

# Josh Lee's Tribute

**R**ETURNING from Washington, D. C., to participate in the Claremore rites for Will Rogers August 22, Congressman Josh Lee, '17, as, delivered a eulogy at special services that were attended by many of the closest friends of the great Oklahoma humorist.

Congressman Lee was introduced to the assembly in Will Rogers' home town by State Senator Dennis Bushyhead, '29 law. Lee's sparkling eulogy follows:

From the land of the midnight sun, last Friday there came the saddest news that has flashed across the United States since the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. News of the tragic death of Wiley Post and Will Rogers so stunned the world that people solemnly stood in sad and silent suspense. Business stopped. Business men, if they talked at all, would talk about nothing but the untimely death of these two distinguished men.

Many a cup of breakfast coffee was left untouched—listlessly and absent-mindedly people turned to their duties. Automatically people performed those tasks that were necessary but no others.

Perturbed handkerchiefs dabbed many moist eyes. So also were many tears brushed away by the back of rough and brawny hands.

In the theatre world many a make-up was streaked by the mascara the actors use on their eyelashes.

Then we caught at hope, "perhaps it is not true"—but the next flash from the land of the midnight sun destroyed our feeble hope. It was true, Will and Wiley had gone out together. Both as they had wished; both at the zenith of their fame.

Oklahoma's two most distinguished sons and aviators two most ardent champions "took off" together on their last flight.

The announcement of their tragedy swept the news from the front page of every newspaper in the entire English-speaking world.

Now we have met here in the home community of Will Rogers to honor him, but we can only honor ourselves in honoring him.

Will Rogers was my hero. He was the big brother of the world. He always boosted the fellow who needed a lift. He was a self-made man. He blazed his own trail over the mountain of fame. He never waited for opportunities, he made them. While others slept he was pouring over the daily news, digging the fun out of it.

He was a part of Oklahoma. The dash and romance of the new state appealed to his pioneering spirit. It was

this admiration of the pioneer that drew him to the intrepid daring Wiley Post.

The redman's trail of tears ended here and the redman named our state, Oklahoma, which means beautiful land of the redman.

Before I left the national capitol I walked into the hall of fame and stood before Oklahoma's son who graces that hall of fame—Sequoyah, a Cherokee. There he stands benignly looking over the rotunda of the national capitol. I said, "Chief Sequoyah, one of your sons will soon be with you here." Will Rogers had blood of that proud haughty race coursing through his veins.

He was a part of Oklahoma, both its redman and its white man. He was a cowboy in the day when the ranchers were a lean and fearless race of men. His generosity was typical of the big hearted cattleman. The old school of devil-may-care cowboys and big hearted cowman is passing. Will Rogers was one of the last.

He was typically American. He represented the American spirit of smiling at disaster. He was fiercely patriotic—always kindly and always fair, but it was always America first for him. The last time I heard him speak was in Chelsea last fall. You remember, he talked to us for a while without discrediting other nations. He told us how much better off we were than people elsewhere.

He always took pleasure in telling the people who traced their ancestry back to the Mayflower that his people met the boat—showing his pride in everything American.

His humor never bit like a wolf, but always like a lamb. He never used sarcasm nor cynicism. He never destroyed an ideal, crushed an ambition, withered a hope or disillusioned a dreamer. But instead he encouraged, he cheered, he inspired.

His sharpest arrows of wit left no bleeding wounds. His keenest thrusts of humor left no ugly scars of hate. His humor was clean and wholesome. His jokes left no unsavory taste. He left no unpublished manuscripts of coarse comedy. His repertoire contained no ribald jokes. Humorists with less refined conscience have yielded to the temptation of substituting coarseness for humor in order to get the guffaws of the groundlings, as Shakespeare would say. But Will never did. He didn't need to, nor was it ever necessary for him to use profanity in order to be effective in speech, as is sometimes done by men of more limited ability.

As Congressman Upshaw said, "He was the cleanest, keenest, best loved comedian-statesman the world ever saw."

His humor was the safety valve for American life. The high tension of our fast-moving life found relief of pressure in his wit and wisdom.

His philosophy saneness. He walked with kings, but never lost the common touch. Affectation, sham and pretense were defenseless before his thrusts. The plaudits of two nations failed to shake his faith in the plain and simple things of life. To him one ounce of common horse sense was worth all of the fine spun theories in the world.

His humor was only the superficial tinsel tapestry that concealed the great white soul underneath.

Few men become idealists while they still live. But as the flag is more than a piece of colored bunting so also was Will Rogers more than a mere man. He was an ideal. He encouraged the discouraged. He cheered the cheerless, he inspired the despairing; he shamed the greedy and praised the generous.

His charity was unlimited.

He accumulated a fortune but gave away more than he kept. He tithed by keeping one-tenth, giving away nine. He beat the Red Cross to the scene of every disaster.

When the searing winds of the drought curled up the last stock of corn in southern Oklahoma and Arkansas there came on the next wind the glad news that Will Rogers was coming. He followed the devastated paths of the droughts and left groceries on a shelf and a cheer in the heart.

The roar of the hurricane that swept Puerto Rico was still in the ears of the survivors when the cheering news was flashed over the radio that Will Rogers is coming. Through his benefit program he collected enough to relieve the destitute.

Above the confusion of the Nicaraguan earthquake was heard the drone of an airplane motor. Latin lips shouted with new courage, "It is Will Rogers."

Where shall we place his body to rest? Golden, sun-kissed California wants to bury him there. All the heroes who slept in the beautiful, sacred Arlington are inviting him to rest there.

But Oklahoma, his most beloved Oklahoma, is calling for her most distinguished and most loved son. Lay him to rest here in Oklahoma soil from which he sprung. Bring him back to the beautiful Osage hills and let him sleep beside the sparkling Spavinaw. The travelers of the world shall make sacred pilgrimages to his burial ground, and it shall become a sacred shrine where people will dedicate themselves to the noble things of life.

Though his body rests here, his soul has taken off in the "Great White Ship," for the beyond. Happy landing, Will.