

to me the day she died. 'He will if you ask Him. Read your Bible, and try to be of some good, though it's pleased Him as knows best to make you as you are.' And then she clutched my face up to hers in her two hands, and burst out cryin'; and those are the last words I ever heard my poor dear mother say.

"Well, sir, I tried to be a good boy for poor dear mother's sake. But father treated me worse and worse. He pitched mother's Bible into the fire when he caught me reading of it, and pushed it down with the poker till the leaves were 'most like tinder; but I got some of the middle ones out when he was gone, and I've got 'em now. They are like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, though the smell of fire had passed upon 'em. Well, sir, father drubbed me, and never give me half enough to eat—sometimes he wouldn't give me anything. The neighbours gave me a bit of bread now and then, but, of course, they couldn't be expected to keep me, when my father was a hearty man earnin' good wages; and, besides, I hadn't pretty looks and ways to take the women's hearts. I was worse off than if I'd no father, for then the parish must have took me. I thought it wasn't game to cry, but I couldn't help it when I've gone to poor mother's grave, and wished myself snug inside along with her.

"Some of the lads on the quay were sad prigs, and they've put me up to steal rope, and copper nails, and things, and slip down into the cabins to prig prog; but if my earthly father didn't look after me, my heavenly Father did, and, I'm thankful to say, I never was a thief—though a boy's hungry belly is a sore tempter, sir. Perhaps, if I'd have had the use of my pins as they had, I might ha' done it—if so, I thank God for making me a cripple—but I hope not. I used to fancy that my mother was a-watchin' of me. 'Try to be of some good, Bob,' I used to hear her say, and as well as such a poor little crittur could, I made up my mind that I would try. Anyhow, however, I couldn't stand home any longer. I must be off somewhere to fend the best I could for myself. I'd sense enough to guess that father 'ud bring me back if I hung anywhere about Colchester. I wanted to be off to London. I'd heerd that all sorts o' folks could get work there. Not as I thought that it was paved with gold—children—poor folks' kids, anyhow—ain't green enough for that. I had talked about London sometimes to a man who drove a fish machine. 'Well, Bob,' says he, one day, 'you couldn't be worse off there than you are here, and if you can manage to hobble out, quite unknown to your father, mind—for I shouldn't like him to fancy that I'd any hand in it—to the third milestone on the London road, I'll take you up to-morrow evening.'

"I went to bid poor mother good-bye that night—her grave somehow makes me think that Colchester's my home down to this very day, though I've never set my foot in it since—and next mornin', as soon as I'd seen father off in his lighter polin' down the river to Wivenhoe, I slipped back and packed up a few of my clothes that he hadn't pawned, and my Bible-leaves, and a Mavor's spelling-book my mother used to learn me out of, in a brown Hol-