

SKETCHES OF

*Richard
Vander*

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A Servant of God

FOREWORD

Mr. Leonard Sheldrake first gathered most of these facts together and published the story of Richard Varder's life. These stories have been carefully revised and anything not true to facts have been corrected with the help of Evelyn Varder. These few facts from the rich experiences of Richard Varder are presented to inspire and encourage young people today. May the reading of these pages be a help and blessing to you.

—Richard Burson



SKETCHES OF

*Richard
Varder*

A SERVANT OF GOD

"I can take my Bible and write 'Christ' at the top of every page from cover to cover. Christ! Christ! Christ!". This was a favorite saying of Richard Ferris Varder who was born in the village of Haberton, England, April 30, 1858. He was the seventh of eight children and was baptized as an infant according to the ritual of the Church of England. His parents were devout Christians and sought to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. His mother died when he was fourteen years old.

Richard Varder was of a studious nature, was educated to be a school teacher and taught two years. He was saved on April 17, 1875, thirteen days before his seventeenth birthday. His own account of his conversion, written in 1893, follows:

"How can I forget the time when the burden of my heart rolled away and when, for the first time in my life, from my very heart the song of praise to God came forth,

'Praise my soul the King of Heaven,
To His feet my tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like me His praise could sing?'

RICHARD VARDER

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I had always been somewhat religiously inclined; indeed at times I was zealously so. I was the son of Christian parents; said my prayers from early childhood, read my Bible regularly, was a Sunday School scholar, and when I was old enough was a Sunday School teacher, a member of the church choir and a Good Templar. I was, in fact, as far as could be seen from outward manner of life, a reproduction of Saul of Tarsus as pictured in Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:4-6.

"I persevered in this manner of life until I was nearly seventeen years of age, but I was not happy. My religion was a heavy burden to me, sometimes it was almost intolerable. The fact is, I was a goat trying to adopt the manners and habits of a sheep, and found it hard work, and beside this I had made so many falls in the path I had mapped out for myself that it was getting more manifest to me that I was not a sheep after all.

"There was one thing that made me more uneasy than anything else. My father was a sincere Christian, one who knew what it was to be born again. The things which were burdensome to me were a delight to him and I could see that he possessed something to which I was an utter stranger. I have seen him melted to tears as he pleaded with God on behalf of his children that they too might become God's children. He had discernment enough to see beneath the surface of my outwardly religious life and told me firmly but affectionately that I must be born again or I could not enter the kingdom of God.

"I began to be really anxious about my soul. A picture of the judgment spoken of in Matthew twenty-five was used of God to bring more vividly before my mind the subject of eternal torment and I trembled

at the thought of having to meet God. God's arrows were fast in my heart, my religion was tottering, and although it had given me a good name in the sight of my fellow men yet I saw that it was an insufficient covering in which to stand before God. Conscience was aroused, and sins of the past, in thought, word and deed, which had been forgotten were brought to memory until they seemed to be a dark cloud, an insurmountable barrier, to shut me out forever from heaven and happiness. 'Oh my sins, my sins!' I cried in agony. Often I had heard of Christ and His death on the cross but it seems to me that Satan who had kept me pretty well occupied with my fancied goodness now kept me occupied with my badness in that I was unable to look beyond myself. Deliverance came at last. It was on a Sunday night; the other members of the family had gone to church but I, under some pretense or other, absented myself. I was left alone in the house and in the solitude I again began to consider my condition before God. Again the old picture of eternal punishment and sins of the past rose up before me. All was dark; 'not a ray of light could I see'. No hope! No hope!

"I wept, I prayed; but 'twas of no avail, and I gave up at last in despair. I had come to an end of myself and now God graciously met my need and by His Spirit directed my mind to Isaiah 53:6.

