

# Yours,

# Will Rogers

Arranged by Richard Adamson

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"It takes a great country to stand a thing like this hitting it. When you figure that you have a system where you make business stand still and people go nutty for three months every four years, why somebody who concocted the idea of elections certainly figured out a devastating scheme. The candidates are 'High Typed Gentlemen' till the contest gets close, then the 'Brute' comes out in 'em. What starts out to be a nice fight winds up in a street brawl. But it all comes under the heading of Democracy. And bad as it is its the best scheme we can think of."

That was written early in November, 1932. A few days later Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected for his first term and the last presidential campaign upon which Will Rogers was to comment came to an end.

Altogether, in his daily and weekly newspaper articles, Will covered three campaigns. The first was that of 1924, when John W. Davis ran against President Coolidge. Will attended both national conventions that year. A paragraph he wrote then, after observing how the convention buildings were literally lined with flags, seems to express fairly well the attitude he consistently held toward his specialty. "I could never understand," he wrote, "the exact connection between the flag and a bunch of politicians. Why a political speaker's platform should be draped in flags, any more than a factory where men work, or an office building, is beyond me."

Four years later, Will was in Kansas City when the Republicans nominated Herbert Hoover, and in Houston when the Democrats chose Al Smith. There followed a bitter and expensive campaign. On November 4th, in a daily wire, Will summed up the issues:

"I have been studying the two parties and here is the difference: Hoover wants all the dries, and as many wets as possible. Smith wants all the wets and as many dries as he can get. Hoover says he will relieve the farmer even if he has to call congress; Smith says he will relieve the farmer even if he has to appoint a commission.

"Hoover says the tariff will be kept up. Smith says the tariff will not be lowered. Hoover is strongly in favor of prosperity. Smith highly endorses prosperity.

"Hoover wants no votes merely on account of religion. Smith wants no votes solely on religious grounds. Both would accept Mohammedan votes if offered.

"Hoover would like to live in the White House. Smith is not averse to living in the White House, and in order to get there either one will promise the voters anything from perpetual motion to eternal salvation."

"I really don't see how anyone can take the whole thing serious." Will wrote after the Hoover landslide. "Of all the inconsistencies, of all the back tracking. Of all the changing opinions, of all the waiting to see what the majority will be liable to do, of all the trading back and forth with each other for support! There is no more independence in Politics than there is in jail."

## High Expectations

But when Herbert Hoover was inaugurated in March, 1929, expectations were high. "Here is just a few things we look to be settled not later than Saturday," Will said. "Farm Relief—Now we have never had farm relief in all our history, but we look to him for it. Prohibition Enforcement—Never had it since it was established, but we expect it from him. Prosperity—Millions never had it under Coolidge, never had it under anybody, but expect it under Hoover. And women think he will wash their dishes and look after their babies. Nothing short of Heaven will we accept under Hoover. Good luck to you, Herb!"

Seven months later everybody was "restoring confidence." Will announced in a weekly article that he, too, had joined the drive—explaining how he had really done it for vanity, since it was what all the big men were doing.

"When I took up the work two or three weeks ago confidence was at a mighty low ebb. Wall Street had gone into one tail spin after another. You would pick up a paper in the morning and read the stock reports and you wouldn't think there was that many 'Minus' signs in the world. Well the effect of it was just like going to Monte Carlo, and hearing that everybody was betting on the black, and the red had been coming up continually for two days.

