

## THE SECRET OF FAILURE.

BY REV. ARCHIBALD G. BROWN.

"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."—Matthew xiv. 18, 20.

THERE was a want of faith on both sides. It was not only in the disciples but in the father of the child. Granted, that our Lord says "*your* unbelief," yet that in no wise affects the force of our argument. The unbelief of the father required the higher faith of the disciples, which was wanting. Let us for a moment or two look at the difficulty their little faith met in the father. He was a doubter. Before Jesus uttered a word of rebuke to His disciples, he said to him, "Oh, faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? Bring him hither to me." It is worthy of note also, that before he received the longed-for blessing, his faith had to grow. Mark, in his account of this miracle, records the fact, that before the devil was cast out of the lad a confession of faith was drawn from the father's lips. "Lord," said he, "I believe, help thou my unbelief." Jesus said unto him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible."

Here then was one cause of the failure. *The disciples with little faith were trying to bless a man with less.* Ah, friends, there is such a thing as unbelief in the pew as well as in the pulpit! many a man is more to be pitied than criticised for his want of visible success. He is suffering through the sins of others. Possessed of only very ordinary faith himself, he is no match for a people possessed of far less. Backed up by a praying and believing people he might do something, but his little spark of faith falling on the wet blanket of their unbelief fails to scorch it, much less dry and burn it through. Remember, that it is said of the peerless preacher, "He could there do no mighty work because of their unbelief." Is it any marvel then, that surrounded by unbelief, some of his disciples can do no work at all? Oh, my hearers, whilst willing to take the giant's share of unbelief, I ask you if you are all clear in the matter? Though we have had conversions by the score, might we not have had them by the hundred had I my want of faith not been supplemented by your unbelief? But there can be no question that the chiefest hindrance to success was their own personal lack of faith. Had their belief been anywhere near perfection it would have triumphed over his unbelief, it would have laid hold upon the rugged tops of his mountain of doubts, plucked it up by the roots, and said, "Be thou cast into the sea." The faith that can triumph over others' unbelief, is faith of the highest kind. Alas, how few possess it! The faith of the majority is of that ordinary kind, that does very well in company, but is powerless when alone. Most logs will burn with tolerable brightness in a heap, but it is only occasionally you come across one so full of turpentine that it will flare and blaze away solitary and unassisted by other fires. So with Christians. But when do you come across such a one it is worth while to stop and look. You may well turn aside to see this great sight, for be sure that when a bush burns by itself in a wilderness, God is in the midst of it.

Nothing short of an in-dwelling God can keep a lonely saint blazing, yet unconsumed. I know of no grander sight under heaven than that of a man "believing down" all opposition and forcing his way through every obstacle by the sheer force of faith. A man whose confidence in God rises with every difficulty like the sea-gull on the wave; a man who sweeps along the most lethargic in his course, and by the power of his own momentum, draws others after him as an express train does the withered leaves that lie between the rails;—such a man is a grand man. Heaven works with him. Earth wonders at him. Hell dreads him. The disciples were not possessed yet of this all-conquering faith. They doubted, feared, and consequently failed. Perhaps the very appearance of the lad, and the more than usual ferocity of the fiend, staggered them. They only *hoped* he would come out when commanded. They took into account probable failure, and that paralysed their power. Any way, their faith fell short, and rendered them unable to cope with the difficulty. They lacked just one thing, and that was—not discipleship, not position, not propriety, but power. That power was lacking through want of faith. That faith was lacking through want of prayer and fasting.

Fellow-workers for Jesus, hear this word: We must have faith in our work if it is to result in anything more than miserable failure. We may be active even to restlessness, and

enthusiastic even to fanaticism; but if we lack faith our activity will be useless, and our enthusiasm worthless. Devils fear faith, nothing else. We must believe in the power of our God to cast out any and every unclean spirit. Never look upon any sinner as too far gone a case for sovereign mercy, and never preach or teach the truth as a kind of "forlorn hope." Believe in the power of God to change the most raging lion into the gentlest of lambs, and go to work under the inspiration of that belief. Believe in the actual presence of your Lord, and speak as one who sees him. I doubt not that this was one cause of the disciple's failure. They thought of him as absent, and often sighed, "Oh would that he was close at hand!" He was. But they knew it not. He who goes to God's work with the Lord no nearer to him than heaven's throne will never go with power. But faith sees him at its right hand, and goes into the battle side by side with its lord. It is he who fights in consciously Divine company that fights best. We must believe also that results shall follow. The faith that wins the day is the faith that shouts "Victory" before the sword is drawn! This is the kind of faith Jehoshaphat had when he went to meet in battle the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir. The Lord had said to him, "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: stand ye still and see the salvation of the Lord, for he will be with you." Well, what did the king do? He took (God at his word, and never doubted the result. He placed in front of the army, not his most experienced swordsmen, or his most unerring archers, but his sweetest singers. They were not to intone a prayer, but chant a note of triumph, "Praise the Lord." The whole army files before the king and he gives them an inspiring word. What is it? Listen! "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." Thus the whole army went forth determined to believe down the enemy. Who wonders at the result? They were three days, not fighting the foe but gathering the spoil, and on the fourth day they rested in the valley of Berachah, which, being interpreted, is the valley of blessing.

As it was then, so is it now, and ever will be. They who go to God's work singing in the full confidence of victory shall always gather spoil, and rejoice in the valley of blessing. But how is this high kind of faith to be obtained? We purpose giving the answer to that question this evening, when we hope to preach on the more difficult text, "This kind cometh not forth but by prayer and fasting." Suffice it to say, that extraordinary power, or power over extraordinary difficulties—the two are one and the same—can only be obtained by the use of extraordinary means. The ordinary, world-mixing Christian is incapable of any high service. He may do for sitting on committees, acting as secretary, or looking after the secular affairs of the Church; but bring him face to face with a possessed man and he is powerless. The highest style of work calls for the highest faith, and high faith is inseparable from a high life of communion.

The secret of power with others is heart elevation. Staying at Hastings a few months since I was much interested in watching the building of a breakwater just opposite my lodgings. It was done by driving massive piles of wood into the shingle. They were driven by a huge mass of metal being let fall upon them from a great height. True, the blows were not very quick one upon another, for it took some time to raise the weight to the necessary elevation; but when it did fall it accomplished something. Now suppose an on-looker had suggested that time was being wasted in hauling the herculean hammer up, and had offered to tap the iron-bound pile with a child's spade, saying, "He could give a hundred taps to the one blow," what would have been thought of his suggestion? It would have been laughed to scorn, and he would have been told that one of their blows would do more than a whole century of his tapping; that there was no waste of time in raising the iron thunderbolt, for the power of its blow was in proportion to the height from which it fell. So believe, your power and mine to affect men is in exact proportion to the elevation of our soul-life, and this elevation can only be obtained by secret communion with God, and abstinence from all that panders to the flesh and hinders the Spirit's fellowship. Oh for a higher ambition to be made meet for the Master's use! a more intense longing for that secret power with God in private, that shall make us more than conquerors over hell in public! The Lord give us faith that shall overcome the unbelief of others, and clothe us with power to cast out devils, for his dear Name's sake! Amen.