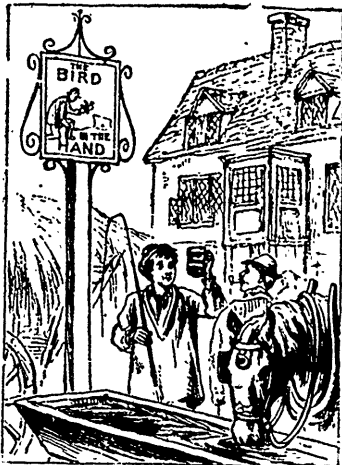


The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

I John i. 7.

THE BIRD IN THE HAND.



THERE was the sign-board, swinging backwards and forwards, with a rough daubing of a man who had just caught a bird in a snare, and was now holding it in his hand. Not a bad sign either, if it was meant to tell the honest truth. No doubt the man or woman who goes there is as a poor bird caught in a snare, and is now in the hand of the publican, and it may not be an easy thing to get out of it. I dare say, if he escapes, it will be with very few feathers, and not much life left in him! Better keep out of the snare, and as far away from it as you can. Better avoid the sin and the riotous company, and the bad language that abounds there. And if you have been caught, better take the first opportunity and make a struggle and fly out, and never darken the door-step again.

When you make a resolution to do this, stick to it, it will be the best day's work you ever did. You will have more liberty, and more food, and more feathering for your nest, and a great deal more peace. Blessed are they who

learn to live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world!

But the sign-board recalls to my mind a talk between two men. It is so good that I have often spoken of it, and will recount it here. A modern disciple of unbelief was glorying in his freedom from the restraints of religion, and in his power to enjoy to the full the various pleasures which the world has to offer.

"I am far better off than you are," said he to the other man, who was a Christian; "I have a bird in the hand, and you have only a bird in the bush. I can enjoy myself as I like now, but you are waiting for your happiness till the world to come."

"Oh, no; you make a great mistake," said the Christian; "*I have a bird in the hand, and a bird in the bush as well.* I have far more happiness now in religion than you have in the world; and when your happiness is over, when your bird is dead and buried, my bird will be alive and go on singing forever."

There is a great deal of truth in this argument. A Christian has far the best of it in the present life. The faith of Christ robs a man of no single thing which ministers to his real peace and comfort. It only bids a man do himself no harm. Just look at the contrast which you may see every day before your eyes. Look at the men in the streets who have no guiding principle, and just follow the impulse of the moment. What numbers you see whose very look tells you that all joy is withered and dead out of their lives; and the worst of all is, that they are rapidly losing all capacity for a better life either here or hereafter. On the other hand, you meet with many Christians who have no exemption from life's burdens, but yet there is a calm peace about them that tells how they make their daily refuge beneath the wings of the Almighty. They have their sorrows, but in the Saviour they have comfort and rest and hope. The promises of God make their hearts sing with joy.

By Him all that believe are justified from all things.

Acts xiii. 39.