiliation and a fear that Will might alienate his good friend, Herbert Hoover.[4]

The six articles which Will published in The American Magazine fell short of his other work.[5] The initial piece stated that the humorist

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[3]Will Rogers, "There's Life in the Old Gal Yet--Al," Saturday Evening Post, CCI January 19, 1929, p. 46; Will Rogers, "Mr. Toastmaster and Democrats," Ibid., CCI March 30, 1929, pp. 4-5, 161.

[4]Tabble, George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post, pp. 145, 192; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 179-181.

[5]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 195, 202. It should be noted that Collins contradicts herself concerning the number of articles which Will wrote for The American Magazine. Ibid., p. 172.

intended to present "some success stories."[6] He modified his plans, however, since two of the six treatises dealt with the general topics of humor and prohibition. The best American essay came in December of 1929 with the publication of an article dealing with Henry Ford. Will used Ford to introduce one of his favorite targets--the wealthy. It seemed peculiar to the humorist that in the matter of earning money there were "a million dumb enough to make it, where there is not one smart enough to dispose of it so it will be a real benefit." Although satirizing the rich, Will praised the producer of America's first inexpensive automobile as a prime mover in society. "A Ford car, and a marriage certificate," the Oklahoman summed up with irresistible humor, "are the two cheapest things known. Both lead to an ambition for something better."[7]

Will ended his appearance in "Three Cheers" during June, 1929, and returned to California. Winfield R. Sheehan, an old friend and the

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[6]Will Rogers, "The Hoofing Kid from Claremore," The American Magazine, CVII April, 1929, p. 34; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 195.

[7]Will Rogers, "The Grand Champion," The American Magazine, CVIII December, 1929, pp. 35-37; Will Rogers, "How To Be Funny," Ibid., CVIII September, 1929, pp. 61, 136, 138, passim; Will Rogers, "Corn Whiskey, Courage and Commerce," Ibid., CIX, May, 1930, pp. 69-70; Will Rogers, "The World's Best Loser; Why I'm Pulling for SIR THOMAS to Life that Cup," Ibid., CV September, 1930, pp. 30, 131-133, passim; Will Rogers, "First and Only Presentation of a Humerous Sketch Entitled 'COOLIDGE;' Episodes by DWIGHT MORROW," Ibid., CVII June, 1929, pp. 20-21, 88, 90, 92-94, passim.

head of Fox Films, had contacted the humorist and suggested that he make one of the new sound motion pictures. Will's silent movie career had only achieved moderate success, and he received Sheehan's offer hesitantly. Nevertheless, the cowboy-philosopher finally agreed to appear in "They Had To See Paris." This initial effort in the sound cinema proved extremely successful and made over $700,000 profit for Fox. Will became a movie star over night and soon negotiated a two-year contract which obligated him to make a total of five pictures. Under the document's terms, the comedian received $225,000 per picture, or $10,000 per week, or a total of $1,225,000. He protested as usual against basing the understanding on anything other than a handshake, but this time Sheehan's insistence prevailed and Will grudingly signed a contract.[8]

The Fox contract gave Will the prerogative of choosing his own pictures. Such evaluation became tedious and he soon delegated the task

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[8]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 236-238, 243-244, 256; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 22-25; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 192-193; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 234-235; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 86; Day, Biography, p. 331; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 79. O'Brien and Lait incorrectly state that Will's appearance in "Three Cheers" occurred in 1929 after he made "They Had To See Paris." O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 79; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 113. Brougher makes the mistake of saying that Will "never made a contract with the movie producers who employed him." Brougher, Life and Laughter, p. 91. Reba Collins believes that Jerome Beatty's work is invalid because he "based his book largely on material written by Hollywood press agents or questionable articles from movie magazines." Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 31. Beatty was, nevertheless, a member of the movie colony, so I think that Collins' harsh evaluation is somewhat unjustified.

to Betty and Winfield R. Sheehan. They adoped a general rule of using material which had already met with public acceptance. This approach worked well and resulted in the production of a long list of successful films which entrenched Will as a leading figure in the early sound movie industry. He performed in: "They Had To See Paris," "Lightnin!," "Young As You Feel," "Ambassador Bill," "Too Busy To Work," "So This Is London," "A Connecticut Yankee," "Business & Pleasure," "Down To Earth," "State Fair," "Mr. Skitch," "Judge Priest," "Life Begins at 40," "David Harum," "The County Chairman," "Doubting Thomas," "In Old Kentucky," "Steamboat Round the Bend," "Handy Andy," and "Dr. Bull." Will served under several directors while making these films; favorites included David Butler, Henry King, George Marshall and John Ford. These men became close friends as well as respected associates.[9]

Sound picture work seemed sterile to Will because he was accustomed to a live audience which reacted instantaneously to his material. Nevertheless, the Oklahoman gradually acclimated to the Fox Studios. High income from the movies enabled him to spend more time with his

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[9]Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 29; Trent, My Cousin, p. 244; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 212-213; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 79; Day, Biography, pp. 331-332; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 85-92; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 235; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 257. The sources cited herein contain conflicting lists of Will's sound movies. I remain obligated to Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial for the above information.

family and offered equal advantages to actors, studios and viewers. In addition, the humorist liked having a "permanent record" of his humor that could keep him before the public after his death.[10]

The positive aspects of movie-making failed to prohibit Will from critizing the make-believe industry and its giants when conditions existed which he felt deserved exposure. During 1931, for example, his newspaper column appealed to traditional moral standards by attacking lurid billboards which attracted patrons by exaggerating certain films' suggestive qualities. He also viewed negatively the increasing difficulty that "virtue" experienced while trying to "triumph" over vice in filmland's products.[11] May, 1935, found the comedian criticizing Sam Goldwyn for his threat to move his movie studio to England if the government burdened the film industry with additional taxes. "We're in an industry that kind of depends on the good will of the people," Will concluded, "and they [the people threatening to leave America] overlooked the biggest thing in all this moving. You can't get much good will by dodging taxes. . . ."[12]

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[10]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 85; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 181, 235-236; Will Rogers, Speech at banquet for Dr. Gianini, "Back to Good Times," 1932, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 141; Will Rogers, "Let Us Pray They Don't Find Out What's the Matter with the Movies," The New McClure's, LX September, 1928, pp. 25, 88.

[11]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, May 24, 1931, p. 21.

[12]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, April 7, 1935, p. 5, verbatim copy, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. It should be noted that some of the radio broadcasts provided by the Will

Will's sound pictures, like his earlier silent films, presented his philosophy and humor. "Doubting Thomas" (1935) showed the comedian's disdain for amateur theatrical groups. He believed that they diverted wives' attention away from their homes and families, and involved young people in unrealistic schemes aimed at performing stardom. The film saw Will describe people who became involved in such endeavors as "fools" and Mrs. Pompenelli, a thespian group's sponsor, as "an old nut."[13] In "Life Begins at 40" (1935), Will (Kennesaw H. Clark) attacked the wealthy by referring to Colonel Joseph Abecrombie, President of the local school board in the film, as "kinda egotistical." "He may not exactly admit that he's responsible for the rain we've been having," Will caustically observed, "but I think he'll tell you that it was his original idea."[14] "In Old Kentucky" (1935) found Will insulting formalized education, since Eastern colleges had begun offering courses in "flag pole sitting."[15] He added to this slander against learning in "Life Begins at 40," by describing writers as getting just enough pay "to act about half

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Rogers Memorial were verbatim network transcripts and some were copies made by the Will Rogers Memorial staff.

[13]Will Rogers in "Doubting Thomas," Fox Film Corporation, 1935, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[14]Will Rogers in "Life Begins at 40," Fox Film Corporation, 1935, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[15]Will Rogers in "In Old Kentucky," Twentieth Century Fox, 1935, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

cracked."[16]

Several fine, but nevertheless, interesting points come to light when observing Will's later movies. Specifically, in many films he failed to represent a dominating central figure. Oftentimes, he simply offered a general structural commentary by assuming the role of a homespun love lorn who helped young couples solve their romantic difficulties. A surprising facet of Will's film career appears when the viewer realizes that the Oklahoman's screen characters and pictures frequently exhibited something less than fundamentalist virtue. Some roles required the humorist to smoke and supposedly drink alcoholic beverages, and he even made some comments that could have been considered lurid. For example, in "Life Begins at 40," Will portraying Kennesaw H. Clark, suggestively advised an old bachelor friend to marry a widow, "I've heard, ah, you can have alot of fun with a widow."[17] "Judge Priest" (1934) emphasized this worldly aspect of Will's sound movie career by presenting

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[16]Will Rogers in "Life Begins at 40," courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[17]Will Rogers in "Life Begins at 40"; Will Rogers in "In Old Kentucky"; Will Rogers in "Doubting Thomas"; Will Rogers in "David Harum," Fox Film Corporation, 1934; Will Rogers in "Judge Priest," Fox Film Corporation, 1934, all courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. The Will Rogers Memorial has many more of Will's films. However, at present, researchers are not allowed to view them. Most of these films were in New York being reproduced when this historian visited Claremore to view the film library. I received the Will Rogers Memorial staff's full cooperation and encouragement at that time.

the story of a young girl who did not know the identity of her father and whose mother died in giving birth.[18]

Will's unstructured temperament made his early sound pictures difficult experiences. He found it impossible to govern his comments by memorizing a script. An arrangement finally evolved whereby the humorist enjoyed the privilege of modifying the script to meet his own spontaneous desires. Following a story's main theme and giving fellow actors their cues eventually represented the only restrictions imposed upon him. Someone would read the comedian his lines so that he had a point of orientation before work began on a scene. The director commenced filming at this point and the dialogue developed in an impromptu fashion. This technique proved awkward for the cowboy-philosopher's fellow actors and some, like actress Peggy Wood, found themselves forced to adopt his instinctive approach.[19]

Will became involved with several areas of film work while employed by the Fox organization. In addition to acting and personalizing his scripts, he sometimes assumed an advisory role concerning title

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[18]Will Rogers in "Judge Priest." Jack Lait presented an idealistic view of Will's movie career when he wrote: "He never spoke a line that wasn't utterly harmless and wholesome." Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 31; Also see Day, Biography, pp. 333-336.

