

OUR WILL:

The Life Story
Of Will Rogers

BY SCOTT CUNNINGHAM

NINTH INSTALLMENT.

"This old story about Will getting to joking accidentally on the stage is all hokey," says Jim Minnick, the stockman who rode the horse Will roped in his first performance on a vaudeville stage. Mort Shea, who soon managed Will, says the same. His humorous monolog was part of his act from the outset.

Jim and Will had been together in the Mulhall show, which had enjoyed an eight-day run in Madison Square Garden in the Spring of 1905. Jim had stayed behind after the show to sell some horses, and Will had stayed to break into vaudeville.

On the fateful day Will rehearsed as long as he could, and when the time came for his act he had "Laughing Fred" Tejan, who was an employe of Minnick, planted in the audience to laugh at the right places.

Will Was a Scream On His First Night

Jim says of Will, "He was a scream that first night," and for a long time it was a habit of Will's to say, "Laughing Fred' had more to do with the success of the show than I did."

Will played in the Keith Union Square theater a week, and moved the second week to Hammerstein's Paradise Roof, near Times Square. The first publicity the cowboy ever got for his act appeared in the old New York World in July, and read:

Will R. Rogers, the sensational lariat thrower, is making his first appearance at the Paradise Roof, and has proved a sensation in every way. The novelty of his act lies in the dexterity and the oddity of the nature chosen, and the whole makes a charming specialty well out of the ordinary run. When Rogers first put in an appearance in this city he was looked upon as a dubious proposition and found some difficulty in getting managers to listen to him. Once he appeared, however, he managed to make such a hit that he has since found no lack of engagements.

On Will's authority, he played on the roof the whole Summer, also appearing in Hammerstein's Victoria Theater downstairs for matinee performances.

Mort Shea, who became Will's manager that Summer, remembers this as his funniest joke: he would try to jump through a loop and purposely fail at it, but boast, "I got all my feet through but one."

Besides telling jokes from his first day in vaudeville, Will chewed gum, a habit for which he was to become famous. It was with a "chaw" of this gum that he one day got a laugh. He kept missing on a very simple trick with his rope. He missed so many times he was beginning to become self-conscious about it.

Finally he walked over to the card announcing his act, where his name was printed in large letters, and determinedly stuck his gum over the "T" in "Will."

Father Wonders How Son Made So Much

Jim Minnick helped Will out his first week only and then Buck McKee, another boy from the Indian Territory, rode the horse that Will roped as a part of his act. The cowboy actor's freight bill for the horse and his crate ran high, and out of his \$250 weekly he had to pay McKee, too. But Will began nevertheless, to send at least a hundred dollars a month home to his father to put in the bank.

Right away, Will later told a reporter, "Papa wrote me a long letter about honesty and being upright. He just never could figure out how his boy'd get all that money, unless I robbed a bank."

For a while Will was billed with a "William Tell" act, wherein a German with bow and arrow shot an apple from an assistant's head, after saying, "Understand, I nefer make meestake!"

Will followed, and after describing a trick he was about to attempt, warned, "Some time I make meestake." If he missed—sometimes on purpose—he said, "That's one time I make meestake."

Shea's bookings for the cowboy roper had been consecutive for a couple of years, and in 1907 the young man wanted to go to Europe. So it was arranged he should play four weeks in the Winter Garden Theater in Berlin.

Will pleased the stolid Germans from the start, though one time he got in bad by roping the fireman who, it is always prescribed, must stand in the wings of a German theater during performances. The manager had to come out and placate an audience that objected to Will's interference with a German official's dignity, "His rope slipped," the manager said.

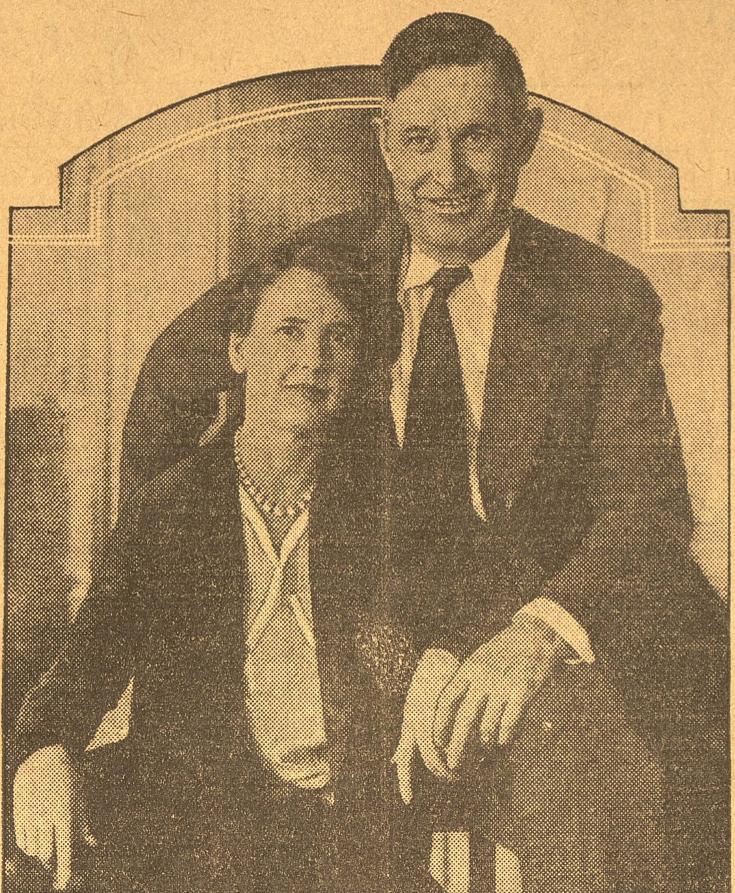
On the Berlin manager's recommendation the cowboy was next booked for the Palace Theater in London, and though he made a great hit there in a three weeks' run, and was getting the equivalent of \$300 a week, he did not accept an offer to stay on.