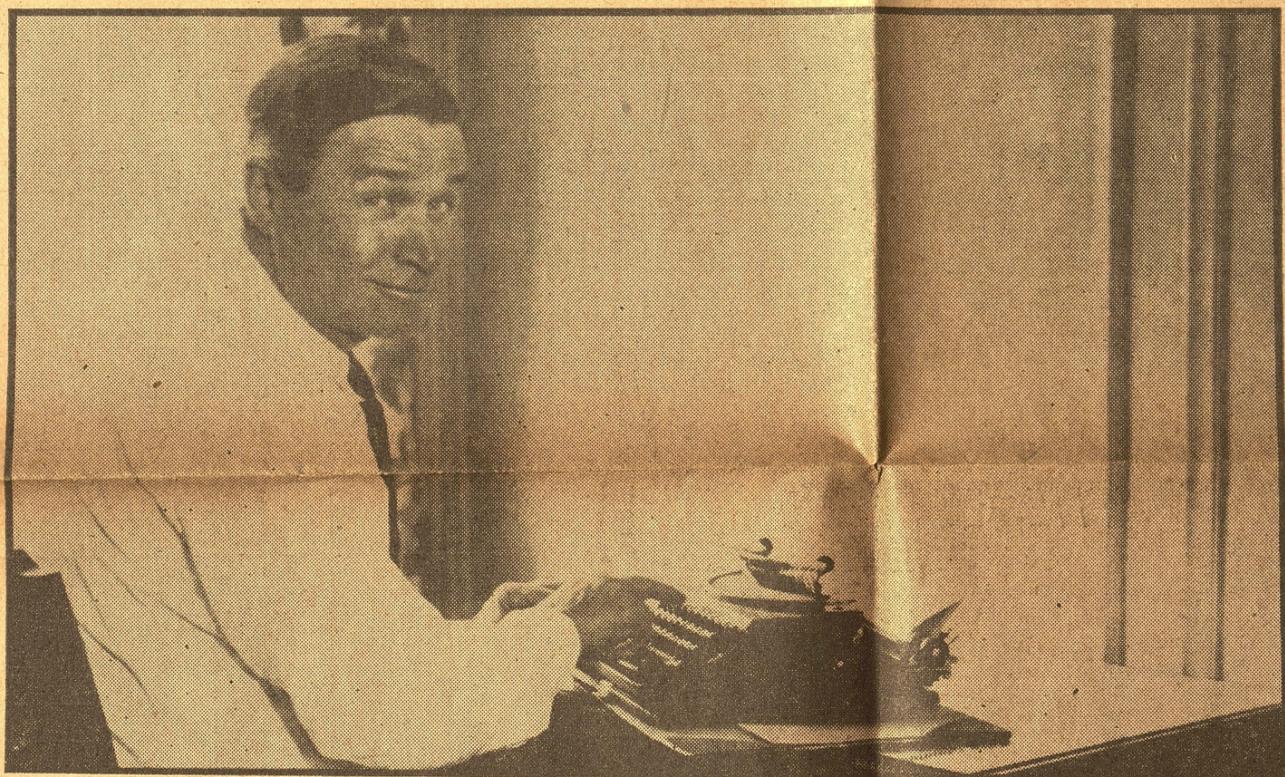
"Course there was a lot of us dumb ones that couldn't understand. We said, 'Well if somebody lost money, why somebody else must have made it. You cant just lose money to nobody, unless you drop it somewhere and nobody ever finds it.' Then they said a good deal of the money was 'Lost on paper.' That is it was figures but it wasent real money. Well I had done that, I could remember every contract I would get for a season's work on the stage or screen, my wife and I would sit down and figure out what 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.

"But then everybody said it would have a demoralizing effect on the country for so many to have their paper Profits all rubbed out at once. So I says what can we do for 'em? 'Why restore confidence.' And thats what I been doing for weeks, writing and talking. Course there is a lot of them that is going to take me time to get back to contributing to Wall Street again. They not only lost confidence but they lost money, some of them all their money. So we will have to wait till they get some money in some other business,

of Thomas Jefferson. (It's always a race with the Democrats to see which speaker can mention Jefferson first.) Well, Cermak drew the first blood of the Democratic National Convention by grabbing Jefferson early. It was awfully timely the way he dragged him in. He said, 'Chicago and Thomas Jefferson had much in common: they both loved liberty.'

The first day of the convention was quiet and peaceful. "Two more sessions like this one," Will said, "and you will have no more people listening to you over the radio than the Republicans did."

But on the second day "They fought, they fit, they split, and adjourned in a dandy wave of dissention." This was over the question of who would be permanent chairman; Roosevelt's choice, or the man previously chosen. Roosevelt won. He controlled a majority of the delegates, but not enough to nominate under the traditional rule that required a two-thirds vote. And a tentative gesture had been made toward changing the rule. This had been dropped, however—according to Will, because "the hotel men were against it."



Will Rogers' daily wires and weekly articles were pounded out on a small portable typewriter. He was a leading exponent of the hunt-and-peck system. In later years he used a typewriter that had only capital letters in large type. Will Rogers was a constant subscriber to the Beverly Hills Citizen. He and

Mr. George Barker, then editor and publisher, used to have much humorous and public correspondence. Their most famous difference of opinion was over the benefit of the "public opinion polls." This was in the days of the old Literary Digest, and long before the use of scientific sampling,

perhaps in some business in which they really have no confidence. Then they will be able to get back into the market not only with new confidence but new money. That's going to take time in some cases. But its great work, and I am just crazy about it."