[19]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 235; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 70, 86; Irving S. Cobb, Exit Laughing, p. 404; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 230; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 105-106; Trent, My Cousin, p. 192; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 31-32; Day, Biography, pp. 333-335.

selection and releasing procedures. As with most other portions of his life, Will's generous nature found expression in his relationship to co-workers in motion pictures. Several valid accounts describe how the Oklahoman helped other actors by giving them good lines or convincing directors to grant them expanded or feature roles at his expense.[20]

Fox Studios realized Will's public appeal and did everything possible to make their new star happy. For one thing, they built the comedian a multi-roomed, plushly decorated Spanish bungalow as a dressing room. Will treated this pretentious abode with "great respect" and "shunned it as one would quicksand."[21]

In its place, he oftentimes used his automobile as a roving dressing room. He "would curl up in the seat or stretch out on the running board to rest" and frequently changed clothes in the car or behind it.[22] Sometimes he slept in a stage chair while hidden behind a newspaper that he claimed to be reading when awakened.[23] Will's unpretentious character also asserted itself when someone placed a "gold-lettered plaque"

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[20]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 266, 290-292; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 101-102, 131; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 80-81, 83.

[21]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 236; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 248-249; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 85; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 21; Trent, My Cousin, p. 191.

[22]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 236; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 85.

[23]Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 85; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 249.

on the arm of his stage chair. He personally removed the nameplate with a hammer that he acquired from a "stand-by" carpenter.[24]

Will's aversion to his bungalow reflected practical necessity as well as distaste for the ornate. He found it increasingly difficult to find privacy and rest from the numerous dignitaries and fans who continually sought his companionship. It finally took a concerted effort from studio personnel to give him isolated moments for reflection and relaxation. His indistinguishable car, located in continuously different sectors of the Fox lot, provided a perfect rejuvenation center.[25]

The cowboy-philosopher's eclectic nature made him popular with the public, but it created problems for people who worked with him. Publicity personnel could not get him to pose for pictures or grant interviews. He refused to wear make-up and harassed cameramen who futilely tried to convince him "to stand in" or play a scene twice the same way. Sound men experienced difficulties because he rehearsed scenes speaking in one direction or area and changed these conditions completely when filming. These eccentricities never made Will unpopular with his associates because he compensated them in other ways. For example, he made many friends among the crew by taking time to informally talk and joke

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[24]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 71-72; Trent, My Cousin, p. 191.

[25]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 249-250; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 214-215; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971.

with them. Oftentimes he "tried out" his daily telegram, typed during a break while he sat on his car's running board, on the technicians. If they disapproved, he would prepare another piece that met with greater acceptance. A childlike procrastination toward work only endeared him to his fellow workers. He bartered amiably with directors concerning when work should begin and told stories as a delaying tactic. And finally, when he finished a picture the humorist took his associates to lunch. If a picture completed filming ahead of schedule, Will personally paid the crew the salary that they would have otherwise lost.[26]

Will Rogers entered the sound movies during a period when the cinema industry was developing rapidly. That stroke of luck helped make him a super star. When he died in 1935, over 80 million Americans weekly crowded into the tens of thousands of movie theatres that stretched across the nation. The tremendous growth enjoyed by the moving picture industry during this era resulted to a great extent from the depression crisis of 1929 and after. People enjoyed fantasy-like escapes from their problems. Will's movies benefited from this situation. They became so popular that many towns declared school holidays so that young people could see the latest Rogers' film. The cowboy-philosopher's fan mail increased in proportion with his ever expanding

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[26]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 35, 69-70, 73-75, 154; Peak, "America's Court Jester," p. 22; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 112; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 214-216; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 263-266; Day, Biography, pp. 333-335.

popularity.[27]

Will's dominance in the early sound movie industry was dramatized in a number of ways. In 1934, for example, he won a poll taken among independent theatre owners to determine the country's most popular box office attraction. Will's stature as a cinema figure comes into focus when one realizes that other performers in the 1934 poll included John Barrymore, Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer and Harold Lloyd. The cash drawer at the Fox Studios also demonstrated the Oklahoman's movie stature. Some estimated that Fox made over $25 million from Will's films during the six years from 1929-1935.[28]

Will's salary rose with studio profits and reflected his position as one of Hollywood's elite. His last contract provided for him to make ten pictures at $200,000 per film. This arrangement enabled the humorist to make an estimated million dollars a year in the movies; the largest salary earned by a film star up until that time. Will's total income from Fox over the years approximated $3,000,000.[29]

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[27]Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 117; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 29; Day, Biography, pp. 333-335; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," p. 90; U. S., Bureau of the Census with the Cooperation of the Social Science Research Council, Historical Statistics of the United States 'Colonial Times of 1957,' (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 225.

[28]Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 6; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 85; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 239.

[29]Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 23; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 239; Trent, My Cousin, p. 255; Day, Biography, p. 339; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 90.

The radio industry, like the movies, expanded dramatically during the early 1930's because of technological improvements and the escapist desires of the depression-burdened American people. Specifically, 21,456,000 of the 29,904,663 homes reported in the U. S. Census for 1930 possessed radios by 1935. This figure represented nearly seventy percent of America's family dwellings. As with his sound movie career, Will Rogers became involved in extensive radio work at a uniquely opportune time. And, as with the cinema, his instant success over the airwaves catapulted the Oklahoman into the super star category. Although the complete story of Will's radio career remains untold, the humorist made at least seventy-five talks over the crystal microphone between 1927 and 1935. His most publicized and best recorded radio work consisted of fourteen programs done for E. R. Squibb and Sons during 1930 and a longer, sporadic series which the Gulf Oil Corporation sponsored between 1933 and 1935. These programs generally lasted for fifteen minutes. The Squibb Broadcasts featured Bob Haring's Orchestra, while Al Goodman's Orchestra and the Revelers Quartet appeared frequently on the Gulf productions. Will's radio appearances almost always came on Sunday evening between 7:00 and 10:00 p. m.[30]

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[30]U. S., Bureau of the Census and Social Science Research Council, Historical Statistics, pp. 16, 491; Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport, The Psychology of Radio (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), p. 85; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," pp. 48, 93, 125; Day, Biography, pp. 255, 307; Trent, My Cousin, p. 186; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 20. An undated note from William R. Brown

Radio performing continued, as in the early 1920's, to bother Will. He worried about the audience's ability to "tune out so quickly," and their inability to distinguish between serious and humorous comments.[31] He further experienced difficulty in finding "something new to talk . . . about" and anxiously felt that "nothing in the World exposes how Little you have to say as Radio."[32] These apprehensions led him to seek advice from his listeners concerning the topics which they wished him to speak on and their reactions to his performing in an audience-filled studio as opposed to an isolated broadcasting booth. Will never overcame his discomfort with radio work and left the airwaves periodically as a way of not wearing out what he feared represented tenuous public acceptance.[33]

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concerning Will's radio work located in the Will Rogers Memorial; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, April 3, 1933, verbatim copy; Ibid., November 5, 1933; New York Times, March 20, 1930, p. 30; March 30, 1930, p. 19; April 6, 1930, section X, p. 2; New York World, April 6, 1930, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Publicity sheet for E. R. Squibb Broadcasts entitled, "Will Rogers to Become Regular Radio Star in Weekly Broadcasts," all courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial. As William R. Brown points out in his typed note, Will probably took part in many local and/or random broadcasts whose transcripts may be lost to posterity. Undated note from William R. Brown concerning Will's radio work located in the Will Rogers Memorial, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[31]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, June 17, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., June 9, 1935, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[32]Will Rogers, "Mr Toastmaster and Democrats," p. 161; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, June 24, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., October 14, 1934. All transcripts of Gulf Oil Radio Broadcasts are courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[33]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, June 11, 1933, Memorial

Will's radio technique reflected his free personality. Rather than reading a prepared script like most performers, he preferred an extemporaneous approach. This caused periodic difficulties when he took up more than his alotted amount of air time. The humorist began to use an alarm clock, and then two timepieces, in an attempt to remain on schedule.[34]

The radio gave Will another public rostrum from which he disseminated his philosophy. He once again sided with the weak against the strong by registering his displeasure with the white man's treatment of the American Indian. On one broadcast, the humorist drew an analogy between "Roman gladiators" who "used a lion to cut down their native population" and the "Pilgrims" who employed a more sophisticated instrument of destruction--"a gun." This comparison led to commentary concerning "465" treaties that the Federal Government had "broken with the Indians." "That is why the Indians get a kick," Will caustically observed, "out of reading the Government's usual remark when some big affair comes up, 'Our honor is at stake.'" The show ended when the cowboy-philosopher announced that for the first time since the discovery of America by Columbus the Government had agreed to construct a hospital

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copy; Ibid., July 8, 1934; Ibid., March 4, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., October 14, 1934; Ibid., June 9, 1935.

