

Writer Says Rogers' Heart Never Can Die

Elsie Robinson Says Spirit
Licked Too Many Things
to Be Beaten by Death.

BY ELSIE ROBINSON.

They say Will Rogers is dead. I don't believe it! That spirit of his licked too many important things to ever be beaten by a bit of broken timber or twisted steel.

Funny how I met him—over a "hot dawg" . . . But if the man himself is great enough, you can get the quality of his spirit as well over a shared sandwich as in a conference of nations. One or the other, it was all the same to him. For it was all life. And life was Will Rogers' specialty.

I had never met him. But somebody said he was around, and I wished I might. Who didn't? It was at the Democratic convention in Chicago. Sizzling hot. I had just clawed my way out of the press box, through that goshawful crowd looking for chow. Suddenly, when I least expected it, there came that drawl of his, slipping over my shoulder like a friendly fist, and following it, his trowsled, quizzical face.

"'Lo, Elsie! How about a dawg?"

We grinned—grabbed. Then, sinking his teeth into his lunch he reckoned he wanted to know about those bonus boys I had been writing up. Were things really that bad?

They were. They were worse. As I talked, the grin faded from his face. He didn't say much—just went on chewing, mopping sweat, chewing, grunting now and then. But I think I've never seen such pity welling up in human flesh.

Most of us, when we start showing our feelings, make a mess of it. We've too many layers for kindness to struggle through—layers of suspicion, or self-pity, or conceit—the mask we've built to hide ourselves from life.

But with Will Rogers it was like looking at a little child. There he was, with the truth of him shining out, naked. Free of any pretense. You had a queer feeling that he was free, even, of his own body—just wore one around as a concession to public opinion.

All the time people were milling around, shoving, nudging, pointing at him, the big fellows as curious as the little ones. Every few seconds some particularly big shot would yell at him, or shake his hand. He was easily the biggest human interest item there. And, not being an idiot, he probably knew it.

But it didn't touch him. I mean that literally. You could actually see that he—the real man—was apart from it all. There sat his body, chewing that "hot dawg"—ducking a little when they breathed too hard down his neck—grinning absently when the crowded heads saluted.

He was completely detached. His heart was down at Anaconda with those poor, suffering devils. And this business of success was just a faint, childish uproar he had left far behind—as he had left the memory of the hard times, as well; the brutality and unfairness he must have had to meet on his long trail.

And it came to me that here was what Kipling was thinking about when he wrote: "If you can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same"—

He had met them both—good times and bad, fair dealing and foul—but none of it had ever trapped him. He had come through—whole—with nothing riding him.

Arthur Brisbane, who loved him, touched the reason for it when he wrote: "The word fear wasn't in his vocabulary."

"Triumphs and disasters"—the two greatest tests life has to offer. Neither one of them had been able to get him down. Up to a throne, or down in the mud, the result was always the same for Will Rogers. He would grin in that friendly, shy way of his—shake himself a bit as if he was getting rid of something—and then be on his way.

And I'm thinking it's that way today. Dead? Not he! Just interrupted. And somewhere, I bet, he's shuffling along, grinning at the show as he always did—killing time till his Betty catches up to him, and wishing she wouldn't cry.

So long, old boy. We will be seeing you.