Early in June, 1932, Will observed: "We never realized that elections were so close 'till we see by the papers this morning that each political party has 'some' plan of relieving the unemployed. They have been unemployed for three years, and nobody paid any attention to 'em, but now both parties have discovered that while they are not working, there is nothing in the constitution to prevent them from voting."

The Republicans were meeting in Chicago that year. And flying from California to the convention Will sympathized in advance with the Grand Old Party's keynote speaker: "He has the toughest job any of them ever had. If he points to accomplishments he is sunk and if he views with alarm he is sunk. We are liable to get two solid hours on the weather."

To Will it was another 'convention held for no reason at all,' like the Republican convention of eight years before, when "Coolidge could have been nominated by post card."

"They tried to sell box seats to this thing for \$22 a piece," he said. "These Republicans just won't admit there is depression." And when the convention was over, with President Hoover renominated: "The Democrats seemed more pleased with it than the Republicans. The real wets went away mad. The real dries went away sorer than the wets."

Both the 1932 conventions were held in Chicago. Returning a week later, Will found the "air charged with true Democracy, and good feeling of every candidate for his own delegates."

After a private chat with each of the candidates present, Bryd of Virginia, Will's old friend Alfalfa Bill Murray, Richie of Maryland, and Al Smith (Garner was in Washington, Roosevelt in Albany), Will reported: "The plan is to 'stop' Roosevelt. Then everybody 'stop' each other. At a time when the Democrats should be 'starting' they are 'stopping'."

The opening day prayer was delivered by Miss Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army—showing, Will thought, "the Democrat's touch with the common people." And "next come Mayor Cermak of Chicago. He beat them all to the name

On the afternoon of the third day the convention had to recess for a couple of hours. To fill in a session of entertainment was arranged. "The resolutions committee were trying to draw up a platform," Will wrote. "They didn't start till 10 o'clock. How they were expected to agree on prohibition in two hours when they hadn't been able to in twelve years, was a mystery to everybody but the Democrats. The whole convention has been 'stop Roosevelt,' 'stop Smith,' 'stop a dry plank,' 'stop a too-wet plank'—everything has been stop something. So today they just stopped the convention." Amos and Andy appeared, Eddie Dowling performed, and Will ad libbed from the convention platform for a solid hour—the first orator, according to Heywood Brown, "to leave the platform with shouts of 'More! More!' ringing in his ears."

But when the resolutions committee finally made up its mind on prohibition—"did the Democrats go wet? No, they just laid right down and wallowed in it. They left all their clothes on the bank and dived in without even a bathing suit. They are wetter than an 'organ-die' dress at a rainy-day picnic."

The rest of that night and well into next morning the futile balloting continued—with Roosevelt, Smith, and Garner deadlocked. Will himself had 22 votes for one round; when Alfalfa Bill Murray released his Oklahoma delegation to "that sterling citizen, that wise philosopher, that great heart, that favorite son of Oklahoma . . ."

## 22 Votes For Rogers

"Politics ain't on the level," Will described it. "I was only in 'em for an hour, but in that short space of time somebody stole twenty-two votes from me. I was sitting there in the press stand asleep and wasn't bothering a soul when they woke me up and said Oklahoma had started me on the way to the White House with twenty-two votes. I thought to myself, 'Well, there is no use going there this late in the morning,' so I dropped off to sleep again, and that's when somebody touched me for my roll, took the whole twenty-two, didn't even leave me a vote to get breakfast on."

Next day as a result of the famous deal, William Gibbs McAdoo announced that the California delegation had shifted their votes from Garner to Roosevelt—and the convention was over.

As the Hoover-Roosevelt campaign got under way the stock market began to improve a little. Simply a Republican

In arranging this article we ran across many sayings that seemed good to us, but required local reference or needed the proper background. In the hope that some of the older residents can remember the situations of which he was speaking, we have picked a few of Will Rogers' remarks at random. His notes and his writings are studded with quotations like these:

"California's fifteen delegates left yesterday accompanied by sixty bootleggers."

"A quart of old Crow in the committee room will seat more delegates than all the votes in the world."

"The bills were passed so fast they didn't have time to vote on 'em, they just waded at 'em."

"When we opened the 'Open Door' in China, we didn't go in, Japan came out."

