

# OUR WILL:

The Life Story  
Of Will Rogers

BY SCOTT CUNNINGHAM

## INSTALMENT XI.

As early as 1916, when he was a star in the Ziegfeld Follies, Will Rogers' salary was a thousand dollars a week.

"He had," Gene Buck says, "an uncanny sense for negotiating engagements. He never signed a contract." Gene Buck was the Ziegfeld lieutenant most frequently trusted to make deals with talent.

Will in those years never thought he was earning enough. "Every time I made a deal for a season's work," he remembered later, "my wife and I would sit down and figure out what all we would have by the end of that season. Well, at the end of the season we had the figures but we couldn't find the money."

Nevertheless, he saved. He owned a home at Amityville, Long Island, near Fred Stone, whom he would rout out of bed of a morning for a session of rope-throwing. In addition to William Vann and Mary Amelia, neither of whom was in school yet, he now had another son, James Blake.

In the Follies he was a tremendous hit. Before a new show he never rehearsed with the cast, and he once announced on an opening night, "Mr. Ziegfeld is my best audience!"

## Will Goes Socialist; All Talk and No Work

His act was short, but the producer did not mind. Only, Will made it appear, Ziegfeld did not want him to cut down on the roping in the seven minutes he was out front. "He told me the other day," Will informed his audience, "I was getting to be much of a socialist—all talk and no work." That night there was more roping.

Very early Rogers succeeded in making a forum of the Follies audience. He would spot personages in the orchestra seats—Lady Astor, Secretary McAdoo, Clarence Darrow, or whoever it might be—and talk back and forth with them, or he would ask them to come to the stage. Sometimes he would rope his quarry and lead him up.

A record was kept of what he said the night he first performed before President Wilson. "It was just at the time we were having our little set-to with Mexico, and we were at the height of our note exchanging career with Germany and Austria." Will said in telling how in a theater in Baltimore he sweated back-stage till time to "go on." His fellow actors had literally to push him out on the stage.

Ill at ease and chewing his gum, Will admitted, "I am kinder nervous here tonight." The honesty of it made the audience laugh. "I wouldn't be nervous, but this is really my second presidential appearance. The first time was when Bryan spoke in our town once and I was to follow and do my little rope act."

Here, Will was relieved to see the President laugh. "As I say, I was to follow him," the actor continued, "but he spoke so long that it was so dark when he finished, they couldn't see my rope."

## Wilson Gives Will Most Successful Night

Again the President laughed, but as yet there had been no direct reference to Mr. Wilson or anything he was doing. The President then had General Pershing in Mexico trying to capture Villa, and Will dared to comment, "I see where they have captured Villa. Yes, they got him in the morning editions and the afternoon ones let him get away."

Everybody in the house looked at the President to see how he was going to take it. He started laughing. "Due to him being a good fellow and a real example, I had that night the most successful night I ever had on the stage," Will wrote later on.

This was at a time when President Wilson was criticized for military unpreparedness. "There is some talk," Will said, "of getting a Mexican gun if we can borrow one."

"The one we have now they are using to train our army with at Plattsburg."

"If we go to war we will just about have to go to the trouble of getting another gun."

Will was 37 when the United States entered the World War. He could serve his country best by making the people laugh in these trying times.

"South American countries are coming into the war," he observed. "Let them come in. This is no private war. Since the United States has started this war-loan business, Venezuela wants to cancel three revolutions to get in."

