*A. B. Simpson (1843 - 1919)*

"Wingspread, A. B. Simpson: A Study in Spiritual Altitude," A. W. Tozer, Christian Publications, 144 pages.

*Youth*

**The world's great men usually enter incognito. Emerson was wont to put his hand reverently upon the head of any urchin that might come his way. "Who knows," said he, "but I may be patting the head of a future president." The tough youngsters who gathered in Jessie's backyard on a summer afternoon to play the ancient equivalent of hide-n-seek or kick-the-can would not have shoved Jessie's youngest boy around quite so freely if they had had a touch of second sight to let them see that they were taking liberties with the greatest king Israel was ever to know. But their blindness made possible many a glorious day of fun for the boys in the neighborhood, and it also guaranteed to David an uninhibited and normal childhood. Such are the ways of God when He prepares His saints and heroes: He leaves them unrecognized by the world until the day of their "showing unto Israel." (p. 11)**

**Jane Simpson, the mother heard that cry and smiled, and when they told her the child was a boy she may have wept a little, too, but her tears were tears of happiness, and not of sorrow. Her first baby had been a boy, and when he was just old enough to toddle over the floor and to say "mama" and "papa," he had died, and the light had gone out of her heart, and not even the presence of her other children could bring it back again. So she had prayed that God might send her another son to take the place of the one who had gone, and her faith would have nothing less than that he become a minister or a missionary, though with good Scottish caution she had made her prayer plenty broad, "if the Lord so wills, and he lives to grow up, and is so inclined." It would not do to be too specific with the sovereign God, but after all, He might listen to a suggestion. (p. 12)**

**Right here we may as well see what history has been at long pains to teach us, that if you get a good mother it will not do to be too particular about your father; you cannot have everything. Give the boy a superior mother, and he will make the grade somehow. The women know this well enough, though they are not saying so in front of the men. Hannah looks down at the floor modestly and says nothing, but she searches for her own features in Samuel-and finds them there. And Manoah's wife, and the mother of Zebedee's children, and Monica, and Suzanna Wesley; what do all these teach us but the same thing every scientist knows, that greatness follows the maternal line? The men have impressive voices, they look knowing, and claim credit for every sign of intelligence in their offspring, but their masculine pride takes a terrible beating from biology.**

**There can be no doubt about it, Dr. A. B. Simpson, boy and man, can never be explained apart from his mother, Jane Clark Simpson. She gave him wings. High strung and temperamental, with more than a dash of high romance, she had a soul too large for her small body. Straight from mother to son, following the laws of life, went this great soul, sensitive, poetic, beauty-loving, lofty. (pp. 13-14)**

*Conversion*

**Albert Simpson was called to the ministry before he was converted, and God said of him, "I have even called thee by thy name though thou hast not known me." If God could-and would-ordain Jeremiah to the ministry before he was born, then he could call Albert Simpson to preach, the lad being yet unregenerated-and he did just that.**

**James Simpson, Albert's father, was a good man, a product of his times and a faithful son of his stern religion, and he is not to be censured that he did not know a swan when one appeared among his brood of ducklings. David's father had made the same mistake, had tired to push every son he had under the prophet's oil except the one whom God had chosen. Howard, Albert's oldest brother, is to prepare to enter the ministry, and Albert is to stay at home on the farm and help with the chores! (p.19)**

**Suddenly the accumulated terrors of a multitude of books and sermons on total depravity and the damnation of the non-elect roar out upon Albert like a lion from the thicket and throw him into mortal panic for his dying soul. He cries out in anguish, but there is no one to help him. The proud man within him will not permit him to go to his mother with his fears, and the timid boy dare not go to this father. How can a boy talk to a somber Presbyterian elder about anything as painfully intimate as that, especially when that elder is your father, and you remember how solemn and awful your father used to look at you when you missed one question in the catechism or smiled on the holy Sabbath?**

**No one could tell him the simple gospel story. Strange no one remembered the story of the prodigal boy and the kind, trembling old father who received him back again from the far country with the touching, tender words: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Such is the power of loveless doctrine to freeze the heart and dull the mind.**

**He flipped a page in an old musty volume, called Marshall's Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, and suddenly his eyes were fixed on a passage that stood out like fire from the rest: "The first good work you will ever perform is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Until you do this, all your works, prayers, tears, and good resolutions are vain. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe that He saves you according to His Word, that He receives and saves you here and now, for He has said: 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'" That was enough. A heart as hungry as his and a mind as keen, needed no more. With rapture he slid to his knees and closed with the promise, and there came to his soul such a sweet, restful knowledge of sins forgiven as swept away his fears like a flood. God had delivered him. (pp. 22-25)**

