

Biographical Sketch

John Simpson, who was born about 1615 in the Parish of St Dunstan-in-the-East of London, was an Independent Minister of the Gospel, and struggling Fifth Monarchist. Simpson was admitted to Exeter College, Oxford, age sixteen, and graduated {Master of Arts} in 1638. In 1642, whilst England was in the midst of its Civil War, he was appointed lecturer at St. Dunstan's, where John Childerley was Rector, by the House of Commons. Only one month later he was also appointed {to the satisfaction of many parishioners} the minister of St Botolph-Algate {one of the largest parishes just outside the then existent London Wall} in the East End of London, {where he maintained an open-membership congregation of Independents and Baptists,} when the curate Thomas Swadlin, {incumbent of St Botolph's since 1628, a staunch Royalist, and considered as one of Laud's favorites,} felt compelled, {after a short imprisonment, and to prevent further confinement,} to flee the district. During the English Civil War, Simpson served as a Major in the Parliamentary Army, and by 1647 became a close friend of Henry Jessey, {a Fifth Monarchist, and Particular Baptist,} though maintaining an open fellowship throughout his life, with all that embraced the Gospel of Christ.

Simpson's passionate zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel of God's Free Grace in Christ, along with his unwavering stand for what he embraced as Gospel Truth, soon brought him into conflict, as complaints were made to the House of Commons, {being dominated at this time, by the Presbyterian faction,} to the effect that Simpson differed in certain points from the Westminster Confession, which cultivated in his removal from St Botolph, along with cautions against his preaching anywhere without their approval, thus suspending him from preaching until the latter part of 1646.

After being accused, {along with the Particular Baptist Hanserd Knollys,} of embracing Antinomian tenants, and having to defend his principles, Simpson's next appointment, {now under the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell,} was at All-Hallows-the-Great, where he succeeded Walter Cradock. {Interesting side note, although its creditability may be questioned, is that according to Thomas Edwards, who belonged to the heresy-hunting wing of the London Presbyterians, and whose often unreliable and fabricated tales can be found in his three volume work entitled Gangraena, 1646, says in regards to the charge of the Antinomianism of Simpson & Knollys, that they co-authored a book concerning the Ten Commandments, which if they did, has been sadly lost to the ages.}

Both the All-Hallows-the-Great, and All-Hallows Lombard Street Congregations were at this time considered as rather radicalized by religious formalists and puritanical legalists, as its ministers emphasized the free grace of Christ, and the Spirit's work apart from the Law for both justification and sanctification, being motivated by a primary concern for Christ's glory in the work of salvation, whilst also

refusing to congregate along denominational ties, embracing saints as saints, wherever they were found.

Though the Allhallows Congregation practiced a mixed communion under Simpson, its nevertheless recorded that over two hundred adult baptisms took place between the years 1650 and 1653. During the Commonwealth, All-Hallows-the-Great also became a center for the Fifth Monarchy Movement, an extraordinary religious and political movement, active from 1649-1660, and brooding upon the then great political crisis, whilst seeking the key to it in the prophetic Scriptures. These Fifth Monarchists took their name from their belief that the time of the fifth monarchy, that is, the monarchy that - according to their traditional interpretation of the book of Daniel - should succeed the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Monarchies and during which Christ should reign on earth with his saints for 1,000 years, was at hand.

A small sample of Simpson's messages were published in 1648, entitled THE PERFECTION OF JUSTIFICATION MAINTAINED AGAINST THE PHARISEE. These were printed in response to accusations leveled against him by fifty-two London ministers, accusing him once again of Antinomianism. Throughout these messages, this Ambassador of Christ, endeavored to set forth the glory of God by the proclamation of an accomplished redemption, through the sole merit, righteousness, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. As one who was instrumental in republishing these messages one hundred years after their initial debut, {William Cudworth, in 1745,} said, "however strange the Doctrine herein contained may be to those who build their hopes upon inherent righteousness; yet it is none other than the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Doctrine of the Reformation, and the only Doctrine that tends {contrary to the judgment of carnal reason} to uprightness of heart and life, and whoever conceives otherwise of this Doctrine understands it not."

The execution of King Charles I in 1649, truly intensified Millenarian hopes and expectations, which brought such outspoken prophetic preachers, such as Simpson, to the forefront. Next to Christopher Feake, {1612-1683, vicar of Christ Church, Newgate, weekday lecturer at Allhallows the Great, opponent to the Westminster Assembly, and amongst the first and most outspoken critics of the Protectorate,} Simpson was the second most influential Fifth Monarchist leader, until he toned-down his views and removed his congregation from the hardliners, {like Feake, and Vavasor Powell,} during the summer of 1656.

