

# Will Rogers

BY JEFF D. RAY.

About 20 years ago I drifted into a theater in Chicago. (Let my pastor remember that was a long

time ago and I was a long way from home). The vaudeville feature was supplied by an open - faced, tawsle - haired young fellow twirling a rope, chewing gum, and pulling side-splitting wise-cracks on every-



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thing and everybody from Dan to Beersheba. I afterward learned his name was Will Rogers. There was doubtless something else in the show but I do not remember it. I have never seen him since that day. But it would be impossible to forget that youth with his open, magnetic face, his amazing lariat stunts, and his apparently impromptu flow of kindly humor. After that experience I never missed an opportunity to profit by his humorous philosophy on the radio or in the press.

I suppose there were people who saw in Will Rogers only his humor, but thoughtful people saw in his humor an ever-present humanitarian philosophy—a keen desire not only to amuse people but to help them. Doubtless many people will always think of him as a fun-maker. But to my thinking he seemed to rank first a philosopher, second a philanthropist, third a humorist. If he did some things I did not approve and said some things I did not believe, he could have said the same about me if he had ever heard of me, and therein honors would have been even. Taken all in all I admired him and loved him—admired him for his keen intellect, his sound common sense, his ability to accomplish whatever he undertook, and loved him for his noble altruistic heart. What Antony said of Brutus may be truly said of him: "His life was gentle and the elements so mixed in him

that Nature might stand up and say to all the world — this was a man."

Would it be an extravagant utterance if one should say no man has ever been so universally known, sincerely admired and genuinely loved by the American people as a whole? He is quoted as saying that he never knew a man he did not like. Would it not be just about true if we take the converse of that statement and say he never knew a man who did not like him? There was in him an evident yearning for the love of his fellow men. When his sister, Mrs. Lane, died he spoke of the great throng, white and black, high and low, who came to her funeral and said: "If they will love me like that at the finish, my life will not have been in vain." All right, Will, the American people did love you like that. In the same general vein he said: "You may roam all over the world but after all it is what the people at home think of you that really counts." So be it. The closer home you came the more your people loved you and honored you.

I can think of nothing more fitting than the proposal to ask the millions who loved this man and who have been amused and helped by him to provide a monument to his memory. If it were a proposal to build in his honor the most magnificent marble mausoleum the world ever saw I should have no interest in it and I am sure he would have none. But, as I understand the plan, it is to give all of us who loved him an opportunity to share in a great fund to be used perpetually in promoting in his memory such things as shall definitely help in "healing humanity's hurt." I am sure he would say: "If you must do anything, do it that way."

By this movement all of us have a means of giving concrete expression of our love for our great fellow citizen and at the same time have a part in founding an enterprise that shall be a perpetual blessing to mankind. Personally, I covet a little share in it. Don't you?