"I had often sung the words when going through Handel's oratorio, 'The Messiah', and knew them by heart but up to this time they had been merely a string upon which so much music was hung. Now I was able to enter into their meaning and began to take this verse, sentence by sentence, and consider it. 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' 'That is me,' I

thought. 'I have gone astray.' 'We have turned every one to his own way.' 'I again; it is true that my way has been a more religious way than that of many but it is still my own way.' 'And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' 'Can it be that my sins were laid on Jesus?' I thought. 'Oh, it is too good to be true.' But it was true nevertheless; God had said it and it could not be otherwise, and with the simplicity of a little child I took Him at His Word. Yes, my sins were laid on Jesus. God had said it. He who cannot lie had said, 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' I believed Him. The burden was gone, the cloud had vanished, despair was a thing of the past.

"Peace, perfect peace, was mine; 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' The sins which had troubled me were gone forever. 'Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins' (Acts 10:43). 'Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more' (Heb. 10:17).

I had been wandering in Satan's by-path for a long time but, thank God, He had brought me to the cross at last and I could say like Bunyan's Pilgrim when he came to the cross and sepulchre:

'Thus far I did come laden with my sin,
Nor could aught ease the pain that I was in,
'Til I came hither. What a place is this!
Here is the beginning of my bliss.

Here has the burden fallen from my back,
Here have the strings that bound it to me cracked.
Blest cross, blest sepulchre, blest rather be
The One who was there put to shame for me."

Mr. Varder remained in the Church of England

for five years after he was saved and served as a bell-ringer for the local church.

In 1880 he learned from the Scriptures that believers, being dead with Christ, should be buried in baptism (Rom. 6:1-4); and that they were called upon to be separate from the world and its religions (II Cor. 6:14-18). At this time he associated himself with like-minded Christians who gathered simply in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and was in association with such believers until his Home-call fifty-three years later. He began to serve the Lord in association with Robert Chapman and Henry Dyer.

In April, 1881, he emigrated to Canada. When he arrived in Winnipeg he found it to be a town of tents and log huts. There were no paved streets and when the snow melted it left a bog of mud that had to be seen to be appreciated. He had learned the carpenter trade from his father and had no trouble getting work.

In 1884 a Christian family named Benner passed through Winnipeg on their way west to take homesteads in Saskatchewan. Richard Vardeer joined the party and took up a farm. While homesteading, he and Roland and George Benner conducted a Sunday School and Gospel meeting as well as Bible readings. He learned to speak in the Cree language and was thus able to preach the Gospel to the Indians. Later he sold the farm and went back to Manitoba. In association with John Rae and John Grimason, Mr. Vardeer invaded North Dakota for God and eternity, and saw a rich harvest of souls. Sinners were saved and New Testament churches were planted.

In the winter of 1889 Richard Vardeer and Alfred Goff, young men of thirty-one and twenty-one, re-

spectively, were much exercised about the people of Manitoba, north of Winnipeg, and they set out the day after Christmas, trusting the Lord to guide and support them. They brought the simple Gospel for the first time to Selkirk, Poplar Park, Balsam Bay and other settlements. A number were saved and New Testament churches were planted in Balsam Bay and Selkirk, both of which still carry on their testimony.

It was the month of January, 1890, that two humble servants of the Lord arrived at Poplar Park. They knew no one there, and went from door to door seeking a place to stay. However, their offer to pay well for their board and room could not induce those staunch Episcopalians to open a door to these preachers of the good news of Christ. They began to wonder if they had not made a mistake in going there. It couldn't be that the Lord intended that they should stay outside all night. They knew in their hearts that it was not a mistake. The burden of souls in that place was too heavy upon them. It was getting toward evening when they stopped at another cabin, hoping against hope that their search was at an end. The door was opened by a woman whose face was a little kinder than those they had encountered during the day. When they told her they had traveled a long way in order to tell people in that settlement how they might be saved without money and without price, and that they had gone up and down the district looking for a place to stay, the kindly woman said, "You may come in here". She made them comfortable in the spare room and prepared a warm supper which they ate with relish.

The men lost no time beginning their work. The next morning they were out calling on the same peo-

ple who had refused to admit them to their homes, inviting them to the Gospel meetings which were to begin that night.

