

THE STRONG NAME

BY

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"I bind unto myself to-day
The strong Name of the Trinity."
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^{There} is a poem by G. K. Chesterton, called *The Convert*, in which with startling daring he seeks to imagine the first thoughts and feelings of a man literally taken out of the tomb by Jesus and recalled to earth from the world beyond the grave.

"After one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said. . . .
The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free :
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live."

And that, if you will believe it, is what the Lord Christ can accomplish still—change our whole scale of values for ever, resurrect our spirits from their encircling gloom, and bring from our ransomed souls the cry, "I was blind, and now I see ! I was lost, and I am found. I was dead, and behold, I live—all glory, Christ, to Thee—I live !"

Will you believe it ? Or are you still, like Nicodemus, haunted by the question, "How can these things be ?"
"It would be so wonderful if it were true : but I don't see how it is ever going to happen." But is not the answer to that perplexity lying here before you ? "The dead shall hear the voice"—not of the great Teacher, not of the Jesus of the Galilean road, not of the Man who walked this way before us—"the voice of *the Son of God*," the voice (that is) of death's Conqueror, of One who ever since the dawning of the first Easter day has held all Resurrection power in His keeping, and reigns the Lord of life for ever. Read the very next words following our text, and you will find that made explicit : "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." Don't you see now how Christ achieves the seemingly impossible ? He can give you life, by imparting Himself to you, by coming into

you, by making His dwelling with you : for He is life. That is the secret. If Shakespeare were in you, what poetry you could write ! If Beethoven were in you, what music you could compose ! If Christ were in you, what a life you could live ! If ? There need be no if about it. You can't have an indwelling Shakespeare or Beethoven. You *can* have an indwelling Christ. You can say with Paul, "I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Then indeed the dead soul has heard the voice of Resurrection. Then your spirit has cast off all its bonds and come alive ! Then

"From the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."

"The hour cometh," said Jesus. When will it come ? Have we to tarry for some far-off, divine, incalculable event ? Have we to loiter helpless till the next nation-wide revival goes sweeping through the land ? Have we to wait perhaps till the hour of our departure sets us free ? "The hour cometh"—if only we knew when ! There is a brief entry in John Wesley's *Journal*, amazingly significant when you consider the date, Sunday, 2nd April 1738. Those were the days when Wesley's heart was as yet unkindled by the fire from heaven. Here is the entry. "Easter Day.—I preached in our College chapel on, 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live'": and then this plaintive note, "I see the promise ; but it is afar off." No wind of God was blowing then, no breath of Paradise to stir his poor dead soul to life. "The hour cometh : but," said Wesley sadly, gazing down the dim vistas of the trackless years, "it is afar off." Was it ? You turn a few pages of the *Journal*, and suddenly, just seven weeks later, the fire from heaven falls ! Afar off ? "The hour cometh—and now is !"

We glorify the past, and say, "O had I lived in that great day when Christ was really here !" We dream of the

far future, and say "O that we might have lived to see the glory that our children's children will behold, when Christ comes again into His own!" But why dwell regretfully upon an age that is gone, or envy wistfully an age that is not yet born? Christ is here! The Lord and Giver of life is here. The hour cometh—and now is! "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart." To-day reach out hands of faith, and pray, "Jesus, think on me! Thou ever-present Saviour, whose name is Resurrection and life, speak with the voice that wakes the dead: shatter the silence, pierce the gloom of my lost worthless soul." And He will work in you the everlasting miracle, the mightiest of all His mighty acts: and you will know the thrill that ran through the morning stars at creation's dawn—because your name is Lazarus and you live!

V I I

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

(1) BEHOLD THE MAN

"And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?"—*MATT. xxi. 10.*

ALl the city said it then; and all the world has said it ever since. For nineteen centuries one Figure has haunted the thinking and the conscience of mankind.

If you go climbing among the mountains, you may come occasionally to a lofty pass where the water-courses change their direction. Here a tiny rivulet makes its inconspicuous way to join the rivers flowing eastward: yonder, a few yards off, another begins its long winding journey towards the sunset and the western lands. The raindrops falling on one side of the summit may be carried down to the North Sea, while those on the other merge at last in the Atlantic. You are standing at the watershed, where all the streams divide.