[34]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, May 7, 1933, Memorial copy; Ibid., December 30, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., January 20, 1935.

for Indians. "Look what the Indians have got to look foreward to in the next 400 years," he sarcastically concluded. "They are liable to build us a cemetery or something, I guess."[35]

The Oklahoman's ability to show deep empathy found expression over the airways when the government sent a group of Gold Star Mothers (women whose sons had died in World War I) to Europe in 1930 for a visit to their sons' grave sites. That act represented "just about the finest thing" the government could have done from Will's point of view. With "their sons' final resting place imprinted in their memories," America's bravest women could meet their maker "satisfied" in the fulfillment of their earthy duties.[36]

Will's talent for summarizing his views in one condensed and piercing comment, generally referred to as a one-liner, characterized his entire career. Nevertheless, he developed this art to a point of refinement in his radio appearances. His one-liners generally dealt with definite and familiar topics. For example, when commenting on Lady Astor's accomplishment in becoming the first woman to hold a seat in the English Parliament, he considered United States Senators: "That [a seat in Parliament] is not a Senate seat, you know; you don't buy

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[35]Will Rogers, Squibb Radio Broadcast, April 27, 1930, pp. 14-15; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, May 19, 1935, verbatim copy; Ibid., June 2, 1935.

[36]Will Rogers, Squibb Radio Broadcast, May 11, 1930, p. 21; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, May 12, 1935, verbatim copy.

that."[37] Congressmen received equal time when Will contemplated purchasing a new suit for a political speech that he had agreed to deliver: "I ain't got any dress suit and I couldn't go in a hired one because they would mistake me for a Congressman."[38] College professors became the target of the comedian's barbs when he reflected upon the fact that Dwight Morrow's (U. S. Ambassador to Mexico during the 1920's) father had been an ivory tower worker. It seemed that Dwight "would grow up to be the usual college professor's son. Then all at once a change came over him, and he went to work."[39] Nothing escaped the cowboy-philosopher's caustic eye; not even the presidency: "Morrow's [Dwight] college friend, Coolidge [Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States during the 1920's] drifted along from bad to worse and he landed in the White House."[40]

Will's radio success rivaled his motion picture triumphs. He soon became the country's highest paid radio performer. E. R. Squibb & Sons paid him $72,000, or $350 per minute, for doing fourteen quarter hour shows in 1930. Gulf Oil Company increased his salary in 1933 when it paid him $50,000 for participating in seven broadcasts. In addition to his financial rewards, Will could point with pride to several special

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[37]Will Rogers, Squibb Radio Broadcast; May 11, 1930, p. 22.

[38]Ibid., April 27, 1930, p. 16. [39]Ibid., May 25, 1930, pp. 29-30.

[40]Ibid., May 25, 1930, p. 30.

broadcasts which bolstered his position as a great radio entertainer. He spoke, for example, to the country about the unemployment problem in October, 1931. This fulfilled a request from President Herbert Hoover, while an appearance in August of 1933 in support of the New Deal's National Recovery Act complied with a similar plea from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. November of 1932 found the humorist taking to the airways in a special effort to help one of his favorite charities--the American Red Cross. Finally, Will's most rewarding radio broadcast took place in May, 1933, when Gulf Oil sponsored a humorous address that he delivered before the United States Senate in the ballroom of Washington's Mayflower Hotel.[41]

Sound motion pictures and radio had made Will Rogers a super star by the time the Great Depression of 1929 began to affect most Americans. Nevertheless, fame did not prohibit him from meeting the crisis head-on and with every ounce of energy he could summon. Will had always empathized with the poor and disadvantaged against the wealthy. He did so again during the depression. In this great crisis, his humane

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[41]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 284; Day, Biography, pp. 255, 307; Trent, My Cousin, p. 186; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 90; Nelson, " A Study in Ethos," pp. 4, 48-49, 115; New York Times, March 20, 1930, p. 30; March 30, 1930, p. 19; April 6, 1930, section X, p. 2; New York World, April 6, 1930, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast, April 30, 1933, Memorial copy; Ibid., June 11, 1933; Ibid., October 18, 1931; Ibid., November 14, 1932. All radio broadcasts courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

manliness was so empathetic that his legend became indelibly impressed upon the mind and heart of America.

CHAPTER XI

Will and the Great Depression

> Foreign Minister Irias [of Nicaragua] who was introduced to Mr. Rogers said of him:
>
> 'I know of him from two angles--that he is a famous humorist and a writer of philosophy as pleasing as an old shoe and that his presence on this earth has been beneficial to mankind.[1]

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of late October, 1929. Will Rogers, like most Americans, failed to realize the seriousness of the situation. The Wall Street speculators appeared to be the depression's early victims, while the rest of the population seemed unscathed. This led Will to view the difficulty from the viewpoint of traditional values and common-sense philosophy. He thought that many people had "been living too high" through "wild buying on credit," while they tried to make a living "gambling" instead of working.[2] This situation resulted in chaos when "the Lord just looked" over

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[1]New York Times, April 9, 1931, p. 18.

[2]Will Rogers in "David Harum," Fox Film Corporation, 1934; New York Times, June 28, 1930, p. 17; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 66.

the nation and "decided to set" it "back where" it "belonged."[3]

Since Will failed to realize the significance of the stock market crash, he used that event as justification for launching an attack against his old protagonists--the wealthy and powerful. He satirized Wall Street as a "Wailing Wall" where "you had to stand in line to get a window to jump out of." He also described speculators who sold "space for bodies in the East River."[4] A drive by financial and political leaders to restore confidence only brought criticism from the cowboy-philosopher. Although he eventually agreed to aid their efforts, Will viewed the movement as a "freak."[5] His determination to refrain from buying anything himself so that others could "have confidence first" reflected his real feelings.[6] Presidential commissions over-ladened, as he said, with unrealistic college professors, statements describing America as fundamentally sound, and banks which agreed to tighten up their loan policies

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[3]New York Times, December 31, 1930, p. 4; Beverly Hills Citizen, October 22, 1931, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[4]The Atlanta Journal, October 25, 1929, p.1.

[5]Ibid., November 20, 1929, p. 1. The New York Times frequently refused to use Will's articles when they differed with the paper's political philosophy. The above article is a case in point.

[6]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 8, 1929, p. 25; Day, Biography, p. 250. Roger Butterfield viewed Will's role in restoring confidence somewhat differently. Bufferfield, "Legend," p. 90. Also see the E. R. Squibb & Sons Radio Broadcast for April 20, 1930, in connection with this point. Squibb Radio Broadcasts, pp. 9-11.

by excluding farmers also provided grist for the humorist's critical mill.[7]

Will summed up his reaction to the depression's early stages on a positive note. He thought that the country remained basically "sound" since Wall Street represented only a small, intangible portion of the nation's wealthy. "Why, the whole 120,000,000 of us are more dependent," he concluded, "on the crackling of a hen than if the Stock Exchange was turned into a night club."[8]

The economy failed to right itself and America slipped into a paralyzing depression during 1930 and 1931. Will's concern over the nation's plight increased as he, like many Americans, gradually began to grasp the seriousness of the disaster. When searching for the depression's cause, he refused to blame the country's problems on President Herbert Hoover. Rather, the comedian staunchly defended the Republican leader as an "unfortunate" victim of circumstances who found himself "watching the dam when it busted."[9] Will saw the wealthy, and specifically the

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[7]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 8, 1929, p. 25; New York Times, December 21, 1929, p. 3; December 26, 1929, p. 17.

[8]The Atlanta Journal, October 26, 1929, p. 1; Ibid., Magazine Section, December 8, 1929, p. 25.

[9]Will Rogers, Special Radio Broadcast for the American Red Cross, November 14, 1932, Memorial copy; Squibb Radio Broadcasts, April 20, 1930, pp. 9-11; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, April 30, 1933, verbatim copy; New York Times, November 10, 1932, p. 23; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," pp. 50-51.

bankers, as the real molders of America's doom. "It wasn't the working class that brought this condition on at all," he said in a special radio broadcast dealing with unemployment during October, 1931. "It was the big boys themselves who thought that this financial drunk we were going through was going to last forever. They over-merged and over-capitalized and over-everything else."[10]

As the Hoover Administration tried to cope with the depression, Will was especially critical of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which was set up in 1932 to provide aid to large corporations as a means of bolstering the economy. Such aid theoretically "trickled down" to the general population in the form of jobs and increased wager. Will, like many Americans, criticized this policy because he believed that the money loaned to the wealthy would never reach the lower and middle classes. He viewed the R. F. C. as a failure because "gold or money goes uphill" rather than down.[11] The humorist found it difficult to understand how Congress could appropriate billions of dollars for helping the rich while not a single example existed "where the loan was for the man who had absolutely nothing." "Our theory," he caustically concluded, " is to help those who can get along even if they don't get it."[12]

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[10]Beverly Hills Citizen, October 22, 1931, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; The Atlanta Journal, February 25, 1932, p. 1. It should be noted that the best copy of Will's Unemployment Speech is in the Beverly Hills Citizen for October 22, 1931.

[11]The Atlanta Journal, February 2, 1933, p. 1.

[12]New York Times, January 23, 1932, p. 17.

Will refused to restrict his activities to criticizing administration policy; he suggested positive solutions to the country's plight. The cowboy-philosopher disliked the dole because it gave people money for doing nothing. Nevertheless, he favored extensive and unprecedented aid. He saw unequal distribution of the country's wealth and unemployment as the nation's basic problems. In addition, he believed that everyone who retained a job or monied position in society should agree to share his good fortune with the disadvantaged in the form of increased taxes. Will visualized such money from taxes as being used to create jobs that would provide each person with the means of surivial and the dignity of making his own living. The Oklahoman justified his plan by taking the position that the poorest among the unemployed had in some way "contributed to the wealth of every millionaire in America."[13] His analysis ended with firm commitment: "It might not be a great plan, but it will DAM sure beat the ones we got now."[14]

The increasing hardships that Americans experienced as the depression deepened led Will into further charity work. When Congress failed to offer flood victims in the South and Midwest financial help dur-

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[13]Beverly Hills Citizen, October 22, 1931, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 68; Day, Autobiography, pp. 238-239, 253, Uncatagorized Manuscripts, Rogers Family Collection.