The lady in whose home they stayed was a regular attendant from the start. On the third evening Mr. Varder took for his subject the story of the Syrophenician woman. He explained that the woman was a Gentile, who had no claim upon God; that she took the only place she could rightfully claim, that of the dog, willing to take any crumb of blessing that the Lord would let fall in her direction. He told how Christ commended her for her faith in Him, and blessed her. He pleaded with his audience to trust this same Christ, to have faith in Him, to come to Him, to believe in Him. As he spoke he noticed a change of expression on the face of his hostess. After the meeting he spoke to her and had the joy of knowing that she was the first soul in that district to pass from death unto life. Her husband was angry at first, but a few days later yielded to Christ for himself. In after years these two saints of God enjoyed nothing better than to entertain the Lord's servants.

At Poplar Park an incident took place that Mr. Varder loved to relate. It was on a Sunday during the terrible winter of 1899 when traders and trappers reported that the northern lakes were frozen to a depth of from four to seven feet. W. L. Monkman left his home by the shore of Lake Winnipeg to go to the town of Selkirk, a distance of twenty-eight miles, to purchase two gallons of whiskey to celebrate his fifth wedding anniversary. About half way to the town was a settlement where his parents lived with a large family of boys. He decided to break the journey there. He had heard that two strange young

men had recently come to the settlement and were preaching the Gospel in the different farm houses. He tied up his team and went to listen to the preachers. Mr. Varder was speaking on the Sixth Chapter of John and told of the wondrous love that led Christ to come down from heaven to become the bread of life to sinners in order that they might have eternal life. Mr. Monkman confessed Christ at once. Imagine his joy when he learned that one of his brothers and a sister-in-law had received Christ on the previous evening! The next morning, instead of going to town for whiskey, he prepared to return home to tell his friends and neighbors about the Lord Jesus and how he had received forgiveness of sins through faith in Him. Learning that the preachers were contemplating leaving the settlement, he took them back home with him. Disappointment was plainly written on the faces of his neighbors when he returned home with two preachers and no whiskey for the celebration. They listened to the strange news that he had received Christ, that all his sins were forgiven, that he had eternal life and had no fear of meeting God and that he was sure of heaven. He ended his testimony with these words, "I went away from here to fetch home two gallons of whiskey and I have returned with two Gospel preachers." Instead of a dance, a Gospel meeting was held. Ere long there was a meeting of believers gathering together in the Lord's Name in that place.

Mr. Varder would preach until funds ran out and would then go back to carpenter work for a few months. As Carey said, he could say, "My business is to preach Christ and I build houses to pay expenses." He worked as a carpenter during the summer, preaching as he had opportunity, going north during the

winter, when it was easier to reach the farmers. For weeks when it was fifty below zero Mr. Varder lived in mud huts eating bread, lard, salt and potatoes with only a change in the menu when someone shot wild meat.

In 1895 he married Miss Edith Newcomb. They had three children: Harold, William and Evelyn.

He was once in a town where there was no Gospel testimony. He felt he must speak to the people. Most of the men in the town seemed to be at the pool room. So into the pool room he went. "Is the proprietor around?" he asked.

"I am the proprietor," said the fat man.

"How much per hour do you get out of this place of business?"

"About two dollars and a half," he said.

"All right," said Mr. Varder, "I am a tract distributor and a preacher and I'll give you a dollar and a half to let me preach to these men thirty minutes."

Without a moment's hesitation he said, "Go right ahead, sir."

This was certainly an innovation for a pool room. Whoever heard of a weak preacher walking into a lion's den and not even getting a scratch? He preached away for half an hour, telling the men he was going to pay the owner for the privilege when he got through. They listened intently. When he was through and stepped up to pay, one of the rough men was at the desk ahead of him.

"No, dad, you don't pay; I am going to pay for

this. The other preachers don't care for our souls and you are willing to pay your money to preach to us; you can't do it. I am going to pay," and he did.

Mr. Varder spent almost all his time preaching and teaching in these little meetings in the far north.

He came to his home in Chicago in 1933 in a very run-down condition. After two or three weeks of rest he was on the go again. The rest of that spring and early summer was spent in active Gospel work.

