

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 sane 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 yu 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 little 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 theys 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 theys 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 theys mixed with wolf and the wolf blood is pullin one way and the dog blood the other. A dogs natcherally loyal and a wolfs a nacheral 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 jist 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 cussedest 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; jist him and the dog.

"Old Neds was jist about as cussed as his dog and nobody liked him; he had the same kind of eyes the dog had; sorta yellow and greenish. He took that dog

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out ever year until he died. Yu member when Thompson found the body? That dog aint been seen from that day to this'n. Everybody was kinda glad cause they was kinda afraid 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 and cuss hell out of the dog, and the dog would growl and bristle and squat in the corner or get under the bunk, growlin deep in his throat. The dog would sneak 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, to keep him from takin beaver, that dog would lay in the corner and growl all the time he was there. He said it kinda made shivers run down his back, seein them big yellow eyes in the dark corner."

"Yu member how Thompson found old Neds? He was goin along and he noticed a dead marten in a trap; been dead for several days he said; he follered the line and a little farther he found another. Then he decided that he had better go to the cabin to see if anything was wrong. When he got to the cabin he could see that something was wrong. The door was almost froze tight. They was no sign that anybody had come out for a long time except the little hole in the door where the dog could come and go; he could see the dogs trail branchin out in all directions from the door. He finally busted the door in; the room was cold as hell and the frost had coated everything, and everything as still as death. He went back to the door and commenced to look at the trails the dog made, and decided to foller one of 'em. He said he had a nidee what had happened. He said he jist knowed it would be a broke leg. He said he follered the trail a good half hour, and was down in the arctic-willow flats when he noticed a piece of clothin'. It was an old coat that had got caught in the willows, and he said he membered see'in old Neds a wearin it now and again. He said he hadn't went a quarter before he seen something in the snow. It was old Neds; his face looked pale and stiff, and he knowed he was dead. He said he

looked around and seen tracks all around the body, but they was all the same tracks; all dog tracks. He said it was as he had figured; he was caught by one of his own bear traps; one of them toothed babies, double spring. He said the old man was tore a little but they wasn't no wolf tracks around. He could see the end of the trap stickin out of the snow he said; must a drug it a smart distance. He said he couldn't figure them gashes on the throat and the tore clothes. Then suddenly he seen some things layin around the old man; they was a frozen pine squirrel, a couple a pack rats, a side of salt pork with the paper still on, and a couple of stiff snowshoe rabbits, besides one of the old man's lace boots, and his buck-skin rifle case. Then he said he knowed how come that coat in the willows. He said he was jist seein the whole story when he heard a deep growl, and when he looked up he seen the big dog standin in a clearin of willows, bristlin 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 seein everything so clear that a way."



NOTABLE SOONERS

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lieve, to acknowledge the roots of their inspiration in the movement which has been fostered by the spiritual richness and generosity of May Frank, "an influence with a difference."



E. H. SKINNER

You will find Sooners dominant in many oil companies; and it is no exception in the "Conoco" organization. Most recent advancement of Sooners to high post in this company (Continental 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 undergraduate 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 responsible 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 refinery. His advancement was rapid. In a few months he became clerk in the refinery 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 Borger. In October, 1926, Mr Skinner was transferred to Ponca City as budget clerk in the Marland pipeline executive department. 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 superintendent of the student publications press shop. We talked "shop" as is the wont of ink-stained fingers, and came to the mutual