[14]Day, Autobiography, pp. 238-239, Uncatagorized Manuscripts, Rogers Family Collection.

ing the spring of 1930, the humorist became incensed. Eight months later, January 3, 1931, five hundred starving farmers in England, Arkansas, threatened to revolt if they failed to receive food for their suffering families. Their plight brought forth an empathetic response and grand jesture from Will. He cancelled a lucrative lecture tour, a vacation, and began arranging a fund raising tour with the Red Cross. The United States Navy provided a plane and the Texas Company donated gas and the services of a pilot--Captain Frank Hawks. Will organized a troupe of entertainers to follow him around by ground transportation. The group included the Revelers Quartet, Charles Byers, a trick roper, Jimmy Rogers, a western singer, and Betty. The troupe started in late January, 1931, and ended some seventeen days later in mid-February. Will visited fifty-seven cities in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas, put on four shows daily, made a considerable personal contribution everywhere he went, and raised about a quarter of a million dollars for the relief fund. Very little record exists concerning what Will said on the tour, but one document found in Donald Day's Autobiography suggested that the Oklahoman found himself in rare form: "Starving aint so bad, its getting used to it that is rough. The first three years of a Republican administration is the hardest. By the end of that time you are used to living on predictions."[15]

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[15]Day, Autobiography, p. 241; Squibb Radio Broadcasts, April 20, 1930, p. 10; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 145; Betty Rogers,

Will returned to the Fox Studios when the flood relief trip ended and began working on another picture--"Young As You Feel." Filming ended in early April, 1931, and the comedian planned to take a short vacation by making a trip through Central America. He arrived in Managua, Nicaragua, in the wake of a viciously destructive earthquake. Spontaneously throwing himself into the fight to relieve suffering, Will contributed $5,000 to a recovery fund and began giving benefit performances which were complimented by public appeals for assistance through his newspaper columns.[16]

Once started, the cowboy-philosopher gave ever-increasing amounts of time to charity work during the depression. He continued to hand out financial aid to friends and relatives in addition to his numerous benefit performances. Any call for help that concerned veterans,. crippled children, hospitals, jails or otherwise disadvantaged

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The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 242-255; Day, Biography, pp. 263-268; New York Times, January 13, 1931, p. 2; January 22, 1931, p. 3; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 227-228; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 88; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 164; Trent, My Cousin, p. 204; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 149-161; Keith, Boys' Life of Will Rogers, p. 252. It should be noted that Love, Trent, Milsten, Day and Keith all make conflicting statements concerning the amount of money that Will raised for flood victims in 1931. Harold Keith uses a statement by Eddie Cantor which incorrectly put the flood in 1929.

[16]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 245-247; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 203; Trent, My Cousin, p. 204; Day, Biography, pp. 267-268; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 228-229; New York Times, April 9, 1931, p. 18.

persons brought an immediate visit. In addition, the comedian secretly donated large sums of money to both the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Specifically, all the proceeds from his 1930 radio contract with E. R. Squibb & Sons ($72, 000) and the initial radio agreement with Gulf Oil ($50, 000) were divided equally between his two favorite charities. And, unlike many people, Will seldom used his contributions to the needy as tax deductions.[17]

International relations assumed an electric character in September of 1931 when Japan invaded China's northern province of Manchuria. This incident assumed strategic importance because it further threatened the peace and stability of a world shaken to its depths by economic depression. Will determined to look into the matter for his constituency. He boarded the Empress of Russia on November 21, 1931, and began a world tour which carried him throughout the Far East and Western Europe during the next two and one-half months. His trip included stops in "Tokyo, Mukden, Manchuria, Peiping, Shanghai, Chinchow, Singapore, Allabad, India, Cairo, Bagdad, Athens, Rome, Paris, London" and Geneva.[18] Will once again recorded his impressions for the Satur-

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[17]Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 165; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 161, 240; Trent, My Cousin, p. 186, 203-205; Day, Biography, pp. 255, 307; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," pp. 92-93; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 145; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 366; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 27. It should be noted that Jack Lait, unlike Trent and Milsten, believes that Will did use his contributions to charities for income tax deductions. Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 27.

[18]Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 199-200; Trent,

day Evening Post, but only after having returned home. He facetiously addressed his supposed communications to Senator William E. Borah, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, rather than President Hoover, because he wanted "to work for the Head man."[19] The new series' title, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to Senator Borah," reflected this motif.[20]

Will's 1931 sojourn to the Orient reinforced his earlier view of foreign affairs. International entanglements remained "terrible expensive" while imperialistic conquest and bullying of other nations still created enemies and financial deficits.[21] The isolationist-orientated columnist found it difficult to understand why Americans believed that they represented "about the only ones that really know how to do everything right." "I don't know how," he lashed out, "a lot of these other Nations have existed as long as they have till we could get some of our people around and show 'em really how to be Pure and Good like us."[22]

My Cousin, p. 256; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 248, 253-254; Day, Biography, pp. 273-282.

[19]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to Senator Borah," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV February 27, 1932, pp. 6-7.

[20]Will Rogers, "Letters to the Phillippines," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV April 30, 1932, p. 6. Will changed the title of the last article in this series to "A Letter to the Phillippines."

[21]Will Rogers, "Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to Senator Borah," Saturday Evening Post, CCIV February 27, 1932, pp. 7, 44, 46.

[22]Ibid., p. 46; Ibid., CCIV March 12, 1932, p. 100.

Will also continued to view compromise as a positive alternative to the destruction and possible disaster of war. Nevertheless, he realistically understood that disarmament schemes were "Hooey," and that a nation's power and prestige rested upon its military capability.[23]

The negative concept of war and imperialism which dominated Will's outlook led him to criticize Japan's thrust into Manchuria as unneccessary and unprofitable. He believed that Nippon had "lost her head" in giving full reign to a "naturally ambitious nature." In addition, the humorist critized as "Hooey" the Japanese assertation that the Manchurian incursion had proven necessary in order to "protect" the Far Eastern nation against its neighbors.[24] Regardless of these sentiments, Will realized that Japan's international position of power rested upon her "Chinese and Russian [Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905] War" victories.[25]

Will returned from his world tour in February of 1932. Shortly thereafter the upcoming presidential election captured his attention. He attended the Republican nominating convention in Chicago during June and gloried in the Republicans' predicament of trying to re-elect the depression-tainted Herbert Hoover. He satirized the convention's speakers

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[23]Ibid., CCIV March 5, 1932, p. 8; Ibid., CCIV March 12, 1932, pp. 8, 96.

[24]Ibid., CCIV March 12, 1932, pp. 8-9, 96-97, 100, passim.

[25]Ibid., CCIV March 19, 1932, p. 80.

for declaring "that Judas Iscariot was the first Democratic floor leader and Al Capone was one of the last."[26] Bert Snell, one of the meeting's orators, even went so far as to compare Hoover's ability as a "Savior" with that of Jesus Christ. Snell's tendency to grant "the engineer the edge over the Carpenter" seemed unique to Will.[27]

The Democrats also held their 1932 convention in Chicago. Will attended and received several honors. First, he was given the opportunity to address the delegates. His fifteen minute rambling presentation covered a myriad of topics which ranged from the platform committee, which he believed would complete its work when "enough" of the members became "sober enough," to the Republicans, whom he described as doing "the best they could with what little they had. . . ." The humorist concluded his talk with a prophetic prediction concerning the Democratic Party's nominee: "I don't see how he could be weak enough not to win. . . . If he lives until November, he is in!"[28] Will's second honor at the Democratic Convention surprised him. Alfalfa Bill Murray, Governor of Oklahoma, nominated the humorist for the Presidency on the second ballot and the old home state cast its twenty-two votes for the comedian. When the gathering ended, Will traveled to Claremore

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[26]The Atlanta Journal, June 16, 1932, pp. 1, 9; Day, Autobiography, p. 270; Day, Biography, p. 293.

[27]The Atlanta Journal, June 16, 1932, pp. 1, 9.

[28]Day, Biography, pp. 294-295.

to "recuperate fron one straight month of speeches." "Heard a mule braying a while ago at the farm," he wrote, commenting on his vacation, "and for a minute I couldn't tell who he was nominating."[29]

The high point of the 1932 election for Will came during late September. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, planned to visit Los Angeles and deliver a major campaign speech. Republican Mayor John Porter refused to officially welcome Roosevelt because of the New Yorker's opposition to prohibition. Democratic party strategists feared the repercussions of Mayor Porter's stand and began frantically searching for someone to present their candidate at the scheduled rally. Will heard of the problem and offered to deliver the welcoming comments. The Democrats leaped at his offer and the comedian introduced Roosevelt to a capacity crowd of approximately 100,000 people at the Hollywood Bowl. His talk rambled between comic and serious topics and ended with a humorous, but candid comment: "This introduction may have lacked logic, and particularly flowerriness, but you must remember, you are only a candidate. Come back when you are president and I will do better. I am wasting no oratory on a mere prospect."[30]

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[29]New York Times, July 4, 1932, p. 13; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 234; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 23-24; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 2.