*The Inward Man of Simpson*

**Underneath Simpson's mild exterior there lay a will like an iron beam. He had a purpose in his heart that completely controlled him. Once he had settle his call to the ministry this mighty purpose took over and drove him like a benignant master for the rest of his days. If ever there was a man who knew why he was alive that man was A. B. Simpson. (p. 29)**

**Simpson needed a special revelation to make him see that people were dearer to God than forms, that the "lesser breeds without the law" were the objects of God's present love and anxious care more than all the rules and regulations of the Presbytery. ... He had become an evangelist to the masses. The cry of the millions was coming to him, the bleat of the other lost sheep. From here on he belongs no more to one church, but to all who need him, not to his parish only, but to all the lost world. (p. 48)**

**A spiritual preparation was necessary in the life of A. B. Simpson before his dream of world evangelism could be realized. It is remarkable how great a man can be, how faithfully he can labor in the gospel ministry, how much, indeed, he can appear to accomplish in the work of the church, and still be far short of the rich, power-driven service possible to the Spirit-filled servants of God. He came into contact with Major Whittle and realized how much pride and self there was within him, and how little of the power of Christ.**

**It was characteristic of the man that he must settle everything with God alone. From the first he had been a lone eagle. Others could inspire him, could help to create spiritual desire within him, but when the crisis came it would be - indeed, for him, it *must* be - when he was shut in with God in lonely wrestling like Jacob by the side of Jabbok. His struggle was wholly internal. Outwardly he was the same poised, gifted and highly respected minister of the church, but inwardly he felt himself a dying man, forsaken and alone. (p. 49)**

*His Motivation: People*

Whatever others might do Mr. Simpson could not settle back to follow the prescribed duties of a pastor, and nothing more. He must evangelize. It was in his blood now and nothing could stop him. ... He appealed directly to the hearts of the people and made no bones about it. They were lost, God loved them, Christ had died for them and now invited them to come home. They ought to come at once, no delaying, no waiting. He accepted as a foregone conclusion the truth of Christianity and refused to turn from his ministry of reconciliation to engage in argument with the half-persuaded or the unbelieving. What mattered one objection to the seven-day creation period, or a dozen objections to the inspiration of the Scriptures for that matter, or any other objections, when one hundred people were waiting to turn to God as soon as the way was explained to them? (pp. 51-53)

Mr. Simpson had learned from Whittle and Bliss the value of good gospel music. Crowds that came heard music, lots of it, the best that could be obtained; they enjoyed vocal combinations of every sort form solos to a chorus choir, and they joined in mass singing of old time church favorites and the more recent Gospel songs, composed by Sankey, Bliss, Crosby and others of the gospel musicians of the day. It was popular. Some frowned on this, but Simpson knew that "popular" meant "of the people" and it was the people that he was interested in. The dignity of the clergy could take care of itself; it would never lack defenders, but the people, the sinful, friendly, seeking multitudes; they mattered more than the opinion of some austere guardian of decadent orthodoxy. So the singing went on and the crowds loved it and kept coming back to enjoy it.

The old idea of a little flock fed and comforted and bedded down for the night without a thought of the lost ones out of the wilds becomes unbearable to Simpson. He must evangelize. ... He came forward with a brand new plan and lays it before his people. It is to build in the center of the city a plain but commodious tabernacle, built not after conventional church lines, but for utility, and located where the crowded ways cross each other, where the rag tag and the outcast, the poor and him that hath no helper may feel free to come and never worry because their clothes are ragged and out of fashion; where the common man with his middle-class wife and large family can come and not be uneasy if the baby makes a bit of a disturbance during the service. Simpson proposes that his church become a center of evangelism for ht whole city; that it change its psychology and think no more of its reputation, but rather of the lost of Louisville. (pp. 54-55)

Simpson went to the owner of Macauley's Theatre and requested the use of the theatre (one of the largest and most popular amusement centers in downtown Louisville at that time) for Sunday evening services. When opening night rolled around and the multitudes flocked to the theatre to a religious service, there was a rending and splintering sound heard throughout all the churches; it was the wholesale smashing of religious precedents by Chestnut Street Church and her lovable but over zealous pastor (referring to Simpson). ... We who live nearly three-quarters of a century removed from those times may find it hard to understand why there should have been any objection to the holding of gospel meetings in a theater. The explanation is simply that we have had two generations to get used to such meetings and it was new to them. We are no broader, no brighter than they were; we merely have custom on our side, and they had custom against them. (pp. 55-56) On such a matter as this, religious people do not think anyway, they merely react. Their emotions decide the verdict, and any thinking they may do is of very low wattage, and is brought in mostly to support their prejudices.