

or not. The day will come when its voice will sound in his ears, and pierce him like a sword. The time will come when he must retire from the world, and lie down on a sick bed, or, otherwise look death in the face. And then the clock of conscience, that solemn clock, will sound in his heart, and, if he has not repented, will bring wretchedness and misery to his soul. Oh, no! write it down in the tablets of your heart—without repentance, no peace.—*J. C. Ryle.*

### THE STRANGE WOMAN'S HOUSE.

There is no vice like licentiousness to delude with the most fascinating proffers of delight, and fulfil the promise with the most loathsome experience. All vices at the beginning are silver-tongued, but none so impassioned as this. All vices in the end cheat their dupes, but none with such overwhelming disaster as licentiousness. I shall describe by an allegory its specious seductions, its plausible promises, its apparent innocence, its delusive safety, its deceptive joys—their change, their sting, their flight, their misery, and the victim's ruin.

Her HOUSE has been cunningly planned by an EVIL ARCHITECT to attract and please the attention. It stands in a vast garden full of enchanting objects; it shines in glowing colours, and seems full of peace and full of pleasure. All the signs are of unbounded enjoyment—safe, if not innocent. Though every beam is rotten, and the house is the house of death, and in it are all the vicissitudes of infernal misery, yet to the young it appears a palace of delight. They will not believe that death can lurk behind so brilliant a fabric. Those who are within look out and pine to return; and those who are without look in and pine to enter. Such is the mastery of deluding sin.

That part of the garden which borders on the highway of innocence is carefully planted. There is not a poison-weed, nor thorn, nor thistle there. Ten thousand flowers bloom, and waft a thousand odours. A victim cautiously inspects it; but it has been too carefully patterned upon innocence to be easily detected. This outer garden is innocent—innocence is the lure to wile you from the path into her ground—innocence is the bait of that trap by which she has secured all her victims. At the gate stands a comely porter, saying blandly, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither." Will the youth enter? Will he seek her house? To himself he says, "I will enter only to see the garden—its fruits, its flowers, its birds, its arbours, its warbling fountains!" He is resolved in virtue. He seeks wisdom, not pleasure! Dupe! you are deceived already; and this is your first lesson of wisdom. He passes, and the porter leers behind him! He is within an enchanter's garden! Can he not now return if he wishes?—he will not wish to return until it is too late. He ranges the outer garden near to the highway, thinking as he walks, "How foolishly have I been alarmed at pious lies about this beautiful place! I heard it was Hell: I find it is Paradise!"

Emboldened by the innocency of his first steps, he explores the garden further from the road. The flowers grow richer; their odours exhilarate; the very fruit breathes perfume like flowers; and birds seem intoxicated with delight among the fragrant shrubs and loaded trees. Soft and silvery music steals along the air. "Are angels singing? Oh! fool that I was to fear this place; it is all the heaven I need! Ridiculous priest, to tell me that death was here, where all is beauty, fragrance, and melody! Surely death never lurked in so gorgeous apparel as this! Death is grim and hideous!" He has come near to the strange woman's HOUSE. If it was beautiful from afar, it is celestial now; for his eyes are bewitched with magic. When our passions enchant us, how beautiful is the way to death! In every window are sights of pleasure; from every opening issue sounds of joy—the lute, the harp, bounding feet, and echoing laughter. Nymphs have desecrated this pilgrim of temptation; they smile and beckon. Where are his resolutions now? This is the virtuous youth who came to observe. He has already seen too much; but he will see more; he will taste, feel, regret, weep, wail, &c. The most beautiful nymph that ever eye rested on approaches with decent guise and modest gestures to give him hospitable welcome. For a moment he recalls his home, his mother, his sister-circle; but they seem far away, dim, powerless.