[30]Day, Autobiography, pp. 290-292; Will Rogers, Speech Introducing Democratic Presidential Candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sep-

The Presidential election of 1932 was hard fought. The "bitterness and bad sportsmanship" which characterized the contest became too overpowering for Will and he escaped the distasteful scene by taking a seventeen day tour of Latin America during mid-October.[31] The campaign was still on when he returned, so he considered the problem of political conflict in his newspaper column. Since "political leeches" in each party had goaded both candidates into "saying things that if they were in their right minds they wouldn't think of saying," Will suggested a "moratorium" on speeches which would allow Hoover and Roosevelt to "get the weight of the world" off their shoulders and "go fishing." This, he declared, would provide everyone with a needed rest and when the election returns determined the new President everyone would know which candidate had proven "the lesser of the two evils. . . ."[32]

Will's criticism of the Presidential candidates in 1932 brought

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tember 24, 1932, Olympic Stadium, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Day, Biography, pp. 297-298; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 152-153; It should be noted that Day's Autobiography, and the material from the Will Rogers Memorial give conflicting dates for Will's speech introducing Roosevelt.

[31]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 284, 280-281; Day, Autobiography, p. 296; Day, Biography, p. 298. It should be noted that Paula M. Love of the Will Rogers Memorial, does not agree with this view concerning the origin of Will's Latin American tour. Interview with Mrs. Paula M. Love, curator of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma, December 20, 1970.

[32]New York Times, November 2, 1932, p. 21; November 8, 1932, p. 21; November 12, 1932, p. 17.

quick responses from both Republicans and Democrats who disliked his comments. The Oklahoman usually was sensitive to public dissatisfaction, but this time he firmly defended his position. In an editorial published by the Los Angeles Times, Will stated that he liked and knew most public figures. Nevertheless, he reserved the right to take "a dig" at any person who did or said "something foolish."[33] He reinterated this position in a syndicated newspaper article during December, 1932. This time the columnist stated that he had always talked and written about "National and International affairs" and that he planned to continue "to call em like I see em."[34]

Franklin D. Roosevelt became President of the United States on March 4, 1933, and immediately began with unparalleled dispatch to institute his broadly conceived New Deal program. Will Rogers adopted a generally positive attitude toward the new President's policies. He liked Roosevelt's Fireside Chats on the radio and supported his announcemen of a national banking holiday. His early favorable reaction to the New Deal turned into pure elation as Roosevelt's program began to take

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[33]Los Angeles Times, November 10, 1932, cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 283, and Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 96; Love, The Will Rogers Book, p. 96; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 281-283.

[34]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, December 18, 1932, p. 20. Reba N. Collins uncovered another controversy between Will and his readers at this time. However one gets the feeling that she may have treated both disagreements as one. Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 160-165.

form. Will soon announced: "We got the puncture fixed and are headed away."[35] By the early spring of 1933, Will was referring to Roosevelt as "the Houdini of Hyde Park," and "this modern Messiah."[36] Christmas of 1933 saw the Oklahoman observe that "there is lots more good cheer this Christmas than last (or the last three), and it's not all out of bottles either."[37] In summation, 1933 appeared to Will as "the year of the big switch from worse to better."[38]

Will's support of Roosevelt's programs included positive evaluations of the President's monetary policies, relief programs, regulation of big business, increased taxes and large scale spending. Specifically, he made favorable comments concerning the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Industrial Recovery Act, repeal of prohibition, Agricultural Adjustment of 1933, Public Works Administration, Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America and American participation in the Court of International Justice. Will's description of the sweeping Democratic victory during the Congressional elections of 1934 reflected his support of Rooseveltism.

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[35]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, April 2, 1933, p. 16; The Atlanta Journal, March 6, 1933, p. 1; Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast, May 7, 1933, Memorial copy of National Broadcasting Company transcript; Day, Biography, p. 314; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 70-72.

[36]Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast, April 30, 1933, verbatim copy.

[37]The Atlanta Journal, December 25, 1933, p. 1.

[38]Ibid., January 1, 1934, p. 1.

He pictured the Republicans as having thought that the "honeymoon" between Roosevelt and the public was over. "They were mighty poor judges of a love sick couple," he followed with poorly concealed elation.[39] A radio broadcast on November 11, 1934, dealt with the same topic. Will depicted the Republican Party in 1934 as a patient who realized that he suffered from "accute appendicitis" and therefore needed an expensive operation. Just before going into the operating room, the Republicans unnecessarily signed their own obituary by calling off the surgery. They had incorrectly decided that their organization suffered from "cramp colic" rather than accute appendicitis."[40]

The cowboy-philosopher's support of the New Deal was natural in light of his concern for the disadvantaged sectors of society and his general criticism of the establishment. He believed that Roosevelt's spending policy had given many people work and had accounted for the upswing in the economy after early 1933. Since he saw things in this light, the Oklahoman viewed critically the actions of groups like the U. S. Chamber of Commerce which attacked the Administration's pro-

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[39]Ibid., November 8, 1934, p. 1.

[40]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, November 11, 1934, verbatim copy. Lowell Thomas's comment that Will "never took a crack at any man--either a man, a party, or a class--unless he or it was riding cockily on top of the world" must be viewed carefully in the light of the above information. O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 6 of Introduction by Lowell Thomas.

gram by trying to "'keep government out of business.'"[41] In essence, Will could not understand a world where "you feed a dog and he bites you."[42]

A second characteristic of the opposition to the Administration which miffed the cowboy-philosopher was the unwillingness of rich individuals and organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers to carry their share of the country's burden. Such people wanted "to know in advance" what lay ahead because they had "always played with marked cards." When the wealthy opposed increased taxes, Will drew an uncomplimentary portrait: "He [the wealthy person who stood in opposition to higher taxes] won't bet on his country being bigger than the system, even if the system is wrong."[43]

Will's favorable response to Roosevelt's policies and programs should not lead one to the conclusion that he blindly supported the New Deal. The humorist did approve of many Administration programs, but he also retained a realistic perspective which enabled him to oppose some aspects of the New Deal. He realized that the Democrats had "buried in the ash can" some of their schemes that had not "exactly

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[41]The Atlanta Journal, May 3, 1934, p. 1; April 20, 1934, p. 1; July 4, 1934, p. 1; April 3, 1935, p. 1.

[42]Ibid., July 14, 1934, p. 1.

[43]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, November 5, 1933, verbatim copy; The Atlanta Journal, November 28, 1934, p. 1; June 14, 1934, p. 1; Will Rogers in "Life Begins at 40."

percolated."[44] And at times, he also saw that both parties sincerely desired "recovery," but disagreed on whether it should start at the "top" or the "bottom." On one such occasion, Will admitted his bewilderment and wrote, "I don't know which is right."[45]

The hostile comments which Will levied against the New Deal specifically considered the overall collapse of the National Recovery Administration (N. R. A.), the unrealistic theories of the college professors in Roosevelt's entourage, the President's inability to make his gold policy "quite clear" in radio broadcasts, the government's cancellation of air mail contracts, the questionable ability of Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, "to teach the farmer corn acreage control and the hog birth control" and the doubtful nature of some relief programs which enabled people to receive "more for not working than . . . . working, and more for not raising a hog than raising it." The negative effect of the 1934 Congressional elections which saw the Democrats receive too much power and many "awful good Republicans" fail to win re-election also constituted part of Will's dissatisfaction with the New Deal.[46]

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[44]The Atlanta Journal, March 25, 1935, p. 1; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 72.

[45]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, June 9, 1935, verbatim copy, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

[46]The Atlanta Journal, November 9, 1934, p. 1; August 23, 1933, p. 1; Magazine Section, March 17, 1935, p. 12; October 24, 1933, p. 1;

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Magazine Section, May 20, 1934, p. 16; August 29, 1933, p. 1; Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, February 3, 1935, verbatim copy; Ibid., October 29, 1933, verbatim copy; Ibid., March 4, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., February 11, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., November 11, 1934, verbatim copy; Ibid., November 12, 1933, Memorial copy; Ibid., April 7, 1935, verbatim copy.

CHAPTER XII

The Last Curtain - Unannounced

> He [Will] was doing what he wished to do and was enjoying it thoroughly. And his health was good, except now and then when his chili got him down. But in a meal or two he would be all right again and back on his beloved chili. And, beans. He loved them too. Oklahoma beans were best. Nobody really knew how to cook 'em except the folks back in Oklahoma.[1]

Will changed very little during the last few years of his life. He paid his respects to the past by rebuilding the home ranch at Oologah, while his spontaneously epicurean nature continued to guide his day to day existence. The cowboy-philosopher disliked schedules more than ever, and went to great lengths to avoid a structured existence. Many associates, like Charles Wagner, believed that his tendency to place "fun and living ahead of business" made him "casual and unreliable."[2] Nevertheless, Will continued to enjoy life "immediately." In the early 1930's, for example, he loved to strike out on unplanned automobile trips with Betty. They would take a day or two and travel the backroads

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[1]Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 245.

[2]Ibid., p. 246; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 173.

of California visiting with average citizens and eating in picnic fashion.[3]

Lack of interest in wearing apparel also remained a facet of Will's informal nature. Betty described this trait in an intriguing story which she told about the humorist's last minute decision to attend the London Naval Conference of 1930. He scurried around New York frantically making preparations for his departure. In the process, Will purchased a "$19.85" "double-breasted" "blue serge suit" in "a cut-rate shop on Broadway." When he arrived in London, a series of formal parties connected with the diplomatic gathering had begun, and Will attended in his $19.85 special. This incident not only epitomized the comedian's aversion to fancy clothing, it also exemplified his habit of touring with very little extra clothing.[4] His traveling companions usually consisted of a typewriter and a small "soft red grip" full of throw-away underwear, socks and one extra suit. "Its [Will's grip] always packed the same," he said, "no matter if its to New York or Singapore."[5]

Although Will worked hard to acquire wealth, his free nature made him haphazard with his own finances. The humorist oftentimes found himself without pocket money, and it remains doubtful if he ever

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[3]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 173, 264, 272-273.

