

"Ah, then it was a splendidly courageous act. I honour you for it."

"But you will continue your mission?" she replied earnestly.

"Alas, I can hardly see how the mission can be continued. There seems to be no opening."

Mrs. Gwynne apparently lost interest. "Good-bye," she said simply, shaking hands with them both and without further words left the room with her boy. For some distance they walked together along the dark road in silence. Then in an awed voice the boy said:

"How could you do it, mother? You were not a bit afraid."

"Afraid of what, the Rector?"

"No, not the Rector—but to speak up that way before all the people."

"It was hard to speak," said his mother, "very hard, but it was harder to keep silent. It did not seem right."

The boy's heart swelled with a new pride in his mother. "Oh, mother," he said, "you were splendid. You were like a soldier standing there. You were like the martyrs in my book."

"Oh, no, no, my boy."

"I tell you yes, mother, I was proud of you."

The thrilling passion in the little boy's voice went to his mother's heart. "Were you, my boy?" she said, his voice faltering. "I am glad you were."

Hand in hand they walked along, the boy exulting in restored pride in his mother and in her courage. But a new feeling soon stirred within him. He remembered with a pain intolerable that he had allowed the word of so despicable a creature as Mop Cheatley to shake his faith in his mother's courage. Indignation at the wretched creature who had maligned her, but chiefly a passionate self-contempt that he had allowed himself to doubt her, raged tumultuously in his heart and drove him in a silent fury through the dark until they reached their own gate. Then, as his mother's hand reached toward the latch, the boy abruptly caught her arm in a fierce grip.

"Mother," he burst forth in a passionate declaration of faith, "you're not a coward."