

W I L L R O G E R S

BY

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There are many hills, but only here and there a great  
towering Mr. Shasta;

There are many streams, but only here and there a great  
Mississippi;

There are many trees, but only here and there a great  
Sequoia gigantea;

There are many echoes, but only now and then an original  
voice;

There are many musicians, but only now and then a  
Mendelssohn or a Mozart;

There are many politicians, but only now and then a  
commanding statesman;

There are many people, but only now and then an out-  
standing individual.

When a great personality suddenly appears, the world stops in its busy rush to look and listen. The monotony of life is broken for a moment. A man who is "different" has attracted the attention of all. He soon becomes a hero, for men and women bow before a strong and magnetic personality. Such has been the unique and commanding position of Will Rogers during the last quarter of a century. He has been the one figure in the life of our nation who has drawn to himself the admiration and the love of all classes of people.

It is no exaggeration to say that no man has been so universally appreciated and loved as Will Rogers.

Hence, today not only an entire nation, but people of all nations around the world mourn his sudden and tragic going from our midst.

Measured by any one of a half dozen standards, one of the very greatest men America has ever produced has gone on a little while ahead of us into that life of greater opportunity and service that Christ has prepared for them who love Him.

Will Rogers was a man with the highest sense of honor. He did not stoop to little tricks to win the favor of men. He was absolutely genuine and sincere. The word "sincere" means without "putty" or "paint". Men use putty and veneer to stop up the cracks and give the appearance of hard wood to that which is not genuine. But Will Rogers never made any pretense. He was just naturally honest, sincere and genuine.

He was pure minded and clean in his thinking. Like a rubber ball bounding on a clean wall, he threw out his thoughts and they rebounded to you without taint or soil upon your heart and soul. He emphasized the teaching of the great Apostle Paul who said: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things." It was upon such things as these that Will Rogers thought, and he interpreted them in terms of wit and humor which made them attractive and winsome. The only time I ever heard him say a rather sharp and caustic thing was when a speaker at a banquet told a rather doubtful story and when Will had his turn, he said "My friend's mind is like a race horse. It seems to run best on a dirty track." His own soul preferred the things that were clean and bright and helpful and he found it easy to eschew gossip and scandal and speak words of helpfulness and good cheer.

He was a man of sympathetic kindness. He understood human nature. He knew its weaknesses and its struggles. He could forgive our sins while he made us laugh at our mistakes. Sometimes a great and strong character stands aloof from mankind. He is as cold as pure ice and as unsympathetic as a mountain of snow. But Will Rogers was wisely human and naturally kind. He had the sympathy of a mother for her child and the kindness of a friend for a friend.

"Oh, for the subtle touch of his art!

Oh, for the gift of his pen -

Oh, for his smile, just once in a while,

Oh, for his ways among men!

Oh, for the gentle charm of his speech!

Oh, for the powers of his mind -

But, mostly we pray

On this deep-shadowed day,

Just for his grace to be kind!"

Will Rogers was a loyal friend and brother. He understood human nature so well that he did not misjudge men and women. He was so thoughtful and considerate of others that he would not permit himself to be unjust or unkind or unfriendly.

"I tell you one thing pleases me about this friendly man,  
He always says the kindest things about folks that he can,  
Perhaps they're gnarled and crooked as a twisted stick o' wood,  
But Will, he seems to think that they'd be better if they could.  
An' somehow he just makes you feel you'd like to take his hand,  
An' try an' walk along o' him towards the Better Land.  
Ye know he'd not be hard on ye if ye stumbled now and then -  
Perhaps he's had troubles o' his own that makes him feel for men."

He did not have a shadow of intolerance or prejudice in his make-up. He was a brother to all mankind. Like his Master, he "went about doing good" to all classes and races of men. He was never above doing some humble service for the good of others.

The last two times that I had the great pleasure and privilege of appearing with him on the platform, I was introducing him to do his share for the McKinley Orphan Boys' Home. And after that, for the raising of money for the colored people in one of our big Baptist churches in Southern California. When drought or flood or earthquake or storm brought suffering and starvation to his fellow men, he gave his service without thought of himself to minister through the Red Cross and other agencies to those who were sick and disconsolate and bereft. His place in the hearts of the people of our nation is secure, because of his sacrificing spirit and helpful ministry to the various needs of mankind.

Will Rogers was preeminently the apostle of good humor. He was a humorist who made fun that was good natured without the sting of acid or the barb of spite. At first we laughed at the best story he had to tell us. Then we chuckled and smiled, and sometimes laughed hilariously at the wise cracks he took at politicians and statesmen, sinner and saint. His bright and witty sayings will be repeated throughout the years to come and the world will continue to laugh at his repartee and keen, but kindly philosophy of life. He proved to all men that good humor and wit and smiles and laughter were not out of harmony with the profoundest sincerity, the cleanest conduct and the noblest living. He also demonstrated that merriment goes with Christianity, because to be Christlike is to be happy and kindly, to seek the welfare and happiness of others and to smile while you make other smile. Will Rogers was the master magician who with a simple phrase could turn laughter into tears and tears into laughter.

Mr. Warnock, a prominent newspaper man, has well said:

"Beloved monarch of all wholesome mirth  
High priest of joy, apostle of good cheer,  
Lover 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 that fair land your smile shall make more bright."

Last of all, he had a genius for love. He loved people. He loved the things that people loved. He loved to make people happy. He loved to help bear the burdens of his brother. No wonder people gladly heard and read what he had to say. No wonder they flocked in crowds to see him when he appeared upon the stage or platform for they wanted to know more intimately the man whose voice and writings had cheered them out of their depression and inspired them with higher hopes and ideals. He not only loved the people and loved his friends, but he loved his home. Here was found the finest and the highest expression of his loyalty and devotion to wife and children and home ideals. No wonder he has gained and held the affection of all right-minded and noble men and women. Children loved him. The boys and girls loved him; young men and young women loved him, and the old people loved him. He was of us all and for us all, and so in turn we were all for him, and his passing on wrenched the chords of every heart.

But, we do not mourn as those who are without hope. Jesus and the great Apostle Paul have given to us absolute assurance that death does not end life. It is only a transition. Will loved to venture where new things could be learned and greater progress be attained. If we could see beyond the azure sky into which he loved to fly, I expect that we would know now that he is realizing his fondest dreams to know and to do something untried and new.

When the Apostle Paul approached the time of his death, he said, "The time of my departure has come." The word "departure" here signifies the launching of a ship. Paul really said, "The time has come for my ship to be launched into the sea for which it was created." He also said, "It is far better to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." He did not look upon death as a defeat, but really as a new venture and a high attainment.

The word "sleep" is used by Jesus and the New Testament writers as a symbol of death. Last night at midnight I went to sleep. I was dead to the world until seven this morning. But I was living and gaining new strength and new power for the duties of this day. So our loved ones lie down in death and become unconscious to the things that hinder and hurt and harm to live on in new power and strength in a life more beautiful beyond the grave.

A few years ago a friend moved from New York state to Los Angeles. He did not bring his wife and children with him, but left them in the east so that the children could continue without interruption in school. A few months later, he showed me a beautiful bungalow which he had built and had furnished with all the conveniences and comforts that love and good taste and wealth could supply. Then he said, "I am going now to New York to get my wife and children and bring them out here to be with me in this beautiful home." It was in language just as simple and plain as that that Jesus said: "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Our loved one and friend has gone on a little while ahead of us, but we can look with happy anticipation to that eternal morning, when we shall meet him again and abide with him and our Lord forever and forever.