In March of 1651, Simpson, along with the Independent John Owen and the Presbyterian John Leigh, were nominated to preach a sermon to the Rump Parliament, which caused quite a commotion, seeing that he felt compelled, as did William Dell and John Webster a few years following, to set up the infallible work of the Spirit of God in opening the Scriptures to a believer's understanding, against human learning, which during that time, was being elevated to measures beyond Scriptural precedent. One of his remarks was that he believed that the LORD had more eminently blessed the preaching of the Gospel by the Parliamentarian Soldiers

of the Army, than all the endeavours of all the so-called clergy combined, arguing that worldly scholarship was essentially irrelevant to the training of a true minister of the Gospel, and denouncing the notion that such achievements were of any value as a means towards the better understanding of Scripture, whilst asserting time and time again the essential work of the Holy Spirit in opening Gospel Truths. With such a hostile position against the established clergy, it's no wonder that his sponsor, Major-General Thomas Harrison, {Harrison, one of the most powerful religious zealots of the day, who was at one time a close friend and supporter of Oliver Cromwell, and in 1649 signed the death warrant of Charles I, which resulted in Harrison being hanged, drawn and quartered, shortly after the restoration of the King in 1660,} was implicitly rebuked and criticized for recommending him.

When Cromwell dismissed the Rump Parliament, and took the oath as Lord Protector in 1653, things began to get harsh for many of the Fifth Monarchists, as they had envisioned a different course of events, and felt betrayed by Cromwell, {not truly grasping the fact, that there was no sword like that of the Protector, I Sam.21:9, in all the world,} who they felt had not carried out many of their mandates, in attempting to turn the Commonwealth into a more 'godly' nation.

Simpson's outspokenness soon got him into trouble, as one of his predictions was that the Protectorate would fall within six months, which, amongst other expressions, landed him in Prison, namely at Windsor Castle, in order to preserve the peace of the Commonwealth. Whilst Simpson deteriorated away in prison, his congregation at Allhallows also began to deteriorate, to the extent that Cromwell himself was informed that Allhallows, without Simpson and Feake, {who was also imprisoned,} was "a dull assembly," as they "were the men that carried it on with heat." So many of his parishioners flocked to Windsor to see Simpson that the Council felt necessitated to order a confinement, in order to prevent more dissent.

From Windsor Prison, Simpson wrote a series of letters to his flock at Allhallows, from which we extract a few sentences. Lashing out against schools for the manufacturing of Gospel ministers, he says, "Universities as now they stand upon an Antichristian foundation must be tumbled down, antichrist hath set up those cages of unclean birds, that they who go thither may learn to sing the whores song, but not the songs of Zion." He exhorts his brethren to "pray down those things, persons, and places, which are anti-Christian, and yet standing in England. Come out, and be separated from the wisdom and spirit of the world, and come up with me into the spirit of the Lord Jesus." He acknowledges that "a faith of my own working will not remove a molehill, power must be given in by Jesus Christ, for the glorifying of his name," and further urges his flock to "abstain from all appearance of evil, abhor Jezebels fasts, pray down the anti-Christian clergy, and their nasty nests the universities; believe down antichrists high commissioners, with patrons, parsons, vicars, curates, lecturers, and their tithes, and all things belonging to that new hierarchy." Regarding the present form of government he states, "I had an impulsive spirit, in which I was strongly carried to believe, that that bastardly government, in

the setting up of which, the mouths of God's enemies were open to blaspheme, should die, and not live, though in itself it might be good enough, and too good for us, unless we did walk more worthy of our mercies; yet considering it, as set up by them, who declared so much for the liberty of the freeborn people of England, and the interest of Christ, it is a bastard begotten and conceived in a night of hypocrisy, and brought forth in the day of boldfaced impiety, and the Lord will make a grave for it, for it is vile. I did apprehend that great Oliver was set up by God permissibly, by the dragon voluntarily, by himself ambitiously, by the army cowardly, by willing saints treacherously, and by unwilling saints passively and mournfully."

Upon his release from Prison five months later on July 4th, 1654, Simpson was prohibited from preaching within a 10-mile range of London, and barred from the City itself altogether. Despite his banishment from London, Simpson returned to the Allhallows pulpit in December of 1654, and after preaching two sermons, Cromwell himself requested that he consult with him "as a Brother and a Christian," inviting three or four members of the assembly at Allhallows to accompany him. {Remarkably indeed, in the light of Simpson's hostile remarks regarding Cromwell.} Accompanied by these brethren, Simpson spent an entire day at Whitehall. When Simpson questioned Cromwell regarding his wrongful imprisonment, the Protector responded that unless he had imprisoned him, he would have been tried under the Treason Ordinance, with the probable penalty of death. After more than six hours of discussion between them, Cromwell dismissed Simpson, and his friends, urging them "to carry soberly, as that should be best for them."

During the next few months a number of verbal altercations were directed at the Protectorate from those aligning themselves with the Fifth Monarchy Movement, and the Allhallows pulpit was often used as a launching pad for such radical outbursts, though not so much by Simpson himself, as his zeal for a governmental reformation seemed to be beginning to quench, whilst those in high places marvelled at Cromwell's patience in dealing with Simpson, and others identified as political insurrectionists.

