

THE INEXHAUSTIBLE BARREL.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."—1 Kings xvii. 16.

I do not know whether I have made what I intended to state sufficiently clear; but what I wanted to bring out is this:—Just as God sent his prophet Elijah out of pure sovereignty to a woman who deserved nothing at his hands, and just as he sent a prophet to her in the time of her greatest misery and sorrow, so is the word of God sent to you, my hearer, this morning, if you are in a similar condition.

II. Now, I come to the second point: THE GRACE OF GOD IN ITS DEALINGS.

I would have you notice first of all, that the love of God towards this woman in its dealings was of the most singular character. You will notice that the first word this poor woman heard from the God of Israel was one which rather robbed her than made her rich. It was this: "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." It was taking something from that already much-diminished store. And then on the heels of that there came another: "Bring me. I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand." This was rather demanding than bestowing. And yet singular it is, this is just the way sovereign mercy deals with men. It is an apparent demand rather than an open gift. For what does God say to us when first he speaks? He says this: "Repent and be converted every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." But saith the soul, "I cannot repent, it is beyond my power; I cannot believe—I would that I could believe—but this is beyond my reach.—And has God asked me to exert a strength which I have not? Does he demand that of me which I cannot give? I thought that he gave; I did not know that he asked of me." Ay, but soul, notice what this woman did in obedience to the command. She went and fetched the water, and she brought the morsel of bread; and the water was not diminished by what she gave, and the bread itself was increased in

the spending of it. When God saith to the sinner, "Believe," if that sinner believeth, it is not by his own power, but by grace which goes with the command. But the sinner does not know that at first. He thinks that *he* believes; he thinks that *he* repents. Why, I do not believe that the meal which the woman brought to the prophet was any meal of hers: it was meal taken out of her store, and yet not taken out of it; it was meal given her by miracle—the first instalment of miraculous provision. And so if thou believest, thou wilt say, "I have believed." Yes, it was taken out of your barrel, but still it was not your believing, it was an act of faith wrought in you. Here is a poor man with a withered arm; he wants to have that restored. Now, you will imagine that the first thing Christ will say to him will be, "Man, I will make thy withered arm alive; I will once more nerve it so that thou shalt have power to lift it." Nay, he does not say any such thing. But before he gives the man the power he says to him, "Stretch out thy hand!" Suppose he had cried out, "Sir, I cannot;" his withered arm would have hung dangling at his side till he died. But instead of that the command came; the man had the will to obey, and suddenly he had the power, for he stretched out his withered hand. What! say you, did he stretch out that hand of his own might? No, and yet he was commanded to do it. And so if you are willing to believe, if now your hearts say, "I would believe, I would repent," the power shall come with the will and the withered hand shall be stretched out.

I do preach continually the exhortation and the command. I am not ashamed to say with the prophet Ezekiel, "Ye dry bones live! ye dead souls live." If that is esteemed unsound doctrine, I shall be yet more heretical. "Man cannot do it; why tell him to do it?" Why simply as an exercise of faith. If I tell a man to do what he can do, anybody can tell him that; but God's servant tells him to do what he cannot do, and the man does it; for God honours the command of his servant, and gives the strength with the command. To sinners dead in sin the cry is given this morning: "Do you want salvation? Believe on Christ. Would you