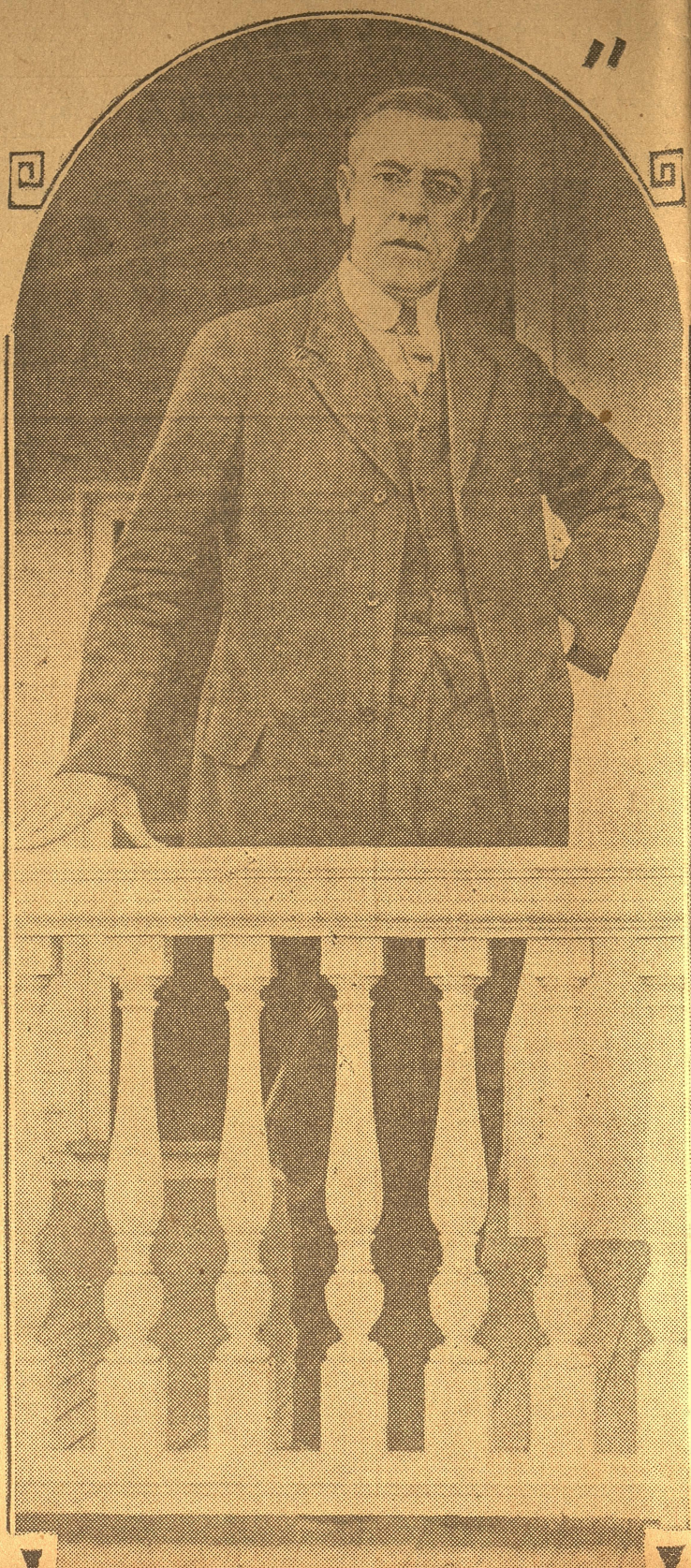
Winfield Sheehan had charge of raising money for the Red Cross among theatrical people, and Will came in one day to donate a thousand dollars in cash and 10 per cent of his salary for as long as the war lasted. In addition, Will gave his services to the benefit shows put on to raise money. He was the funniest part of all the stars who took part in these shows, and one person's comment at the time was: "He sets up laughter so hearty the purses open of themselves."

## Says Will Humorous, Illuminating

In Washington, D. C., in the Fall of 1918 the Oklahoman joked before President Wilson again.

"You know," he drawled, "Germany couldn't understand how we could get men over there and get them trained so quick. They didn't know that in our manual there's nothing about retreating. And when you only have to teach an army to go one way you can do it in half the time."

This quip made such a hit with Wilson that the World War President quoted it often thereafter, and referred to its author as "one of our American humor-



**WILL ROGERS MADE THIS MAN LAUGH! WOODROW WILSON, studious and one of the most serious minded Presidents in history, heard Rogers several times, and the humorist never failed to get a laugh. On his first appearance before President Wilson, Will said: "Due to him being a good fellow I had the most successful night I ever had on the stage."**

ists." "And his remarks," declared the President, "are not only humorous but illuminating."

"Until now," Rogers observed, "I have only been an ordinary rope thrower." Now he was a humorist, so dubbed by the President.

For a long time after the war there were so many returned soldiers at the shows that Rogers told jokes directly to them. "I see where they are going to muster all you boys out," he said, "as soon as they investigate the morals of your homes."

"If they had divided up all the money they spent on parades for you boys, you wouldn't have to be looking for a job."

In 1919 Harper & Bros. brought out "Rogerisms—The Cowboy Philosopher on the Peace Conference," and "Rogerisms—The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition." Will's first books. The first of these contained his famous quip, "It says in the Peace Covenant 'There is to be no more wars.' And then there is a paragraph further down telling you where to get your ammunition in case there was one."

Will was making many friends. There were the folks in the Follies, all of whom had learned to love him: W. C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, Frank Tinney, Ann Pen-

nington and others. He was once writing about knees and mentioned Ann Pennington's, adding, "I was in the Follies with them for years."

Outside his own show his favorite of all friends was Fred Stone. Neighbors on Long Island, they participated with another Follies star, Frank Tinney, in a Wild West act put on in an open arena at Freeport, L. I., to raise money for an actors' club.