"The farmer wears out one automobile a year just running to town to stall off interest on his mortgage."

"Just follow the briefcases to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation."

"Al spoke in Montana on oil corruption. That subject can get more applause and less votes from an audience than any subject ever invented. Jim Reed has made the subject so entertaining that the audience instead of going out voting against it, they start practicing it. Senator Walsh adopted it as a motto and eliminated himself from the race. It was an issue in '24 and Calvin won by nine million."

maneuver, according to Will. "They are all just a buying and selling among themselves," he said. "Yesterday farm machinery went up. Now there is not a farmer in the United States that can pay his taxes or his groceries. How is he going to buy any farm machinery? He has no more credit. If he wanted to he couldn't get a garden hoe, much less a threshing machine. He can plow with a forked stick and raise more than he can sell. So that raise don't look so hot. That's like Christmas trees going up at New Year's."

In Will's opinion the Republican party had a tough proposition: "All the Democrats have to do is promise what they would do if they got in. But the Republicans have to promise what they would do and then explain why they haven't already done it."

Then came September, and Maine went Democratic. "And 'as Maine goes, so goes the post-offices.' Why, four years ago they imported a Democrat into the State just to show around at the fairs. Even Wall Street got plumb discouraged at the news. 'You mean to tell us this booming and trading we been doing among ourselves here has all gone for naught?' Mr. Hoover wired to Everett Sanders to 'tighten the lines, enlighten the people, our cause is right.' Roosevelt just grinned, and even the original couldn't a shown more teeth. The old campaign is getting hot. God help a man out looking for re-election on a night like this."

Early in October, as the campaign was reaching its height, Will left for a trip to South America. "I am leaving for everything south of the equator," he wired October 10th from San Salvador. "Am flying down the west coast by Chile, then to Argentina for a week, and up the east coast by Brazil. I want to get back just before election. Not to vote, but just to see the show. I think people would like to read something in the papers beside 'Hoover said this' and 'Roosevelt says that.' I think it's a good time to go. In fact, I am gone."

In his daily wire on the 13th Will told about an old man at a little Peruvian village where the plane had stopped for gas, who came up and began talking about the radio address Calvin Coolidge had made the night before. Will was surprised, and thought Mr. Coolidge might be surprised too—"I'll bet he'll be all broke up when he hears he wasted his speech on people away down here that can't vote."

Will was back in Coral Gables, Florida, on the 27th. And went on to New York.

Mr. Richard Adamson, the arranger of this article, is a nephew of Will Rogers and an author in his own right. His material has appeared in Esquire, The Saturday Evening Post and other national magazines. He is well acquainted with Will Rogers material. In fact, the two of them used to discuss humour and style together.



"All I know is what I read in the papers," was a phrase Will Rogers made famous. This is a characteristic pose. He covered all national conventions for years, and most of the prominent people involved were personal friends of his, but he never could understand the bitterness engendered by politics. He once wrote, "Well, I see where the whispering campaign is about over. They're saying the same things out loud now."

"Was going to stop in Washington," he said, "but the newspaper boys said there wasn't a soul there. 'Ain't Mr. Hoover there?' 'No, he has gone to save Indiana.' 'Well, I know my old Injun friend, Charley Curtis, is here.' 'No, he is saving Kansas.' 'Well, then I will just drop up and see some of the boys in the Cabinet.' 'Why, there is none of the Cabinet that's been here since early in the spring.' 'Well, who is running the country?' 'Why, nobody, that's why things are kinder picking up.'"

In New York Will decided that he had arrived back "in the midst of the most colossal rodeo of applesauce in the history of our national pastime." But he guessed that, after all, it was what they call a clean campaign. "A clean campaign," he said, "is where each side cleans the other side of every possible vestige of respectability. The opposition are just horse thieves and that's all there is to it. Well they are, but aren't we all?"

November 8th: "As I dispatch this little message along late in the evening, it looks like the only thing can beat the Democrats is honest counting."

"Mr. Hoover," Will wrote the following day, "there was nothing personal in the vote against you. We all know that you was handed a balloon that was blowed up to its utmost, you held it as carefully as anyone could, but the thing 'busted' right in your hands. Well, there just aint' much you can do in a case like that. No, it wasn't you, Mr. President, the people just wanted to buy something new, and they didn't have any money to buy it with. But they could go out and vote free and get something new for nothing."