In view of his approaching death, the last words he spoke in Laflin Street Gospel Hall, Chicago, before he left for Cleveland, seemed remarkably significant: "I wait for the redemption of the body."

He went to Cleveland, Ohio, in August, 1933, and was engaged in ministering the Word of God among the colored Christians in Central Gospel Hall at the time of his being called home by the Lord, as the result of a stroke, on September 2, 1933. The final days of his life were spent in the home of some kind, colored Christians, Mr. and Mrs. Muldrow. Mrs. Muldrow well describes this period in the following words:

"Mr. Varder came to us on August 28, 1933, and began a series of meetings in our Hall among the colored saints. He expressed thanks to God for the warm reception given him. He told how the poor farmers and Indians in Northern Canada showed him the kindness of God. Most of his ministry had been given in such places, and God had blessed it. He expressed great disappointment at the lack of brotherly love among God's People. These conditions had been

recently brought before him* and he yearned for the Lord to come and take him home. His few days of home life with us were characterized by quiet and calm devotion to God. His daily meditation and conversation was always inspiring and uplifting. Morning, noon and night he spoke of his desire to go on for God in seeking to build up His people.

"Mr. Varder was grateful for anything done for him, and thankful for everything. Every time he ate his food, he thanked those who waited on him for every little thing. He exhorted us to take fresh courage, in view of the good work God was using us to do. 'Continue to entertain strangers,' said he, 'for thereby ye may entertain angels unawares.' 'God,' he said, 'is a very faithful Friend to His people and He delights to see courage, faith, fellowship and love prevailing among His poor and often neglected saints going on in the face of depression within and without.' 'Continue to render loving service to God,' he instructed us, 'while we wait for His Son from heaven.' The possibility of death overtaking us, he described as follows: 'To the carpenter, death is at the foot of the ladder. To the woodman, death is in the axe. To the horseman, death is in the hoof. To the autoist, death lies in the crossroads. To the warrior, death is in the sword'."

From his last letter written to his wife but a few

* Like his Master, Mr. Varder knew what it was to be rejected by his brethren. He had gone to a certain city in Ohio to minister the Word, but found that he was not welcome. Those refusing him suggested that he go to the colored assembly in Cleveland. It was there that the Lord received him to be with Himself.

—Editor.

hours before his departure from this life, we quote the following thoughts that show us the lovely Christian character of Richard Ferris Varder:

"Yesterday morning I was reminded of Psalm 22:2, 'O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.' This is a part of our Lord's heart language when on the cross. But three days after, the answer came — when He was raised from the dead. So I am hoping and waiting for our third day. May He send it soon."

A TRIBUTE TO ISAIAH

Where laid ye him? Ye Palestinian hills,
Tell, if ye saw, where laid they Judah's seer?
I fain would place a wreath upon his grave,
Upon its sod let fall a silent tear.

'Tis said his body was asunder sawn
By wicked hands, like those that slew our Lord,
Accepting not deliverance, that he may
Obtain in resurrection his reward.

Where laid they him? Why are ye silent still?
I fain would know, for I his debtor am:
My father, he, I, his posthumous child,
For through him, I was pointed to the Lamb.

He penned the soul-emancipating words
That were the means of bringing life to me
When dead in sins I wandered far from God,
"On Him was laid all thine iniquity."

"Wreath," did I say? Yes, more, a monument,
His name, so deep engraved, time shall not dim;
And, underneath, this epitaph inscribed,
"He saw His glory and he spake of Him."

Art silent still? Hath He, who turned the sod
On Moab's plain and buried Israel's seer,
Enjoined on you this silence and must ye
Hold, as sacred trust, this secret tear?

'Tis all in vain: I cannot find the place
Where he was laid, but in eternity,
It may be that I'll grasp the hand that penned,
"On Him was laid all thine iniquity."

—Richard Ferris Varder.