## This Time Cowboy Corpse Yelled!

Their act opened as planned with Tinney riding out, unsaddling his horse and going to bed cowboy-style. Then Stone, dressed as a below-the-border villain, sneaked up, stole Tinney's horse and "shot" Tinney dead in his getaway. What followed demonstrated Will's flair for humorous stage business.

It was intended that Rogers should race after the killer and a manageable horse had been provided for him. However, he found this horse unsaddled and was forced to ride out on one hand to control. Will roped Stone but couldn't stop his horse in time to keep Stone from getting his nose bloody in the unplanned upset. Will and he quit the

# CAUTION SEEPS INTO OIL MEN'S VIEWPOINT

TULSA, Sept. 4 (AP).—The disturbed crude price situation in California and the tapering demand for refined products caused the oil industry to proceed cautiously this week.

The refined market held up well under the circumstances.

Neither the Coast disturbance nor the decline in demand for refined products came unexpectedly. Bad weather in some sections over Friday weekend caused the buying to drop rather than usual.

Third grade gasoline gave way an eighth of a cent a gallon on the lower quotations on the Chicago tank car market. Otherwise gasoline prices were unchanged, with third grade 4½ to 4⅞ cents at Chicago and the regular 5½ to 5⅞ cents.

Conditions favorable to Fall plowing strengthened the demand in this district for kerosene with the result that the prices held steady despite sales pressure.

The California crude price cut still was being watched with interest. The most optimistic observers called it a "local situation," and cited a previous instance when crude price reductions were restored after a few weeks when production was brought down. These observers predicted an early end to the difficulty and said the price would be hiked to its former level soon.

The Independent Petroleum Association view was that the move is a plan by the major companies to force prices down and fill their tanks with cheap crude.

So far, however, the Midcontinent price level has reflected to no extent the California disturbance and there are no indications that it will unless the low price condition on the Coast persists over a period of several weeks.

## Another Hawley Pool Test Spuds

ABILENE, Sept. 4.—Ungren & Frazier, Abilene independents, have spudded their third test in the Hawley pool, 16 miles north of here, as a north offset to the N. H. Martin & Son No. 1 King which completed last week.

It is the Ungren & Frazier No. 2 Henry Dorsey et al., on the old King ranch in Jones County, and is drilling around 500 feet. Location is in the southwest corner of the east half of block 6, Manuel Bueno survey No. 197.

The Martin No. 1 King has not been placed on production gauge, but over the weekend it was tested unofficially, flowing 37 barrels of oil during the first hour and later flowing 60 barrels per hour by heads. It was deepened a foot and a half into the sand, being bottomed at 1,981½ feet. It is in the northwest corner of the east half of block 5, Manuel Bueno survey No. 197.

arena without finishing the act with the "cowboy funeral" which was to have been given Tinney.

Will and Stone watched Tinney remain in the arena as they were followed on by a bunch of cyclists. They watched him continue to lie in the arena "lifeless," a growing source of embarrassment to Will, who had left him there.

Finally, "I'm going out and give him that funeral!" Will said.

As soon as Tinney lay across Will's saddle, all limp, Will locked him in a vise-like grip with one arm. With the other he applied a paddle to the portion of Tinney's anatomy most in evidence.

It was the first cowboy funeral ever conducted with the corpse yelling.

(Tomorrow: The Speakers' Table.)  
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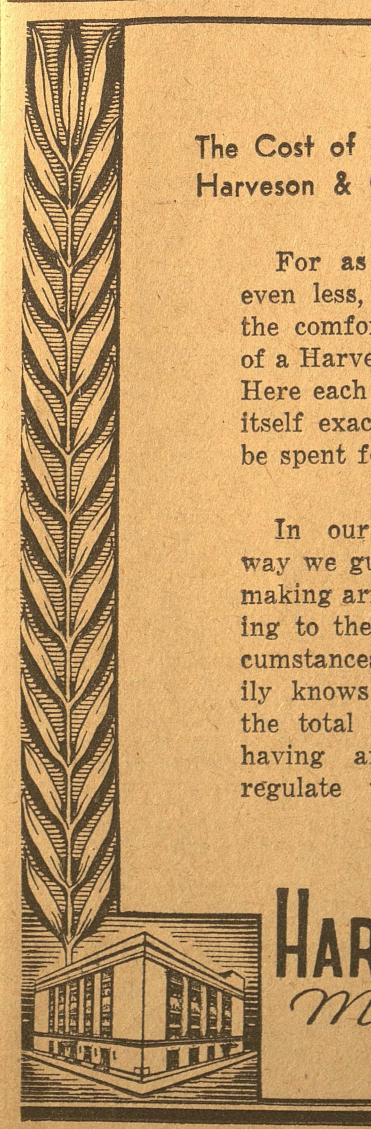
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