### True Neutral

Will couldn't take sides, either with a party or between the parties, and still maintain the privileged position he enjoyed. Will was born a Democrat and always called himself a Democrat—as he sometimes said, because "it's funnier to be a Democrat." But he never voted. He repeatedly said, publicly, that he didn't vote. And for Will, this was the only course. If he had voted and said how he was voting he could not have taken the liberties that, as a good-natured neutral, he was allowed to take. And to have voted and yet kept how he was voting a deep, dark secret would have been a public announcement that he regarded himself and his influence very seriously.

In spite of his efforts to be neutral, and fair to both sides, Will received a great deal of indignant criticism in the heat of political campaigns—and never more than in the 1932 campaign. A piece he wrote November 1st, during the last vitriolic days, was particularly resented by partisans of both sides:

"There should be a moratorium called on candidates' speeches. They have both called each other everything in the world they can think of. From now on they are just talking themselves out of votes. The high office of President of the United States has degenerated into two ordinarily fine men being goaded on by their political leeches into saying things that if they were in their right minds they wouldn't think of saying. Imagine Mr. Hoover last night, 'any change of policies will bring disaster to every fireside in America.' This country is a thousand times bigger than any two men in it, or any two parties in it. This country has gotten where it is in spite of politics, not by the aid of it. That we have carried as much political bunk as we have and still survive shows we are a supnation.

"This calamity was brought on by the actions of the people of the whole world and its weight will be lifted off by the actions of the people of the whole world, and not by a Republican or a Democrat. So you two boys just get the weight of the world off your shoulders and go fishing. Both of you claim you like to fish, now instead of calling each other names till next Tuesday, why you can do everybody a big favor by going fishing, and you will be surprised but the old U. S. will keep right on running while you boys are sitting on the bank. Then come back next Wednesday and we will let you know which is the lesser of the two evils of you."

Ten days later, when things had quieted down a little, Will replied to his wrathful readers. "Now that the election is over and people can't write in and complain about my 'Remarks,' why I figure that this department of the paper will be withdrawn," he wrote in the letters-to-the-editor column of the Los Angeles Times. "One day when I thought I had written a good article (by accident, I suppose, it certainly wasn't through habit), well, it seems that this one sensible article that I wrote was such a change from the usual bunk I had been dishing out that even the Times themselves rose up in protest.

"What surprised me was that I said a hundred fool things day after day that I knew didn't have any sense to 'em. But the only truthful one I happened to stumble on was the one they took the hide off me for, that was the one about telling 'em to go fishing.

"The one thing that I am proud of is the fact that there is not a man in public life today that I don't like, most of them are my good friends, but that's not going to keep me from taking a dig at him when he does something or says something foolish. Mr. Hoover knows that grass is not going to grow on any streets, no matter who's President. You can't get it to grow on your lawns. He knows disaster is not going to be at every fireside, those were said in the heat of a campaign, but that don't keep 'em from being foolish. Roosevelt saying Hoover was responsible for all our depression was just as bad. He knows that's not so, but he said it, all in the heat of a campaign.

"And when I said that they both were taking themselves too serious, that the U. S. was bigger than any two men or any two parties, why that's the way I feel about it."

Which was the way Will had always felt about it. He knew that "Neither one of 'em is going to save us. Neither one is going to ruin us." The only thing about presidential campaigns that seemed to him worth losing his temper over was the bitterness and bad sportsmanship with which they were conducted.

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And in the last two of the three campaigns he had written his way through, the bitterness and bad sportsmanship had been notable. Near the end of the Smith-Hoover battle Will had predicted that it would "take two generations to sweep up the dirt." Just four years later, however, the Hoover-Roosevelt campaign set a new record. "The last campaign brought in religion," Will wrote then, "this one replaced it with fear. This time they tried to scare you into voting a certain way."

Will could never see that everybody getting "all excited and mad at each other" had much effect on the result—"All our last Presidents have been elected by millions, showing that all that heat and perspiration was wasted."—and it seemed to him deplorable that politics couldn't be conducted on a little higher plane.

"And by the way, here is one thing I want somebody to explain to me, why is it during a campaign, after a campaign, or at any other time, why can't our Presidents speak of each other by name and say, 'Well, I wish Mr. So and So well, he is a fine man and will make you a good President, or to have the victors say, 'He had a hard time, and did the very best he could have under the circumstances.' Even small town mayors have been known to speak of each other complimentary, but if Presidents ever did it I think we would drop dead."