[4]Ibid., pp. 174-175.

[5]Day, Autobiography, p. 349; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 173-174, 242.

asked the price of anything he purchased or kept business and financial records. Whatever semblance of order existed in his business affairs rested with James Blake, a brother-in-law, and Dr. A. H. Giannini, Chairman of the Bank of America of Los Angeles.[6]

As one might expect, entertainment at the Rogers' Ranch took on a casual air which complimented Will's general disposition. He preferred to hold "informal outdoor barbecues and buffet suppers" on his patio as opposed to the "large formal parties" given by other stars. Small numbers of "intimate friends" usually made up the guest list on such occasions.[7]

During early 1934, Henry Duffy, a play producer, approached Will with a new type of proposition. He suggested that the Oklahoman take the male lead in an upcoming California production of Eugene O'Neill's play, "Ah! Wilderness." The cowboy-philosopher cautiously considered Duffy's offer. He had never done serious theatre work which required memorizing lines. In addition, George M. Cohan had already made the role famous on Broadway. Nevertheless, Will finally decided to accept Duffy's offer. The play opened in Fresno during the spring and soon

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[6]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 100, 272; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. 23; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 240; Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, p. 122; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 258-259.

[7] Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 272.

moved to San Francisco.[8]

Will played in "Ah! Wilderness" for about ten weeks. His first effort at serious acting proved a great success and he basked in the glory of his accomplishment. Betty told Henry Duffy that the triumph in "Ah! Wilderness" gave Will "'the most pleasure'" of anything he had ever done.[9] Will emphasized this point in a radio broadcast of July 1, 1934, when he described his experience with such superlatives as "lovely" and "great."[10]

Will's appearance in "Ah! Wilderness" ended suddenly and under disturbing circumstances. While performing in Pasadena, he received a critical letter from a minister who accused him of engaging in a lewd and immoral production. "Relying on you to give the public nothing that could bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of a Christian," the communication said in part, "I attended your performance with my 14-year-old daughter. But when you gave the scene in which the father visits the son in his bedroom and lectures him on the subject of his relations

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[8]Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 34; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 288-289; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 231; Day, Biography, p. 338.

[9]Henry Duffy to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 289; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, p. 82; Day, Biography, p. 338; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 34; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 143; Lait, Wit and Wisdom, p. ix of Foreword.

[10]Will Rogers, Gulf Oil Radio Broadcast, July 1, 1934, verbatim copy, courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma.

with an immoral woman, I took my daughter by the hand and we left the theatre. I have not been able to look her in the eyes since." The scene to which the minister referred depicted Will as a country newspaper editor whose son had gotten drunk and succumbed to the advances of a cheap woman. Will [the father] counseled his straying offspring to avoid such ruinous activity by recounting a similar experience in his own youth.[11]

The thought had never occurred to Will that anyone would take offense at what he said in "Ah! Wilderness." The minister's reaction shocked and upset him. After a brief period of conscious-ridden suffering, the comedian submitted his resignation to producer Duffy and left the show. He simply could not stand the thought of doing anything that would produce such a negative public response.[12]

Will's contract with Fox Films required him to make three pictures a year. If he worked conscientiously, this schedule provided him with relatively long vacations. During the summer of 1934, he utilized such a break to take a world tour with Betty, Jim and Will, Jr. The boys were old enough to take care of themselves, and the trip turned into a "second honeymoon" for Will and Betty.[13] The happy couple tra-

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[11]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 251-252; Day, Biography, pp. 338-339; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 143; Lait, Wit and Wisdom, pp. x-xi of Foreword.

[12]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 251-252; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 143; Day, Biography, pp. 338-339; Lait, Wit and Wisdom, pp. x-xi of Foreword.

[13]Day, Biography, p. 326; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life

veled mainly by boat and visited Hawaii, Japan, Manchuria, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, Austria, the Balkan countries and England. Will found his comfort disturbed by the annoying presence of a large wardrobe that the family had selected for him. He graudally discarded the unwanted clothing by leaving some at each hotel along the travel route. "Its going to take a long time to get rid of all it," he announced to his public. "But I will come into New York Harbor, with the little red bag, the old blue serge suit, and the typewriter."[14] Upon returning to America in the fall of 1934, Will resumed his motion picture and radio careers.[15]

By the beginning of 1935, some people thought that age was catching up with Will. His career appeared to have reached its zenith and begun to decline. Homer Croy, a Hollywood writer and associate during these years, noticed that the cowboy-philosopher "rested more and slept more," while Betty observed that Will "showed signs of weariness" for the first time in his life.[16] Croy also spotted a decline in the number of lecture engagements and an increase in the amount of leisure time Will spent at

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Told by His Wife, p. 301.

[14]Day, Autobiography, p. 349; Day, Biography, pp. 320-326; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 290.

[15]Day, Biography, pp. 321-326.

[16]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 290-291; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 301.

home. In addition, Will's career seemed to be showing "shadows" from Croy's vantage point. Specifically, the author pointed out a drop in the popularity of the comedian's motion pictures and an "increasing carelessness" in his newspaper work which produced copy "so ambiguous it didn't even make sense."[17]

Will realized that age was beginning to take its toll. In answering a 1933 request from Mrs. Bertha Johnson Hitch for a personal photograph, he candidly commented that he was "getting so old" that he would not "have anymore" pictures taken.[18] He voiced similar sentiments in a newspaper article which knowledgeably described how middle-aged men unsuccessfully tried to recapture their youthful appearance with barber shop "rubbing machines and lotions." "Your old face gets back to normal about the time you hit the street anyhow," Will lamented. "It begins to hit its original shape, those fancy remedies are awful temporary."[19]

Although Will's career may have been entering a period of relative decline by 1935, the humorist remained ambitious, resourceful and extremely successful. He was considering, for example, taking the

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[17]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 292-293. Croy makes contradictory statements concerning the decline of Will's career. Also, he incorrectly depicted the Oklahoman's age as forty-two rather than fifty-five.

[18]Letter of Will Rogers to Mrs. Bertha Johnson Hitch, 1933, cited in Hitch, Cadet, p. 20.

[19]The Atlanta Journal, Magazine Section, February 24, 1935, p. 14.

leading role in a play that he had written and intended to produce. A plan to buy his own airplane and become the world's first air reporter held an increasing attraction for him. And infrequent references concerning writing his autobiography continued to appear in his conversation.[20]

The humorist's wealth and earning capacity also attested to his continued success. By 1935, he received $2500 per week for his daily and weekly newspaper columns alone. These pieces appeared in approximately 378 papers in forty states and three foreign countries. In addition, during 1934 the comedian earned $330,000 from his movies and $60,000 for radio engagements. At the time of his death, Will's estate was valued at a minimum of $2,300,000 and some sources estimated it to have approximated $6,000,000.[21]

Sometime during 1934-1935, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer made arrange-

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[20]Trent, My Cousin, p. 25; Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 35-36; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 294; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 13-14, 35; Will Rogers to David Milsten, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 255-256.

[21]Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 314-316; Letter from V. V. McNitt to Will Rogers, July 6, 1930, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma; Ibid., March 19, 1934; Letter from F. J. Murray, treasurer of the McNaught Syndicate, to Mrs. Will Rogers, July 22, 1932, in Rogers Collection, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma. All of these letters are cited in Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 157-158. Homer Croy is the best source concerning Will's estate. The idea that the humorist was worth $6,000,000 when he died evidently came from a newspaper article which appeared in the Los Angeles Times. Spi Trent gives support to the $6,000,000 figure. Trent, My Cousin, p. 255; also see Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 194.

ments with the Fox organization to borrow Will for the motion picture version of Eugene O'Neill's, "Ah! Wilderness." Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer planned to begin work on the project during August of 1935, but problems developed when the cowboy-philosopher refused to appear in the film. His bad experience in the live theatre presentation of the play during early 1934 had convinced the Oklahoman that it would offend his fundamentalist-oriented fans if he took the screen role. Louis B. Mayer tried to change Will's mind, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Finally, an agreement was reached whereby Will promised to do another picture for Mayer's studio. While the film company's officials searched for a suitable script, Will decided to take a vacation.[22]

The holiday that Will took in August of 1935 developed haphazardly. He and Betty talked of numerous possible excursions. They frequently discussed "flying to Rio de Janerio" and catching "the German Zeppelin . . . for a flight up the coast of Africa."[23] Nevertheless, the hu-

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[22]Day, Biography, p. 339; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," pp. 33-34; Lait, Wit and Wisdom, pp. x-xii of Foreword; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 143; Trent, My Cousin, p. 252; Folks Say of Will Rogers, p. 35; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp.114-115. Lait makes contradictory statements concerning the definiteness of Will's decision not to do the film version of "Ah! Wilderness." He also leads his reader to the incorrect assumption that the question of Will's appearance in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture immediately followed the comedian's involvement with O'Neill's play. See previous citations for both of Lait's books.

[23]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 301; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 294.

morist's aversion to long range plans prohibited him from making a definite commitment to the African trip. At this juncture, Wiley Post and his wife arrived in Los Angeles. Will respected the unheralded Post for his accomplishments in aviation. These triumphs included awards for the fastest around-the-world flight, first solo flight around the world, first trans-Pacific solo flight and fastest air trip from New York to Berlin. In late 1935, Post was planning a flight from Alaska to Moscow by way of the Bering Sea and Siberia. He intended to travel in a newly constructed plane of his own design and asked the cowboy-philosopher to accompany him. Will hesitated to accept the invitation and asked Post, who was flying to Seattle to get pontoons put on his plane, to call him from the northern city for a final decision. Betty never liked for Will to fly, and she felt especially apprehensive about the proposed trip across Siberia. She tried several times to dissuade Will from going; but when Post called from Seattle, the humorist agreed to accompany him on at least part of his journey.[24]

Will met the famous aviator in Seattle and the two adventurers took off for Jeneau, Alaska. They spent August 7th, 8th, and 9th there visiting with old friends and new acquaintances. Will remained undecided concerning the trip to Moscow. If he made the complete journey,

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[24]Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 301-305, 307; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 194-195; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 294-296; O. O. MyIntyre, "Our Will," p. 83; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 210-211; Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. 114-115.

