The trapper's dog

BY JOHN JOSEPH MATHEWS, '20

We were sitting around the camp fire in Wyoming, three days by pack train from the nearest settlement. We had had a big dinner of venison and were happily disposed as we smoked our pipes and listened to tales of hunting. Red of the Laurel Leaf Ranch had held the attention of all for some time with his stories of grizzly bears. Red was an ardent grizzly hunter and was given credit by the more taciturn and sage guides of the region, for much skill in hunting this rather ferocious beast. He was given credit for his prowess, yet he was avid for praise which was not warranted, and in order to get this praise, he was in the habit of telling rather impossible stories. Having a fruitful imagination he was at times very entertaining, and his tales grew in improbability in proportion to the evident interest of his audience. He was a true artist; an appreciative reception of his escapes and heroics, would fill him with warmth and inspiration, and send him to dizzy heights, wherein he would lose all sense of proportion, and would suddenly awake from the emotion which gripped him, to the realization that he had strained the credulity of his circle. There would be just a hint of embarrassment then he would say: "Of course you don't hev to believe it, but yu know truth is stranger than friction." We usually stopped laughing at this because we felt instinctively that to continue would be to destroy the source of the golden eggs of fantasy, and after all Red was so genial, so very generous and whole hearted that we were ready to show him indulgence.

On this particular afternoon, we were in my tent talking of record heads; of the ferocity of sow-grizzlies in the spring; of cougar hunting, and of the merits and idiosyncrasies of pack horses, and finally through the association of ideas used in our talk of cougar hunting or the later discussion of the pleasure and the discomfort of trapping or hunting without a partner, we came to the subject of dogs as companions, and naturally to the trite discussion as to whether or not they were thinking animals or whether they acted from instinct. Bill maintained that dogs could think, but that they had no soul. Of course Bill had never given the matter a thought until that moment, no more than had Jim who immediately confirmed Bill's opinion, out of loyalty born of a deep admiration for the old guide. My opinion was expected. Bill and Jim looked at me as they expatiated their statements. I looked over at Red. He was looking down at his boot-tip, and I could see that he was waiting for me to give my opinion before he gave his. The expression on his face told me that he was waiting to have the last say on the matter, and if possible base his opinion on some fancied incident, which would be designed to overwhelm us, if not by its strength, at least by its uniqueness. Red knew the power of a startling statement, and that the effectiveness depended upon the last opinion, so he waited for me. I knew that the force of his statement would depend as well on my confirming the others in their opinion so I gave it as mine that dogs could think, but that I was not sure about the soul. Red slowly took his tobacco out of his pocket and filled his paper; he rolled his cigarette with great care and reached over to the fire for an ember. He exhaled several large clouds of smoke, then stretched his legs. The knowledge that we were waiting for him to speak filled him with the warm pleasure of satisfaction which often lights the face of a born raconteur. The situation was his and he was happy; now to make his story worthy of this situation which he had built up.

"Well," he said with an air of omniscience, "maybe a dog has got a soul, and maybe he can think—I dunno. I ain't give it much study, but I do know one thing—yu take a man that likes dogs—he's jist like every other man that likes dogs; yu'll find sich fellers purty nice. They'll be kind hearted and maybe a lit-tie too easy goin', but they'll be good fellers. They's weak men mostly that like to feel important, and a dog makes 'em feel proud of theirselves. Taint that way with people that likes cats, and I guess if a dog thinks, a cat thinks too, only them that likes cats is different; I allus said they's something wrong with people that likes cats. A dog makes a man feel important, and thats nacheral, but a cat don't give a damn for nothin', and don't love nobody, but thays some people that likes that, and of course they got a different disposition that makes yu think 'em kinda off, and makes 'em look kinda mean. Give me a man that likes dogs every time; he's more human and you'll find him okeh to hook up to, and that's one reason why I think dogs think cause they allus hook up to men who likes 'em. But thays one time I knowed of that didn't work out that way at all. I guess they is exceptions, thats one reason that I ain't gonna say that a dog can't think, even if thays mixed with wolf and the wolf blood is pullin one way and the dog blood the other. A dogs natcherally loyal and a wolves a natcheral killer, and he likes to jump on something that can't help itself, while a dog will do everything he can to help his master when he's in trouble; even die for him jest because he's loyal. I'll tell yu something that happened right here in these mountains thats allus queer to me, and I've done a heap a studyin about it too, seems like."

"Bill yu knowed old man Neds that Charlie Beams used to grub-stake every winter don't yu? He used to trap on Pacific crick and the North fork? Well he had one of the cuisedest dogs I ever seen; looked like a wolf, and he was half wolf I heard 'em tellin, and the Johnson outfit accused him of bein a killer; said they'd lost some ewes and lambs on account of him. But yu know old Neds; he swore he'd kill the first man that teched him. He was out on Pacific most of the time anyway and nothin happened. He used to take the dog out with him every winter to his little cabin; jest him and the dog.

