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Will Rogers on the Range.

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Chapter I

Part of the American heritage of our boys and girls of tomorrow is to know Will Rogers, the world's best known and best loved cowboy. The framework of his life was forged in the anvil in the open range country as he spun his rope as a boy. With the hope of presenting this beloved sage of sagebrush land, I have read all that I can find that has been written by and about this great American who was born and grew to manhood on the range. I wanted the reaction and information from the plainsmen of the grassland who rode herd, worked, played and joked with Will Rogers while he was a cowpuncher on the Plains of Texas and Oklahoma. I have sought these old comrades out in person and by letter. These sons of the soil have spoken with deep affection of Will Rogers and his way of life. These links of the past will be broken all too soon, if somebody does not record these stories in permanent form. With the help of many, many pioneers, this is being done with the great hope that much joy will also be given to those approaching the sunset.

Will Rogers and his way of life vanished from the Old West but as Irving Cobb said on the day of Will's funeral, "They can never bury Will Rogers." Long may he be enshrined in the hearts of all people.

In reviewing his experience as a cowboy, many may perhaps get a true picture of the cowboy at his best. The struggle for his life in the open developed strength, endurance, self reliance, courage, self mastery and perhaps most of all, a deep understanding of the other fellow and his courageous efforts to survive the defeats and discouragements that come to all who have broken dreams. Will was "tops."

He knew the heart and soul of man can be seared and branded as calves could be, but he wanted none of that. No one who has never slept in the open under a star-studded sky could possibly love the range country and its people as he did. His first and lasting ambition seemed to have been to be a real cowboy who could rope well. So well did he succeed that he earned even people's hearts eyes and hearts open "The Poet of the Lariat."

Can you give me the names and addresses of any old friends who might contribute to this?

From the place where I first picked up Will Roger's trail on the Plains of Texas, I have found him to be a warm-hearted fun-loving cowboy who loved his fellow-traveller-companions. So many have said that his sense of humor and wise cracking was as much a part of Will Rogers as the color of his hair. "Sometimes we would be dead tired as we swung from our saddle, but Will would come up with a droll remark that would cause us to laugh and relax."

M.B. Jewell, from Dimmitt, Texas who worked with Will said, "One day some of us boys came in early before the cook had dinner ready and we laid down with our heads under the chuck wagon for a short rest in the shade. We soon fell asleep. I knew nothing more until I heard the trace chains rattle and a voice calling 'Whoa -- there. Whoa now.'

Sleeping cowboys jumped to get to our feet and out of the way of the run-away team, but we bumped our heads on a awful crack on the chuck wagon." That old boy, Will Rogers liked to kill himself a alughin'. He was always doin' somethin' like that. I was holed up with him and some other boys one time during a rainy week at the old North Camp for the S Ranch on Runnin' Water Draw. He was clownin' all the time. Will and I were younger than the other boys but we wanted to learn to play cards with the boys. There wasn't anything else to do when we wasn't ridin'. They spread a blanket down on the floor on an emserin' and had a lantern and a candle settin' around for light. He and I soon lost our little wad of maoney when Will said, 'Guess it's about time for me to blow out the candle and start again."

"Will just wanted a fellow to sing a song over and over again until he could learn it, if he liked the song. I never heard him use a cuss word as long as I knew him. He always wanted clean fun, but he sure was full of fun and kept everybody laughin' around him. We called him the 'Little ol' Windjammer from Oklahoma. We sure did like him and hated to see him leave. No body ever got a better welcome that Will Rogers did later when ever he came back to visit in later years. No one ever thought of him ever getting to be so famous when we knew him as a cowpuncher."

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he roped even people's hearts. He was known as the "Poet of the Lariat."

Mary Austin wrote: "The Land of the Sun expands the soul."

When Will left the cow range to work on the entertainment range, he took part of this range with him in his personality, appearance, honesty, and wholesomeness. With always a great yearning to return whenever possible, if but for a few hours.

Sharlotte Hall, the poet of Arizona writes so very beautifully of these days:

Life and death and love and fear---

Each one had its moment here.

Now those first-come men are gone

And the old house stands alone,

Filled with whispering memories---

Haunting, half heard melodies---

A shrine beside the bust way

To the Soul of Yesterday.

It seems that our beloved Teddy Roosevelt must have had Will Rogers in mind when he wrote "The man should have youth and strength who seeks adventure in the wide, vast spaces of earth.... He must greatly long for lonely winds that blow across the wilderness, and for sunrise and sunset over the empty world. His heart must thrill to the saddle and not for the hearthstone..."

"But much, very much more, remains for the man who has warmed both hands before the fire of life,] and who, although he loves the great cities, loves even more the fenceless grassland, and the forest-clad hills... He will take pleasure in the companionship of the men of the open..."

"To me Owen Wister is the writer I wish when I am hungry with the memories of lonely mountains, of vast sunny plains with seas of wind-rippled grass, of springing wild creatures--- and lithe sun-tanned men who ride with utter ease on ungroomed, half broken horses."