The government finally apprehended Simpson once again in January of 1656, though his imprisonment was of a short duration, being freed only a month later. The next year, {January, 1657,} began with a widespread fall-out in matters relating to the Fifth Monarchists, especially Feake, whose preaching at this time became more and more virulent in its attacks on the existing government of Cromwell, denouncing him on many occasions, whilst claiming that the present government was "as Babylonish as ever," and that there existed "as much of Babylon in the civil state, and the old popish laws, and clergy-state, as ever." Henry Jessey, William Kiffin, and Simpson being present on one such occasion at Allhallows, stood in protest against the harsh tones being echoed forth, more especially in Feake's use of the terms Babylonish and Antichristian to define the Protectorate. In the ensuing confusion Kiffin was denounced as a person seeking royal favour by using flattery, whilst Simpson was labeled as a traitor for once preaching "the same things in the same

place." Shortly thereafter, Simpson, again wavering in political matters began praying for Cromwell's government, and now preaching against the Fifth Monarchist movement, which no doubt created further division in his congregation.

Upon the death of Oliver Cromwell on September 3rd 1658, Simpson's troubles intensified, for as the restoration of the Monarchy approached, Simpson, Kiffin, and other 'radicals' were denounced as extremists and fanatics. In April of 1660, the Royal Coat of Arms were exhibited at Allhallows, which must have sunk the hearts of the people, as many associated the reinstatement of the Monarchy with the restoration of Popery. Simpson himself, as late as October of that year {preaching at Bishopsgate} defended the regicides {those responsible for the beheading of King Charles I} in a sermon, reiterating his belief that "they were justified before God, and had acted conscientiously."

Throughout, Simpson remained faithful to his convictions, and was allowed to continue his preaching at Allhallows, {which seems somewhat remarkable, in and of itself,} though denounced repeatedly, as his messages were carefully monitored by those that would extinguish his zeal for the truth. Consequently, a warrant was issued for Simpson's arrest for seditious and dangerous speech, and he was once again arrested and cast into prison, most likely at Newgate, where he was kept for several months. Upon Mr. Simpson's release from prison, he took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, for which he was severely censured by many of his brethren, alleging that by not doing so "he would have sinned against God, against the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made him overseer, against his family, and against himself." It was only shortly thereafter, and much to the disappointment of his adversaries who wanted him tried for treason, that death intervened, and the LORD took him in June of 1662.

From an account taken from the author of his funeral sermon, to his bereaved congregation, we have these words, "God took him away immediately upon his release from prison, when you had some hopes of the further enjoyment of his labours; at a time when there is the greatest want of such faithful and zealous labourers; especially of such as are enlightened in, and are zealous for church-work; such as have a heart and abilities to encourage the people of God in their separation from the world and antichristian defilements. - He had love for all the saints. He had room in his heart to receive every one whom Christ received. He held communion with the saints, not on account of their names, or forms of worship, but on account of their union to Jesus Christ. He loved no man on account of his opinions, but his union to Christ, as he often declared in his congregation. - He had a great insight into the doctrines of grace. Having cast anchor within the veil, he understood well the great mystery of the mercy-seat. It was the glory of his ministry to hold forth the riches of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. In preaching this doctrine he was a mystery to a blind world, for they could not understand him; and, therefore, they hardly knew by what name to call him. When he spoke of the unsearchable riches of the grace of Christ, he was carried beyond himself; he was a master of words, yet seemed to want

words to express what he knew and enjoyed of divine grace. - He was a faithful servant of Christ. Whatever the Lord made known to him, he made known to his people without reserve, whether it pleased or displeased. He did not shun to declare all the counsel of God, so far as it was revealed to him. Also, if at any time he was convinced that he had delivered anything not consonant to scripture, he would openly and publicly confess his error, and trample upon his own name and honour, rather than deceive the souls of his people by leading them to imbibe false doctrine. While he thus ingenuously and openly confessed his mistakes, it shows how eminently faithful he was to truth and to the souls of his hearers. - His ministry was very successful, and attended by the abundant blessing of God. He was instrumental in the conversion of many souls; and he left behind him many seals to his ministry. Every faithful preacher was not so remarkably blessed. God blessed him above scores, nay, hundreds of preachers, in the great work of conversion, by turning souls from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. His happiness is unquestionable. Your loss is his gain. He is taken up into glory, and there hath communion with God. He is out of the reach of all his enemies. They can now imprison him no more. He will never have anything more imposed upon him contrary to his conscience. He will never suffer there for nonconformity. There God will be forever served, adored, and glorified with one heart, and with one consent."

Mr. Simpson's funeral sermon, entitled, "The Failing and Perishing of good Men a matter of great and sore Lamentation," was preached June 26, 1662, the day of his interment.