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FUTURE

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NOTES FOR ADDRESS BY

GENERAL OF THE ARMY DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, CHIEF OF STAFF,
AT THE UNVEILING OF THE WILL ROGERS STATUE, MEMORIAL COLISEUM,
FORT WORTH, TEXAS, AT 3:00 P.M., CST (4:00 P.M., EST),
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1947

We are gathered here out of affection and respect for Will Rogers, a great American.

His career and his place in the American scene defy exact classification. He was member of no particular profession; he was not identified with the trades or sciences--he did not seek political preference nor was he, in any formal sense, constructor, teacher, preacher, lawyer, farmer or soldier. Yet, an adventurer at heart, he seemed something of each; a smiling wanderer through city, farm and village. He possessed a keen insight into the things that concerned, amused or distressed his fellows, and was gifted with an uncanny ability to relate these things to the fundamental business of making a living, of maintaining freedom, of pursuing happiness. He gave to millions who regard philosophy as something of interest only to the cloistered professor, a better balanced understanding of their place in modern society. His favorite tool was the witty barb--but though sharp, to puncture pomposity, it was never poisoned, to leave a lasting wound. He climbed to fame on the lazy twirls of a cow-puncher's rope--and he used his fame to teach while he entertained; to goad each of us to think about the heritage we possess--of our opportunities, our rights, our responsibilities.

Within the year I have seen the lonely cairn that marks the spot, on the bleak borders of our northernmost frontier, where he met his end. There, with his gallant companion, Wiley Post, he had gone, following still his bent of probing into things outside the limit of everyday conscious knowledge. Just what he sought, I do not know--but fitting it seemed to me that his passing should still avoid the commonplace--that his leaving should remind us, as had, in life, his pungent words that there still exists a need to seek, to search, to know.

To class Will Rogers with the acknowledged philosophers of the ages would be as false as to relate him in Thespian art to Booth, Marlowe, Jefferson or Sothern. He, himself, would have ridiculed any such attempt. He was observer rather than profound thinker; entertainer rather than interpretative actor. But though he belonged to neither of those fields, he invaded both and in doing so gave to his contemporaries thought for everyday consumption; bits to spur our minds even as we smiled at the package in which we received the gift.

He knew those the world called great but stood in awe of no man. Purists, grammarians, even scholars and statesmen may have at times deplored his flagrant disregard of the particular dogmas each of them held dear. But the only Americans who failed to gain some inspiration, some mental quickening, some quiet chuckle from Will Rogers were those few totally devoid of a sense of humor and completely blind to the foibles that a mental mirror always shows. With these

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he was not concerned--but to the millions he brought fun and stimulus, and so he deserved what he gained, a big place in our hearts, a secure niche in our admiration.

He was a common man with uncommon qualities, and common men never failed to appreciate what he had to give. Into one sentence, under the glint of a wisecrack, he could pack a century and a half of history and salt it down with an ageless truth. He once observed that "the United States never lost a war or won a conference," doubtless to remind his fellow citizens that while a united America can develop irresistible power in defense of principle, rightness of principle cannot of itself assure success over human selfishness.

Most interesting it is to speculate on what he would have had to say about things that trouble us today. What wisecrack would he have shot at us on a dozen differences in the United Nations; what kind of needling would he have used to awaken us to the relationships between maintenance of our liberties and a decent life for others that desire also to remain free; what quip would he have employed to shame us into greater saving of food for the needy; what shaft would he have launched to inspire us to greater cooperation at home? Could his wit, his insight, his homely phraseology make us better see that democracy has entered its decade of greatest crisis? Could he have helped make us see that personal ambitions and desires must now take second place to national need and solidarity? Could he have made us see the inescapable truth that sheer national interest demands of us a unity of effort that must extend far beyond our national borders? Could he have made us more vigilant in the preservation of freedom, defending it from all enemies, foreign or domestic? Could he have helped strip from our eyes the scales of misunderstanding, prejudice, ignorance, fear--and so help us each to see clearly our duties to our country and ourselves, and tirelessly to struggle toward their performance?

What he would and could have done, none of us can know; none of us is a Will Rogers! But certain it is that he would have tried--he would have brought to us such understanding as was granted to him. He would have done it for his love of America, his devotion to human freedom, his concern for his fellow citizens, his faith in humanity. And even more certain it is that he would have brought smiles to our faces--for he did not believe that to be earnest is to weep, that recognition and performance of duty is possible only to a doleful face. We would have squirmed under the spurs he may possibly have applied to our complacency but we would have warmed to his infectious grin, and tried the harder to meet the requirements of our day.

He has gone--the problems remain, and he would be the first to remind us that thus it has always been. A loved one goes--even leaders that may temporarily seem to acquire the quality of indispensability--but life continues to encounter the storms that loved ones or leaders shared with us or pointed the way to avoidance. Ours alone is the responsibility of meeting the issues of our time, but the memory of those we have lost brings inspiration to the daily task.

It is fitting that we should try to communicate to others still to come, something of this inspiration born of affection, faith and admiration. A pictorial likeness, a statue, can help to do so for it will endure long after we, gathered here today, have joined the one it commemorates. And in the day of our children's

children and beyond their time, it will still testify that a sense of humor and a neighborly spirit can greatly lighten life's burden.

Will Rogers may be smiling now at the thought of capturing in a figure of bronze his humor, his humanness, his discernment, his friendliness! Yet, if so he does, then also he knows that this statue had its birth in a friend's affection and esteem for him, and in generosity and concern for others. Knowing this, he would approve and, though vain pride of self did not mar his daily living, he would be proud in the just pride that, having harmed no man and helped so many, those who knew him found him worthy of timeless tribute.

UN veit to the friends who love him

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my high honor to ~~dedicate~~ this statue to the memory of a great American, Will Rogers.

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