Received Plaudits of King for Roping

Mort Shea is authority for the statement that during this sojourn in London the cowboy roped at a party given by King Edward, and there received the plaudits of the king himself.

What in the meantime had happened to Betty Blake?

She was living at Rogers, Ark.,



WILL ROGERS AND MRS. ROGERS

hearing from Will often. The cowboy had visited her whenever theatrical tours allowed, and from the way Will always talked about her, even Shea knew there was going to be a marriage. "He never had any sweethearts in the time I knew him," the agent says.

Will dropped everything in the Fall of 1908, when he was 29 years old, and went to Rogers, Ark., to marry Betty Blake.

"My goodness," said Will once, when dresses with trains were mentioned, "I haven't seen a train on a woman's dress since Mrs. Rogers got married in one."

Betty's family didn't approve of Will's profession, but they approved of Will. Betty herself thought she would like Will well enough to put up with him in any profession, and at 1 o'clock in the afternoon of Thanksgiving Day, 1908, they were wed.

After what was described in the *Claremore Progress* as an "elegant repast," the couple left Rogers, Ark., for New York City.

"She's a better trouper than I am," Will admitted after a few months. "I thought I was fast, when it came to getaways, but she can be sleeping at the hotel when a train whistle wakes her, and she can get dressed and packed and on that train before it leaves."

Will worked first on one vaudeville circuit, and then on another; the more popular performers could

do that. Before he discarded the horse from his act he made two more trips to Europe.

The first place at which he put on a performance without a horse," says Mort Shea, "was at the Mercantile Club in Philadelphia. And the reason was that the horse missed the boat."

Titanic Disaster Put Dampers on Show

A son was born to Betty and Will on Oct. 20, 1911, and they named him William Vann. It gladdened Will's father to know his son had settled down, and with this happiness in his heart he died Oct. 28.

The cowboy and his manager cast about now for bigger worlds to conquer. Shea tried to get George Cohan to put Will in "Broadway and Buttermilk," but, says the former agent, "Cohan couldn't see his talents."

Finally, in 1912, it was arranged to put Will in "The Wall Street Girl" with Blanche Ring. One authority says Will wore a tuxedo for opening night. Anyway, it was all planned that night to make Will a Broadway hit. But the Titanic ran into an iceberg a few hours before the opening and everybody was too excited to be much impressed with Will.

Will's part in the show was a monolog, but the production had a short run and Will returned to the vaudeville houses.

Tomorrow — From Vaudeville to the Follies.

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Letters From the People

Labor Day.

Editor Star-Telegram: The Nation today honors labor. By the holiday observance attention is focused on the essential place it occupies in the national, social and economical setup. So important an institution deserves both public recognition and celebration.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." This edict, uttered centuries ago, has been accepted more or less universally by the human race—as a creed, as a responsibility which can not be evaded or shirked without inviting penalty.

Analysis shows how dependent and interdependent humanity is on this material asset. Probably the oldest exponent of labor is the husbandman, who, behind the plow, primitive or modern, has given freely of physical effort that a bounteous harvest might follow. Toiling in the heat of the noonday sun, the perspiration dripping from his forehead, he personifies a high type of creative work equally with the handicraftsman in the steel foundry who faces the heat and glare of the scarlet flame that bridges and skyscrapers may later become realities. Poets, in lilting rhymes and choice of words, have ceaselessly sung the praises of labor.

Since the dawn of civilization labor has enlarged its domain. It is no longer just afield. It is above the ground and under the ground; it is evident in manufacturing plants, mighty in transportation, significant in communication, vital in domestic life and an integral part of the prosperity of a community or a nation. In the pit, out of which later will rise a cozy home or a massive office structure, may often be seen agents of labor, industriously employed. These men represent with dignity many of the recognized professions. By their physical exertion they exemplify vividly the age-old edict.

Day and night, year in and year out, the world moves and is sustained by all ambassadors of this five-letter word: L-a-b-o-r.

LOUIS VARNUM WOULEF.

Ridicules FERA.

Editor Star-Telegram: I have found out that the FERA planted 30 acres of wheat over in Arkansas, spent \$600, got back \$12.60. That reminds me of my success in the hog business. Bought a sow for \$15, she had seven pigs; she and all the pigs died except one 50-cent runt.

I was always told that hoss jockies raised hoss jockies, bootleggers raised bootleggers and politicians raised the devil.

(I am not telling my kids to go into the hog business.)

If the above adage is true and the FERA stays in the wheat business, there will be another million people wanting to be fed out of a Government bottle.

CLAY MOORMAN.

Gorman, Texas.

Carnegie Official Dies.

WEST ORANGE, N. J., Sept. 2 (AP).—Robert A. Franks, 72, treasurer and first vice chairman of the board of directors of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, died of heart disease Sunday night in his Llewellyn Park home.

MON

THE FRIEND

Another Shipment!



Fall Lo

In brown or black shades of brown, green and DuBonnet great demand general early Fall

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