The following was written by Mr. Varder just before he was taken to the operating room for a serious operation:

Again I lay me down to sleep,
Not the blest sleep as Thou didst give,
When, last night, I didst lay down,
But that produced by human skill,
From which I may not wake again.
But whether I should wake or sleep,
It matters not, for I am Thine.

How strangely deep — unnatural,
My breathings are! The things of earth
Grow dim, they fade, they disappear.
My precious senses steal away.
But Thou remainest, Thou alone,
And Thou, Lord, art a shield for me,
A shield for me — a shield for me.

A younger man tells that Mr. Varder was often heard speaking the name "Lord Jesus" or "Our Father" at night after retiring. Whether awake or asleep, he was in constant communion with God.

The following lovely poem was composed by Mr. Varder before a Gospel meeting in which he was to take part.

Father Omnipotent, make known Thy power.
Some here are perishing, gloomy their night;
Speak with a mighty voice, lighten their darkness,
Now, as of old, say, "Let there be light".
Father of Mercies, Who, in loving kindness,
Gavest Thy well-beloved Son to the tree,
Cause them to heed Thy voice, dull though their
hearing,
Open blind eyes and cause them to see.
May they now flee to the refuge of sinners,
Yesterday, now, and forever the same:
Giver of Life, impart to the lifeless
Life everlasting through His blest name.
Naught bring we now to Thee save this petition,
Pleading His name, who is now on the Throne:
Helpless, we cling to Thee, Father — our Father —
Claiming His promise, "It shall be done".

LAST WORDS OF A SHEPHERD ABOUT SHEPHERDING

The following article was left unfinished by the sudden Home-call of Mr. Varder. It reveals the tenderness with which he regarded the people of God:

"So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." —Psalm 78:72.

Such is the brief summary by the Shepherd of Israel, of the labours of one of His principal shepherds. What a grand record! Who, among those who seek to feed and guide the people of God, would not earn-

estly desire so to labour that such a record might be true in his own individual case? With this desire in our hearts let us seek by God's help to note a few of the thoughts expressed in the verse quoted, and may He Who alone can write His laws in our hearts indelibly inscribe them there.

He "fed" and "guided". Not the guiding without the feeding. Not the hand work without the heart work. Not the "skillfulness" apart from the integrity.

And note the order. The "feeding" first, the "guiding" second. The "integrity of the heart" first, the "skillfulness of the hands" next.

Before we go further it might be well to look at the two verses which immediately precede the one we have read. "He chose David also His servant and took him from the sheep-folds. From following the sheep great with young." He was chosen of God for the work and God who chose him ordered the path which led from the sheep-folds to the throne. Happy the man who, in whatever sphere he may labour, can say in all godly sincerity, "I am Thy servant," and who has the testimony of a good conscience that his work is the ministry which he has received of the Lord. Let those who claim to be the Lord's servants, especially those who take the place of overseers in the assemblies of God, examine themselves in this matter. Speaking with an aged brother who was travelling extensively, the writer was grieved to hear from his lips, "The men who have the best brains stand at the head of the assemblies of God today." Can this be true? While we trust there are very many exceptions to this rule, we have grave reasons to fear that if some were to ask how they came to be and have maintained their position as leading breth-

ren in God's assembly, and if in the light of the judgment seat of Christ they would deign to answer, that answer would be similar to the words of Rachel, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my brother, and I have prevailed." Be that as it may, God is their judge. But we have in I Thess. 2:1-11 some of the marks which characterize the true shepherd — the gentle hand; affectionate desire; holy, just, unblameable behaviour and the fatherly exhortation and comfort. These things were so prominent in the beloved apostle that he could say without fear of contradiction, "Ye are witnesses and God also". In these last days we can scarcely expect to see these characteristics manifested to the extent they were seen in Paul, but notwithstanding this, these things should be pre-eminently the distinguishing features of those in oversight and we believe that, as these things are increasingly manifested in the shepherds in the same proportion will the number of those who are accounted as disobedient and lawless in the flock be decreased.

"From following the sheep great with young." Why this? Why not the **great** flock? or the **rich-fleeced** flock? and why **following**?

