Chapter IV
SID RICHARDSON—A MAN WITH IDEAS

It is not possible to determine just what causes an individual to act as he does under certain circumstances. Why did Sid Richardson, for example, after finishing his work in Athens High School, enroll in Baylor University, and later register in Simmons College in Abilene, Texas? At that time East Texas and West Texas were more divergent in their philosophies of life and daily procedures than they are today.

There was another young man twelve miles out of Athens, the son of a pioneer farmer-preacher, who, after a “brush arbor” experience, decided there must be a better way to make a living and serve his fellow man than to struggle ten hours a day with tough-mouthed mules, postoak roots, and crabgrass. Suddenly he took off for a business college in Fort Worth, thence to a banking job in the Indian Territory. After getting valuable experience for a twelve-month period, he went to Galveston, Texas. Having promised the Lord that he would preach the gospel, he sought fellowship in the First Baptist Church, and was assigned to one of the “City Missions.”

For reasons unknown, Dr. O. H. Cooper, the new president of Simmons College, visited this mission; and in conversation with this young man, Wm. Coltharp Reeves, he found him qualified to help with the clerical work in Simmons College. He would take his pay in board and tuition. Coltharp, as Dr. Cooper always called him, was soon on his
way to Abilene, where he remained as registrar and student for six years.

Periodically, twice a year, he returned to the old farm home, and never lost an opportunity to tell both parents and students about the school in Abilene that had done so much to change his life. One whom he took back to Simmons College with him was his younger sister, but he never knew that what he said to Sid Richardson had influenced him to come to the West Texas school until Sid presented his registration papers. This, of course, pleased young Reeves greatly.

Science teaches that the characteristics of man are determined by the little cells called chromosomes that come from the human incubator to establish the personality with its particular qualities. Such chromosomes may be dormant for several generations, then surface, producing a personality comparable to a forebear several generations before. Such conditions probably produced the unusual character and genius of Sid William Richardson.

People and institutions are quick to claim relationship or connections with individuals who have become great or famous by their accomplishments. What educational institution the size of the little school at Abilene, Texas, about which we have been writing, or Baylor University, the largest Baptist university in the world, would not be quick to claim Sid Richardson, who amassed a fortune greater than any other Texan save two or three? There was a reason for this; maybe chromosomes from a great-grandfather which had lain dormant during these generations surfaced in this youth. Then, too, maybe the old-school pedagogue said something to him which started wheels turning in his head before he finished his freshman year.

Now let's go back to his father and mother and the home life of his early youth. The father was an average farmer,
and for a time a merchant. His mother was a very devout Christian who gathered her children around her knees for a verse or two of Scripture and a prayer before putting them to bed. The recollection of this kind of environment never escaped Sid Richardson’s memory; the records of the First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas, reveal that Sid Richardson asked the Lord to forgive him of sin, and acknowledged his faith in the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for his sins, as well as the sin of the whole world, and was baptized at age twelve.

One of Sid’s closest friendships began in his public school days with Clint Murchison, son of the president of the First National Bank of Athens, Texas. This friendship continued and grew closer until the death of Sid in 1959. They never formed a partnership, such that one would be responsible for the obligations of the other, but they made a number of joint venture investments, nearly all of which turned out to be very profitable. Local newspapers and national magazines published frequent stories about a $20,000,000 investment made jointly by them in New York Central Railroad stock. This resulted in control, so that their close personal friend, Robert R. Young, became president of the railroad company. It is true that both the railroad company and Young later had tragic experiences, but these occurred after Murchison and Richardson had cashed in for many millions of dollars in profit.

We know little of our subject’s experience until after he had finished high school, enrolled in Baylor University, left there for reasons we do not know, and had come to Abilene. The records today of the registrar’s office of Simmons College show that Sid Richardson registered on September 12, 1911, and signed up for four classes. The records further show that he signed up for a second term, but just
before exams withdrew because of the death of his father—and, according to his home-town newspaper, because he "ran out of money." One never knows what the results might have been had circumstances been different. With a mind "trained in books," Sid Richardson might never have set out to accumulate a fortune, nor do we know the good he might have contributed to society and mankind had he completed work in college. In his mature years he would have been one of the first to admit that his grades did not start him on the way to become a Phi Beta Kappa. He did, however, produce an "A" in mathematics, likely after very little study, showing he was not short on reasoning power.

There is a tradition on the campus today, handed down for over fifty years, about Sid's lack of diligence in his studies, and conferences in the president's office after coming in far past "checking-in time" too often. The school was comparatively small, and that "old-school pedagogue," Dr. J. D. Sandefer, was not only President and Dean of Students, but above all, the chief disciplinarian on the campus. Students there today, while reminiscing, will remind you that the President told Sid — how many times we do not know — "If it were not for the fact that I know your saintly mother was last night on her knees until midnight, praying for you, I'd send you home today; but I am going to give you one more chance."

There is "another verse" which the students do not know, namely, the rest of the president's lecture. After scolding Sid mercilessly, he would say, "You have the brains and personality to do whatever you want to do, and be what you want to be if you would just lay aside this foolish waste of time, and set your heart on making a man. You could be one of the wealthiest men in the state, with the most power and influence among your fellow men, if you would devote yourself
to serious study.'" Some think that Sid left school early partly because he became anxious to begin doing what the school president told him he could do.

At any rate, following his father's death he returned to Athens without funds and took the first job offered him — in the Athens Cotton Compress. His contemporaries stated that after a few weeks he was fired for lack of diligence and enthusiasm for his work. For the next few days he spent part of his time on the Court House steps cogitating about his future.

After all, the job at the compress was a very slow way to become one of the wealthiest men in Texas. He remembered that the president of Simmons had told him not to worry about capital: there would be plenty of that at the right time; not to worry about experience: he would accumulate that every day; but that the thing which moves the world, makes men out of boys, and fortunes out of small bank balances, is "ideas." He had thirty-one dollars in his pocket, earned at the compress; he had purchased some presentable clothes, put them on and begun to think! Having grown up on the farm, he knew more about the livestock business than many grown men. At that time cattle in East Texas were not half as large as they should have been, due to flies, ticks, mosquitoes, and lack of protein in the grasses. He knew that over in Louisiana farmers had planted "educated grasses" and had produced cattle that were fat and sleek and would make a farmer's mouth water to own a few of them.

With the backing of his friend's banker-father, he put on his new clothes and went to Louisiana where they were already having auction sales. When he began to bid, the regulars stopped, thinking he would soon be out of money. He then purchased his quota at a little over half the market.
price, brought his herd to his father's farm, and moved them into town on the next "Monday Trades Day." When he had finally parceled out his herd he had realized nearly three times his original cost. He was then in business, and he realized that ideas were much more valuable than capital or experience.

Books could be written about the thrilling experiences in national and even international business circles involving Sid Richardson. Most of you know that it was commonplace for him to make several millions in profits on what started out to be a small venture. He never forgot that he was taught in college that ideas are more valuable than capital and experience.

On many occasions he mentioned to mutual friends his love and admiration for his "old schoolmaster" who taught him that work would bear little fruit unless accompanied by thinking. So, you can see that it is not unnatural that every Hardin-Simmons ex should be proud to state that Sid Richardson selected his school for his limited college work. Too, the trustees of his estate have taken note of this fact by investing nearly $1,000,000 on the campus of Hardin-Simmons University. We trust that the message in these letters may cause others to "go—and do likewise!"

Part of the above information is quoted, with permission, from the Henderson County Historical Survey Committee's files on Sid W. Richardson, thanks to Mrs. Clyde Eads.

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