

The Return of the Ark.

1 Samuel 5 and 6.

THE people of Israel once went up to fight against the Philistines, and were defeated. So they decided to take the Ark of the Lord with them next time, saying that it would save them, but again they were defeated, and the Ark was carried off by the Philistines. It had in it the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written, the pot full of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. God had allowed the Israelites to lose it in order to teach them that an outward sign of His presence was no help to them while they were wicked.

After the battle, the Ark was taken to Ashdod, where there was a grand temple, and an image of one of the gods of the Philistines, named Dagon. They took the Ark there because they thought Dagon was a greater god than the Lord, and had given them the victory. The image had the head and arms of a man, with the body of a fish. There they put the Ark. But in the morning, lo! Dagon was lying on his face before it. He was put up again, but the next morning he was again lying on the floor with his head and his hands cut off.

Plagues also broke out among the people, and they were covered with boils. They carried the Ark to Gath and to

Ekron, and wherever it went plagues troubled the people. But the Philistines did not like to let it go; they kept it seven months, and then they asked their priests what they should do with it. The priests told them to send it back with an offering of gold and jewels. They bid them put it upon a new cart, yoke two cows to the cart, and let them go wherever they liked. They said, "If it goeth up by the way of His own coast to Beth-shemesh, then He hath done us this great evil; but if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us."

It was no chance. The oxen went straight to Beth-shemesh. The men of that place were getting in their wheat harvest. When the cart drew near, they saw what it was, and very glad they were to get the Ark back once again! The ark was placed on the ground, the cart was cut up into firewood, the cows were killed, and offered up as burnt offerings to the Lord.

The Children of Israel were to learn that though God was grieved with them He had not forsaken

them. The Ark had come back to tell them that He was still with them to keep and bless them, if they would be obedient to His laws.

"Caught!"

IN the cellar Charles had put a mouse-trap. It was well baited with toasted cheese, stood most invitingly open, and quite conveniently close to poor mouse's hole. The next morning, when we looked, behold, mouse had accepted our invitation, had entered the trap, and was now a prisoner.

Poor mouse! I had not the heart to kill him; but took him out into a neighbouring field, and gave him liberty, forbidding Charley to follow and kill him. How happy the little creature was to have liberty again!

Now let us think how men, women, and children, can resemble my poor little mouse. First, see how it was tempted to eat the cheese. It longed for the dainty. It could not resist trying to get it, even though danger might be hidden behind it. Is it not like *sin*?

When you feel tempted to do anything wrong, though pleasant, think of poor mouse, and—*beware of the trap!*

The trap was hidden; the mouse only saw the cheese. Satan knows that if we thought of the trap, we should not

fall into it. So he tries to make wrong things seem very tempting; he whispers that there is "no harm." Oh, beware of the trap!

Are you in Satan's trap? or has Jesus opened the door and let you out?

Look at poor mouse's gladness to get free! How he rejoiced in his liberty! So does every one whom Jesus releases. He "goes on his way rejoicing." Full of "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." And well he may be glad. He has got away from Satan; his many sins are forgiven; and heaven is opened to him. It is enough to make any one glad.

Satan will try to catch you again; so you must ask Jesus not only to set you free, but to *keep* you free.

"He is able to keep you from falling." Now, we have learned something from poor mouse, which I hope you will not forget.

"The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."—Psalm 12 : 6.