Incomparably the most important watershed in the long history of humanity has been the Incarnation of Christ. At this point, the streams divide. After this, the human course and direction are changed. One Figure has split history in two—so that every event is now dated with reference to His coming, either before or after. In the clash and turmoil of this bitter age in which we live, His influence is still a more dominating thing, His power more to be reckoned with, than the power and influence of any Caesar. For this one Figure multitudes to-day would be glad to die; and no man who has once seen Him can ever quite thrust Him out of sight again or evade His urgent challenge. "Who is this?" they asked at the street-corners in Jerusalem long ago: and it is no

the Pharisees, attacking Him, declared "No one can forgive sins but God only," and argued that consequently Jesus must be a usurper and an impostor, their first statement was perfectly correct. Only God can convey forgiveness: that is true. And that is what we have to square with this other unimpeachable fact, that forgiveness is conveyed by Jesus. Only God can open the gate of the kingdom of heaven: yet it is certain that for thousands Christ has opened it. Only God can break the chain of a man's sinful nature: yet for thousands Christ has broken it. Only God can redeem: yet I am certain that Christ is my Redeemer. If Christ thus does for us what only God could ever do, who can He be? What other name is possible except God manifest in the flesh, the fulness of the Godhead bodily?

The fourth decisive fact is *the universality of Jesus*. It is worth asking ourselves the question: How do we propose to account for the unique phenomenon, that Jesus has laid His spell invincibly upon every century and every race and upon all kinds and conditions of men? Aristotle never did that: he was too Greek, and too academic. Buddha never did it: he was too typically Eastern. Only in Jesus has everything local and temporal been transcended by a spirit universal and eternal.

Look at the first circle of His friends. Peter and John were, temperamentally, poles asunder: yet in His eyes they both beheld the answer to their dreams. Consider His early biographers. Matthew the Jewish taxgatherer and Luke the Gentile doctor had nothing whatever in common: yet to draw His portrait for the world to see was, to both men, the only thing that mattered. Or think of the modern writers who have toiled to tell of Him—Papini and Bruce Barton, as different as an Italian mystic and an American business man could be, Emil Ludwig and Middleton Murry, and a host of others even in this last decade, of utterly diverse intellectual background and racial sympathy and

moral ideal, yet all fascinated by this one fact, all drawn by the compulsion of the mystery of Christ! Or pass in review the unbroken ranks of His friends and followers throughout the ages. Who can this be who can grip and captivate the souls of men so utterly different as Luther the Reformer and Loyola the Jesuit, as Francis the friar and Moody the evangelist, as G. K. Chesterton and General Booth, as Cardinal Newman and David Livingstone? What an amazing universality is Christ's!

"I see His blood upon the rose

And in the stars the glory of His eyes,

His body gleams amid eternal snows,

His tears fall from the skies.

All pathways by His feet are worn,

His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,

His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,

His cross is every tree."

Could any mortal man thus besiege and lay captive the thinking and the worship of the centuries? Must not this beleaguering spirit be eternal and divine, the fulness of the Godhead bodily? The universality of Christ is our fourth significant signpost pointing to the answer.

The fifth and final fact is the most decisive of all. It is *the divine self-verification of Christ in conscience*. For there is a very wonderful thing which happens: you begin exploring the fact of Christ, perhaps merely intellectually and theologially—and before you know where you are, the fact is exploring you, spiritually and morally. You begin by dealing with a historic Figure as presented in the Gospels, and gradually you become aware that the ultimate reality and heart of things is dealing with you. You begin by looking for the secret of this Master of life who walked the Galilean road, and piercingly you are made to feel that everything that is highest and holiest and divinest in the universe is looking for you. You set out to see what you

can find in Christ, and sooner or later God in Christ finds you.

That is the self-verification of Jesus. That, in every age, has been the ultimate and sure foundation of the irrefragable conviction of His divinity. In Christ, the one and only God has come. It is a confession of faith which I am constrained and bound to make, because the more I confront myself with the fact of Christ, the more intensely do I know that the living God is confronting me, demanding—as only God can demand—the entire and utter surrender of my soul. If the final reality of the universe comes to meet me anywhere, it comes to meet me here; and all I know of God—His nature, attributes and ways of working—has come to me through Jesus. Wherefore, with the whole company of His disciples throughout the centuries to whom the glory of the Word made flesh has been revealed, I, too, can take the sublime, imperishable words upon my lips and say—"This is the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Thou art the King of glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!"

In these two studies, we have been facing the fact of Christ, in His humanity and His divinity. But let us not suppose that our quest can ever end in a mere giving of assent to certain truths and propositions. When Saul of Tarsus, in the supreme moment of his life, had received an answer to his first impulsive cry "Who art Thou, Lord?" immediately and instinctively a second question came—"What wilt Thou have me to do?" And when from afar we have caught our glimpse of the glory of the Lord, there rises at once and confronts us in the secret place of conscience the inevitable challenge—"If that is Christ, what is our response to be?"

To that question each of us must find an answer for himself. It will be well if, standing at the foot of the cross, we can give such an answer as that which was given by St. Aloysius long ago:

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

"O Christ, Love's Victim, hanging high
Upon the cruel Tree,
What worthy recompense can I
Make, mine own Christ, to Thee?"

My sweat and labour from this day,
My sole life, let it be,
To love Thee aye the best I may
And die for love of Thee."