Betty planned to rendevous with him in Europe. On the other hand, if he decided to leave Post in Alaska, the Oklahoman intended for Betty to join him for a leisurely drive through coastal New England. From Juneau, Post flew to Akavik in the Northwest Territory and then on to Fairbanks, Alaska, on the 12th. Will wanted to interview Charles Brower, a famous frontiersman who lived at Point Barrow, so he and Post decided to head for the Alaskan coast. Heavy fog prohibited flying on the 14th and the two frustrated travelers remained in Fairbanks. Ominous weather conditions reappeared on the 15th, but this time Post, his patience worn thin, decided to head for Point Barrow. If the fog proved impenetrable, he informed friends that he would land on one of the numerous lakes or rivers in the area until conditions improved.[25]

Post and his famous passenger took off from Fairbanks at two o'clock in the afternoon. They eventually ran into heavy fog and lost their way. At 8:00 that evening, the intuitive aviator found a break in the clouds and landed his plane at Walakpa Lagoon, which is located just sixteen miles southwest of Point Barrow. Claire Okpeaha, an Es-

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[25]New York Times, August 8, 1935, p. 1; August 9, 1935, p. 19; August 10, 1935, p. 14; August 11, 1935, p. 3; August 13, 1935, p. 19; August 17, 1935, p. 14; August 18, 1935, pp. 1, 26-27; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 244-247; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 305-307; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 297-300; Stanley R. Mohler and Bobby H. Johnson, Wiley Post, His "Winnie Mae," and the World's First Pressure Suit, Smithonian Annals of Flight, Number 8 (Washington, D. C.: Smithonian Institution Press, 1971), pp. 111-115. Milsten and Croy present conflicting versions of the weather reports which Post received for the 15th.

kimo seal hunter, and his wife lived on the lagoon. Post taxied his plane near Okpeaha's tent and sought directions. After talking briefly with the Eskimo couple, Will and Post prepared to take off. Their aircraft glided across the lagoon and rose to a height of between 50 and 200 feet. As the plane started to bank slowly to the right disaster struck. The engine sputtered and then quit running. The aircraft nose-dived into the water below and did a somersault upon impact. Claire Okpeaha approached the wreck and called out. No answer greeted his inquiry. He then started out for Point Barrow on foot.[26]

The news that Claire Okpeaha carried to Point Barrow stirred the small settlement. A motorboat towing a oomiak, or Eskimo canoe,

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[26] New York Times, August 8, 1935, p. 1; August 9, 1935, p. 19; August 10, 1935, p. 14; August 11, 1935, p. 3; August 13, 1935, p. 19; August 17, 1935, pp. 1, 4; August 18, 1935, pp. 1, 26-27; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 248-250; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 216-217; Northern Cross (Point Barrow), November, 1935, cited in Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 309-310, and Day, Biography, p. 357; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, pp. 308-310; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 300-302; Mohler and Johnson, Wiley Post, pp. 111-115. Milsten introduced the idea that the plane rose higher than the 50 feet which most other sources cite. Some controversy exists concerning the exact nature of the engine failure which caused the accident. See Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 301, 318-319, 368; New York Times, August 17, 1935, pp. 1, 4; August 18, 1935, pp. 1, 26-27; Mohler and Johnson, Wiley Post, pp. 115, 118-119. Croy's presentation on this topic is somewhat contradictory. It is interesting to note that Post's plane, although new, had numerous shortcomings. Mohler and Johnson, Wiley Post, pp. 107, 111-112, 115, 120-121. See Lait, Our Will Rogers, pp. viii-ix; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. 246; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 295. Okpeaha's name is spelled several different ways in various accounts. Mohler and Johnson, Wiley Post, p. 122.

started for the crash scene immediately. Those that made the sad journey retrieved Will's and Wiley's bodies. Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh arranged for Joe Crosson, an Alaskan aviator and friend of the deceased duo, to fly to Point Barrow and start his famous comrades on their last trip home.[27]

The world was shocked by the sudden death of Will Rogers. An outpouring of sympathy and genuine sadness gripped thousands of people in a way that has seldom been equalled. The Rogers family gathered in New York and proceeded westward by train. Will's body was placed in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Los Angeles, California. More than 100,000 persons filed by the casket as the humorist lay in state. An honor guard of eight Army fliers stood vigil beside the bier.[28]

Will Rogers' funeral represented an emotional experience for the people of America. The burial rites took place in the Wee Kirk o'

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[27]New York Times, August 17, 1935, pp. 1, 4; August 18, 1935, pp. 1, 26-27; August 19, 1935, pp. 1-2; August 20, 1935, p. 17; August 22, 1935, p. 18; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 310; Day, Biography, pp. 354, 356. Dr. Henry W. Greist (of Point Barrow) to Homer Croy, cited in Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 300-305; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 300-306; Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, pp. 248-250; Trent, My Cousin, pp. 216-218. Trent disagrees with Croy and Day concerning the number of boats sent to retrieve the bodies.

[28]New York Times, August 17, 1935, p. 4; August 18, 1935, pp. 1, 27; August 19, 1935, pp. 1, 2; August 20, 1935, p. 17; August 21, 1935, p. 10; August 22, 1935, pp. 17, 18; August 23, 1935, p. 10; August 25, 1935, section XI, p. 11; Day, Biography, pp. 357-360; Lait, Our Will Rogers, p. vii of the Foreword; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 231-232; Brougher, Life and Laughter, p. 201.

the Heather simultaneously with similar ceremonies in Oklahoma for Wiley Post. As some two hundred friends and relatives bid an intimate farewell to Will, thousands of others mourned his loss in ceremonies that were conducted throughout California and the United States. In California, separate services took place in the Hollywood Bowl (25,000 persons attending), the Community Presbyterian Church in Beverly Hills (400 people attending) and the Twentieth Century Fox lot (3,000 people attending). All motion picture studios in the western state shut down operations during the funeral hour, flags flew at half-mast over all state buildings and an executive order from the Governor ordered a minute of reverent silence at 2 o'clock p. m. Similar gatherings took place in numerous motion picture theatres and cities across the nation.[29]

The national reaction to Will's death did not end with his funeral. The evening following his burial some friends participated in a nationwide memorial radio program. Those who eulogized the humorist included Lady Astor, Eddie Cantor, George M. Cohan, Mrs. Florenz Ziegfeld, former President Herbert Hoover, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker,

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[29]New York Times, August 18, 1935, p. 1; August 19, 1935, p. 2; August 20, 1935, p. 17; August 21, 1935, p. 10; August 22, 1935, pp. 17-18; August 23, 1935, p. 16; August 25, 1935, section XI, p. 11; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good Will, pp. 231-236; Brougher, Life and Laughter, p. 210; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 307-308. Will was buried in California in 1935 and remained there until 1944 when Betty, shortly before her own death, agreed that the humorist's remains should be transferred to the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 309-310.

Amos and Andy and Rudy Vallee. The speakers made their statements from such divergent points as London, New York and California. And still the loss the nation felt did not abate. Eventually, three western states, Oklahoma, California, and Colorado, constructed large memorials which honored the cowboy-philosopher. In addition, November 4th became a state holiday in Oklahoma, a statue of Will was placed in the National Statuary Hall in Washington. D. C., and the federal government issued a commerative stamp in Will's memory--the only such award ever given to an American humorist. Many Americans continue to exemplify the feelings which James Warnack transferred to paper on the occasion of Will's death:

> Beloved monarch of all wholesome mirth,
> High priest of joy, apostle of good cheer,
> Love of life, defender of true worth,
> Today the world stands silent at your bier.
>
> So brave you were, so noble, good and true!
> Your gladness sweetened all our bitter years;
> You smiled and all the world smiled after you
> We laughed with you, till laughter died in tears.
>
> May all the tears your friends let fall today,
> Unite in one great silver stream of light
> To bear your gentle soul upon its way
> To the fair land your smile shall make more bright![30]

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[30]Brougher, Life and Laughter, pp. 203-204; New York Times, August 18, 1935, p. 1; August 19, 1935, p. 2; August 20, 1935, p. 17; August 21, 1935, p. 10; August 22, 1935, pp. 17-18; August 23, 1935, p. 16; August 25, 1935, section XI, p. 11; Butterfield, "Legend," pp. 78-80; Croy, Our Will Rogers, pp. 316-319; Day, Biography, pp. 360-361.