Teddy Roosevelt loved the West, the cowboys and the sagebrush and he wanted to see this rich heritage preserved in American Literature before all of this

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went the way of the "49ers". He urged Owen Wister to write of this epoch in American history before it was too late. Since he too was a cowboy at one time in the West that he loved so well, he had a very great appreciation for the men of the open range. Will Rogers was extremely fond of him.

Another pioneer who had a great desire for the preservation of the spirit of those pioneers was J. T. Griswold,

When I went to Bill Rowland, Manager of Halsell's Ranch where Will Rogers worked so much and spent so many of his short vacations helping to rope and brand cattle he gave me the names and addresses of several people who knew Will even better than he did. We are also indebted to him for the following: "Yes, the ranch near Higgins, Texas was operated by the same Halsell's who have the Hashed O Ranch where Will worked longer than he did at Higgins. ^{the son of W. E. Halsell,} Ewing Halsell was about four years older than Will and they became life-long friends. Ewing's father and Will had such a great understanding and appreciation for each other. I remember one day at the Ranch where Will had been roping and helping the boys brand, just like he was being paid for working like the boys instead of being on a vacation, Will came past Mr. Halsell at the close of the day's work and Mr. Halsell said: 'Well did you get some good ropin' today?' Will ~~replied-~~ ~~ended-~~ ~~the~~ replied: 'I got some good missin' ' and that was all that ~~were~~ ~~said,~~ all that was said."

While the boys were working some cattle one day some bankers and business men came and sat watching them for a long time. Finally one of the men said, 'Where could we find Will Rogers? We want to see him.' He was amazed when he heard, 'Well you've been lookin' at him all day. There he is workin' with the rest of the boys.' "

When Will could have a few days or sometimes a few hours off to spend at the Ranch he would get a taxi driver in Amarillo who was free to wait until he had to go back to Amarillo. Of course he made him take the 'Taxi' sign off his car and he could sleep and eat with the boys until Will had finished. I have seen Will walk away from his rope and go to the car and take out his typewriter and peck off something then say to his driver 'Here take this to Muleshoe and get it off at Western Union to my paper at Amarillo' and away he'd go back to working cattle. He would not hesitate a minute on what to write. I don't see how in the world he could think of so much so quickly. Next day or so I'd read that message in the Amarillo paper and it'd be good too."

"One day Will was ridin' Gather's pet horse while the boys were separating cows and calves. After they finished that job Will got his rope to hummin' when Gather said, 'Better not try to rope from that horse for he's been rope burnt and he will sure throw you!'"

"Will didn't pay him any mind but dropped his rope and that instant the horse started pitchin' and Will soon picked himself off the ground and began knockin' the dust off himself as he said 'I sure thought that I could ride 'im.' "

One of the cowpunchers said, 'I thought you 'as going' to stay with him before he turned.'

"Yes" Will said, "but he turned."

When Will came out in '34 when it was so terribly dry he asked the boss how things were going. He said 'Well it's pretty dry here but they've had more rain on down farther.' Will replied 'There you go again, if you can't brag on your own country don't brag on the other fellow's country.'

He never laughed at his own jokes even- no matter how much the other boys laughed. His wit was just part of it and he seemed not to realize it.

"Yes, Will raised lots of money for the Red Cross. He had a way with him that went over. He knew lots of wealthy men and sometimes he would say 'Well we'll just fine Mr. So and So for not bein' here/at this meetin' & sometimes for being there and about all that old boy could do was to give the Red Cross his check for that amount. "

"I was in Lubbock one time when Will was there between trains and they had a big meeting where Will was to speak. I got about the last seat way at the back of the house. When they pulled the curtain there sat Will on the floor twiddli' his thumbs. He looked so surprised as he said 'Well I do declare, they told me this 'as a good play to while away the time waitin' for my train but who'd thought I'd run onto so many people here.' An old woman sittin' by me said to her husband 'Let's

I just knew it'd be somethin' silly like that' but even she could not drag her old man away from there until Will got through'

In such a funny way he rolled his eyes and said, 'You know there's somethin' funny about this man's town for they don't want you to go to the left part of town. You see signs all over 'Don't turn left.' I don't know what it is they don't want us to see. But I do know that Tech is about the best school in the whole country. Do you know how I know? Well it's got about the best football team and that's the way they judge these colleges.----- Oh! it was really good the way he had that crowd with him. '

One day I heard him tell about some fellows in Washington bettin' him that he could not make President Coolidge smile say nothin' about makin' him laugh. 'Do you know how I got my money? Well when the fellow introduced me to him as President of the United States, I leaped a little closer and said, 'I didn't catch the name?' Calvin Coolidge must have at least smile again when Will visited him in his little New England home. As they sat down to the table to eat dinner one of the beautiful collie dogs came near Will and he said ' Now you can eat here three times a day but this is the only chance I'll get here' and I ^{so you just lay off} pushed him away."

I wish that you could have seen the expression on the face of this man of the real West as he talked to me of the compuncher who had so completely won the boys at the Mashed O Ranch near Maloshoe, Texas.