

But it was certain that from the moment of crossing the threshold Miss Nancy's dream began to be troubled. The rector led the way, and she crept after him, into one empty room after another, with lattices long closed, where the dawn looked in morning after morning, doors long open, where the sunset shone through into the passages evening after evening, and hearts long closed, where no light fell ; down passages where a footfall echoed strangely ; into rooms overhead, with gable windows looking out on the quiet meadows, and lattices of yellow light on the bare walls, and floors that creaked mournfully beneath the tread ; and down the staircase that was still, and yet not silent, and into the hall again, from which the spirit of the old days had fled. And it was very chill, and bare, and empty ; and Miss Nancy shivered eerily, and awoke from her dream.

The rector turned towards the door, but Miss Nancy did not beg even a few minutes' grace ; she only followed very silently. She was thinking, in a desolate way, of a confused multitude of things, but principally she remembered that the sun bonnet had been uncomfortably stiff, and the strings a degree too tight, when she set out on her walk, and she was beginning to wonder now whether she could bear it much longer. Poor little Miss Nancy ! if her disappointments had been hard to bear, the awaking from her dream was far, far harder.

But that empty page, so unspeakably dearer than any written one, however crumbed, must be turned over with the others, when its time comes ; only at ten years old one's philosophy cannot bear a very heavy strain, and the sight of the sleepy courtyard brought back the poor, foolish old dream so pitifully, that Miss Nancy felt that she must either untie the strings of her bonnet or choke. Nothing seemed to care ; the water rippled in the gray basin, and the pigeons fluttered round the dovecotes, and nestled in the yellow light, and the sheep bleated faintly on the uplands, and the larks sang high over the meadow.

*(To be continued.)*