CHAPTER XIII

Conclusion

> . . . but that Day when they brought him [Will] home, and that Friday morning when they threw open those wonderful big gates out at Forest Lawn Cemetary . . . an I saw the sadness in folks faces. . . . Why! it just come over me all of a sudden-like that Will aint gone at all! Just like I thought at first--Will couldent ever be gone.
>
> Then it come to me how Will was always a-hankerin after new Places. . . . Maybe it was natural for him to want to go an nose around on some of them new planets they been discoverin. . . .
>
> So just in case you don't see him around for a while, I hope youve put a stopwatch on your memory of your last Happy Thought of him. Will wouldent want you to be sad just because his restless roamin spirit called him to explore in other worlds. He would only want you to remember that they havent got him corraled and that he don't ever plan to attend that Last Roundup! [1]

Will Rogers was one of America's greatest rustic philosophers and humorists. He represented a national tradition which included Benjamin Franklin, Jack Downing, Hosea Biglow, Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, Bill Nye, Josh Billings, Mark Twain and Finley Peter Dunne. The Oklahoman's use of the mass media which developed during the 1920's, his great popularity with the general public, and his projection of his own personality differeniated him from his predecessors. Nevertheless, he

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[1]Trent, My Cousin, pp. 214-215.

extended their tradition and may have been the greatest of them all.[2]

Although the cowboy-philosopher achieved fame and wealth during his lifetime, success failed to affect him basically. This continuity manifested itself in Will's philosophy. At the time of his death, he believed in the same things that he had supported when he began his career as a newspaper columnist. The humorist generally sided with the disadvantaged and weak against the powerful and wealthy on both domestic and international questions. Domestically he stood against doctrinaire religion, nativitism and unethical or illegal political and business practices. Furthermore, he supported national defense, the ability of the average citizen to guide his future successfully through elected representatives and American as opposed to foreign institutions. On the international scene, Will opposed war and imperialism, while he took an isolationist stance concerning his country's involvement in world politics.[3]

Excluding his support of military preparedness and national institutions, the Oklahoman's outlook opposed the power structure or establish-

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[2]Elmer Ellis, Mr. Dooley's America. A Life of Finley Peter Dunne (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 302; Day, Autobiography, p. xv; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 414; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," p. 1; John C. Moffitt, "Will Rogers, the Only State, Movie, Radio and Literary Star, Tells How He Works at Fun," The Kansas City Star, July 27, 1930, section C, p. 1, cited in Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," p. 1; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 31; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 122-144, passim.

[3]Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 89; Betty Rogers, The Story of His Life Told by His Wife, p. 175; Day, Autobiography, pp. xii-xiii.

ment. The exceptions to this rule can be explained in terms of his realistic approach to national security and his identification with the culture of the United States.[4]

Will's philosophy represented a natural outgrowth of his early psychological experiences. His Indian heritage, for example, exposed him to racial prejudice. This probably stimulated an empathetic understanding for society's disadvantaged people which led him to support the weak and poor. Will's opposition to the world's wealthy and powerful can conceivably be explained in terms of his antagonism toward his own father. Will loved and respected Clem, but he never enjoyed a completely positive relationship with his father, a clear representative of the establishment. His attacks against positioned people may have represented a way of lashing out at Clem. Furthermore, his affinity for associating with the influential people whom he criticized recreated the syndrone of attraction and repulsion that he experienced with his father. His unswerving loyalty to national institutions which he continually satirized repeated the same pattern.[5]

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[4]Alworth would probably disagree with this analysis of Will's philosophy. Interview of E. Paul Alworth with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 24. Alworth also believed that a great logical contradiction existed between Will's isolationism and his anti-imperialism. This does not appear as a great inconsistency to me. It simply existed. Interview of E. Paul Alworth with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 91-92.

[5]Telephone interview with Will Rogers, Jr., February 26, 1971;

Any discussion of Will Rogers' life demands that an evaluation be made concerning the influence that his thought had upon his own society. The difficulty of determining public opinion during the height of Will's career makes this admittedly a hard task. Although the great and small alike were undoubtedly exposed to Will's philosophy, and sensitive to his views, it still remains hard to gauge his impact. Much of his popularity, no doubt, rested upon peoples' enjoyment of his humor as opposed to their acceptance of his outlook and values. Nevertheless, the comical nature of Will's remarks probably made them acceptable to people who would normally have rejected his attitudes. In addition, the satirist's political non-partisanship added validity to his remarks. The simple threat of public exposure by a person with Will's following made him a powerful force in society. Jerome Beatty recounted an incident in his book, The Story of Will Rogers, which described this situation: "'This country never can go to war,' a Washington statesman has said, 'unless Will Rogers is for it. In the newspapers, over the radio and in the movies he would destroy the plans of the jingoes within

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Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 162. It should be noted that Paula M. Love does not agree with this interpretation. Interview with Paula M. Love, December 30, 1970. Will Rogers, Jr. believes that Will was sensitive about his Indian heritage as a youth, but that he overcame this feeling in manhood. Will, Jr. also believes that his father felt antagonism toward Clem. Once again, however, Will, Jr. takes the position that this hostility passed as Will grew older. Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971.

a week. The people would believe Will Rogers and with him, laugh the politicians into defeat.'"[6] In essence, about all that can be said with a degree of certainty is that Will Rogers was an influencial social and political critic who had a definite, but at the same time, underterminable impact upon his age.

Since Will achieved fame and influence, it is also necessary to examine the reasons for his success. Numerous factors contributed to his prominence. He possessed a realistic view of human nature which made much of his satire timeless. However, his wit remained positive rather than pessimestic. This gave his humor a moderate tone which was devoid of the "hatred and malice" which would have repelled people.[7] He became involved in the radio and motion picture industries at a time when those medias were experiencing tremendous growth. This afforded

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[6]Beatty, The Story of Will Rogers, pp. 4-6; Will Rogers, Radio Broadcast, May 7, 1933, copy of the NBC transcript courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial; Day, Biography, p. 163; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; Beatty, "Betty Holds the Reins," pp. 60-61; Elmer Ellis, Mr. Dooley's America, pp. vii-viii, 288-295, passim. It should be noted that I have relied heavily on Elmer Ellis' evaluation of Finley Peter Dunne's public influence in formulating my own judgement of Will Rogers.

[7]Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; Interview of E. Paul Alworth with Will Rogers, Jr., April 12, 1957, cited in Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 24; Harry Carr, 'Vaya Con Dios, Will' (Go with God) (Los Angeles, California: Angelus Press, 1935), n. p.; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 2; Ellis, Mr. Dooley's America, pp. 239, 287-288, 297-299. It should be noted that Alworth, and to a lesser degree Croy, do not believe that Will's humor was timeless. Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 28-29; Croy, Our Will Rogers, p. 329.

the Oklahoman an opportunity for unparalleled exposure and popularity. In addition, Will generally vocalized the attitudes and values of the majority of Americans who, regardless of their growing urbanity, were one generation removed from the farm. As Damon Runyan perceptively wrote: "Will Rogers was undoubtedly America's most complete human document."[8] Will's appearance during the insecure 1920's and disastrous 1930's also helped his career. These were times in which the American people cried out "for an affirmation of the American dream."[9] Their "rags to riches" concept of the cowboy-philosopher's life made him appear as the fulfillment of their needs. His ability to help people laugh at themselves and their problems reinforced his already substantial public acceptance. And finally, Will provided the West, a young section of the country which was searching for prominence and identity, with its first wholesome folk hero that did not carry the stigma of "Jesse James, Sam Bass and Billy the Kid."[10]

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[8]Folks Say of Will Rogers, pp. 115, 198-199; Nelson, "A Study in Ethos," pp. 90, 159-160; Letter of Amon G. Carter to David Milsten, April 7, 1933, cited in Milsten, An Appreciation of Will Rogers, p. xvii; Day, Biography, p. vii of Beginning, p. 163; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," pp. 5, 27, 91-92, 122-144, passim; L. H. Robbins, "Portrait of an American Philosopher," p. 4; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 418-419; Interview with Will Rogers, Jr., March 19, 1971; William R. Brown does an excellent job of catagorizing the issues on which Will's views contrasted with those of the general citizenry. Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 9-11.

[9]Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 206.

[10]Butterfield, "Legend," p. 81; O'Brien, Ambassador of Good

Since Will Rogers' death, no one has appeared to carry on the tradition of nationally orientated home-spun humor which he represented. No one has vocalized the thoughts and feelings of the average citizen as he did, and no one has enjoyed his widespread popularity. The years after 1935 witnessed the fragmentation of American society into numerous groups which believed in widely divergent values. This alone probably made it impossible for Will to have a successor. It also helps to explain why present-day youth know so little about the cowboy-philosopher and why very little of his material is enjoyed today. Thus, it would seem that the story of Will Rogers should be reserved for the history books. This however, is not the case. Will Rogers has a great deal to say to a young generation of Americans who are experiencing doubts about themselves and their nation. The modern age reflects the same type of uncertainty that Will's own era experienced and he can speak just as effectively to the present as he did to the past. However, his contemporary message differs in one respect from that which he delivered previously. Before, people responded to what the Oklahoman said or wrote. His relevance today lies in what he was rather than what he espoused. Specifically, Will suffered from two of the afflictions which torment contemporary American youth--racial discrimination and parental alienation.

Will, pp. 5-6; Ellis, Mr. Dooley's America, p. 293; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," pp. 17-19, 43-44, 152, 198-199, 206, 237.

But, unlike many of today's youth, he refused to try and destroy his milieu. Rather, he worked to solve the problems of his world by becoming a positive and constructive social and political critic. This is Will Rogers' new message. Problems, hatreds and tensions are unavoidable, but they don't mean inevitable defeat. They simply offer the opportunity for greater challenge and victory. As William R. Brown points out in his recently published book, Imagemaker: Will Rogers and the American Dream: "At the end of Huckleberry Finn, that all-American boy is planning to flee to the open spaces of Indian territory. He entered, and came out as Will Rogers, the all-American man, who disappeared into the wilderness of Alaska. He was, and is, an embodiment of the great American dream."[11]

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[11]William R. Brown, Imagemaker: Will Rogers and the American Dream (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1970), pp. 276-277; Collins, "Writer and Journalist," p. 295; Cantor, As I Remember Them, p. 138; Alworth, "The Humor of Will Rogers," p. 4; Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," p. 432.

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