In John 10:4 we read, "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth **before** them." So said the Good Shepherd, and the undershepherd walking in the fear of the Lord, when he admonishes the flock, following the example of his Master, will not be content merely with pointing out the path but will "go before" and, in other words, will himself walk in the path he has pointed out.

In the literal sphere there are times when the sheep needs to be followed. She withdraws herself

from the flock and in that lack of wisdom which is characteristic of the sheep, may wander to a place where there is no shelter when the cold blasts blow in their full vigor and at a time when she most needs the tender care of the shepherd. Let the shepherd neglect his work and what is the result? She may possibly return with no increase or it may be the presence of the carrion crow or the hungry wolf will indicate plainly that the sheep should have been followed and wasn't, and has been lost to the flock.

And as in the literal so in the spiritual. Are there not times in the career of many of the Lord's flock when there is great need that they should be followed? The true shepherd who, like his Master, seeks to know his sheep, who watches for their souls as one that must give an account and takes upon him daily the care of the allotted portion, will often see in the saddened countenance, the down-cast eye, the tear-stained face, the look of perplexity or dismay, the sign that the sheep is needing special care. The cause may not be apparent to him and, should he judge hastily, he is likely to err as did Eli in Hannah's case and wrongly charge one who for some cause unknown to him is "of a sorrowful spirit" and who has "poured out her soul before the Lord." And, in passing, we might note how differently Elkanah acted. His gentle "Why weepeth thou?" and his words of comfort, "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" so cheered her that she could eat and drink and so doing was sustained until she went into the sanctuary of the Lord, and hearing the words, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee the petition that thou hast asked of him," her countenance was no more sad, but, rising early in the morning, she could pour out before the Lord adoring worship from

the soul that could only pour out its sorrow the day before. See I Samuel 1.

And what wisdom is needed in such work as this. "Stern duty, daughter of the voice of God" (as a certain poet writes) can never accomplish the desired effect, and when the soul is bowed down with trouble such as it feels it can only pour out before the Lord, it would be presumption on the part of "duty" to seek to search it out. But love — pure, fervent love — can tread in paths on which duty's feet should never venture and which if they did venture would soon prove to them that they are incapable of walking therein. But love, guided by discretion, will not be slow to observe the moment when it can venture the question, "What aileth thee?" or "Why weepeth thou?", and will find that lonely grief will respond to that sympathy which finds its source in the heart of Him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and was "tempted like as we are", of Whose fulness we have received and grace corresponding to grace. And thus the troubled heart will be drawn out to share its fears, its anxieties, its griefs and its desires with one who seeks its welfare, who stoops to bear the burden of another and whose comfort it is to comfort the hearts of those who are cast down with the comfort wherewith they themselves are comforted of God. (A dear departed brother once said to the writer, "There is work to be done for which these hands are too coarse." "Wisdom is profitable to direct.")

And in these last days when —

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In the words of Leonard Shelldrake: Here the aged

warrior laid down the pen. The work he was doing was unfinished though his own work was done.

Mr. Varder had good cause to be bitter in his attitude toward some other believers. Everyone speaks of his sweet, submissive spirit. The following, written by him as to how we may detect bitterness, was the exercise of this man's soul before God:

(1). Bitterness habitually denies its own existence, as such, and the Spirit of God, anticipating this, has given the admonition, "Lie not against the truth", in this very connection (James 3:14).

(2). When bitterness sees real grievances, it exaggerates them.

(3). Bitterness sees fancied grievances and makes them appear to be real.

(4). Bitterness rejoices in heart when it hears anything which is detrimental to the character of those against whom it is embittered.

(5). Bitterness acts in opposition to the love that covereth all sins, seeking to uncover them, except when carnal policy dictates an opposite course.

(6). Bitterness sees things through its own blurred vision and, consequently, cannot speak the truth.

(7). Bitterness always justifies its own attitude and actions and condemns those of one whom it dislikes.

(8). If bitterness hears of any well-doing on the part of the opposite party, it is very apt to impute some sinister motive as a reason of the accomplishment of it.