"Old Neds was jest about as cuised as his dog and nobody liked him; he had the same kind of eyes the dog had; sorts yellow and greenish. He took that dog (TURN TO PAGE 141, PLEASE)
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out ever year until he died. Yu member
when Thompson found the body? That
dog ain’t been seen from that day to
this’n. Everybody was kinda glad cause
they was kinda fraud of the two of ‘em,
seemed like. Well it seemed like old
Neds liked the dog in a way, but he
never had a word to say to the animal
lessen it was to cuss him; never petted
him. Accordin to the Rangers that made
the North fork country, he fed him
good, but they jist seemed to be enemies.
Old Neds would come in from the line
cuss hell out of the dog, and the
dog would growl and bristle and squat in
the corner or get under the bunk, growl-
in deep in his throat. The dog would
move around the cabin like some wild
animal, and when it’d see old Neds it
would start growlin and showin its
fangs, and when old Neds got a chance he
kicked it in the ribs, and then jumped
away before he got snapped. Ranger
Thompson said that when he went to
the cabin to kinda check up on the old
man, and he shore needed watchin,
thompson said that when he went to
the cabin to kinda check up on the old
man, he could see the dogs trail branchin
in deep in his throat. The dog would
make a track, and decided to foller one of
them. Then he said he knowed how come that
coat in the willows. He said he was jist
seem the whole story when he heard a
deep growl, and when he looked up he
seem the big dog standin in a clearin of
willows, brislin and showin his teeth;
they was a snowshoe rabbit layin at his
feet, which Thompson figured he’d
dropped when he seen him. He said all
of a sudden it all come to him, and he
raised his gun aimin to put a bullet
through the killer’s head, but he said the
dog turned and run like a flash and his
shot went wild. He said he figured that
the old man had been dead about six
days, considerin everything; he said it
shore did make him feel kinda funny
standin there suddenly seem everything
so clear then say that a way.

NOTABLE SOONERS
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E. H. SKINNER

You will find Sooners domin-
ant in many oil companies; and it is
no exception in the “Conoco” organ-
ization. Most recent advancement of Soon-
ers to high post in this company (Coni-
tentral Pipe Line Co.) is that of E. H.
Skinner, ’23 bus., who has been made
the general manager, succeeding another
Sooner to that post. Harry Moreland, ex
20, who became general manager and
vice-president of the Great Lakes Pipe
Line Co. Earlier university students will
remember Harry Moreland as an assistant
in the journalism department in his un-
dergraduate days.

Mr Skinner was born September 12,
1902, in western Kentucky. That makes
him one of the youngest oil executives
in the country occupying such a respon-
sible post. In the summer of 1918, the
Skinners moved to Oklahoma and after
completing work in Oklahoma City
Central high school, Mr Skinner came
to the university, to study economics.
One year was spent out, as principal of
Taloga high school.

After leaving school, Mr Skinner went
to Ponca City, to become an instructor
in Ponca City high school. During the
summer of 1924, he began work for the
Marland Oil Co. as a laborer at the re-
finery. His advancement was rapid. In
a few months he became clerk in the re-
finery department, and during May,
1925, was transferred to Texas to work
for the Reagan County Purchasing Co.,
a Marland subsidiary.

Less than a year later he was transferred
to the staff of the Marland Pipe Line
Co., being stationed in Borger, Texas,
and for a time, he was chief clerk at Bor-
ger. In October, 1926, Mr Skinner was
transferred to Ponca City as budget clerk
in the Marland pipeline executive de-
partment. When Mr Moreland became
general manager Mr Skinner became
chief clerk (in 1929). The promotion
to Moreland’s office came in July, 1930.

Mr Skinner made most of his expenses
while in the university, and therefore did
not become a “joiner.” He was, and is,
one of the most loyal Sooners in that
Sooner town of Ponca City. He is a
2-5-0 subscriber to the Stadium-union
and is a life member of the University
of Oklahoma Association. At Ponca
City he maintains a home for his mother,
brother and sister, and, as head of a
household at twenty-eight, experiences
the varied responsibilities of the head of
a household. His hobby is tennis, which
he plays often.

WILLIAM S. GIBSON

By the editor

There was a time when I thought that I held the unique onus of
being the sole Sooner in the alumni editorial field. Great was my surprise
and pleasure to learn that I had a fellow sufferer and co-laborer in the person of
William S. Gibson, ex ’24, editor of the Minnesota Alumni Weekly. I met him
while he was visiting his brother-in-law, Charles Tant, the capable superinten-
dent of the student publications press shop. We talked “shop” as is the wont of ink-
stained fingers, and came to the mutual