

## MISS ESTHER'S OPPORTUNITY.

BY MRS. C. E. K. DAVIS.

"If one only knew what to do, and the wise way to do it! One can see with half an eye that there is work enough, but I am puzzled to know how and where to begin," and Miss Esther Craydock, who had been standing by the window and gazing out upon the narrow busy street for the past ten minutes, now crossed the room and sat down in front of the fire.

"Yes, there is enough to do," said Miss Esther's mother, smiling placidly over her knitting. "It isn't work but workers that are wanted in the Lord's harvest field."

"I know, I know," rejoined Miss Esther, almost impatiently; "and I believe I am ready to do what I can there; the question that vexes me is, what *can* I do? Answer me that, mother dear, if you please."

"Saint Paul asked that question of the Lord Himself," said Mrs. Craydock. Miss Esther sat looking into the fire. She, too, had asked the Lord every day since they left their quiet country home for this busy, closely settled town, but as yet the answer had seemed withheld.

"One knew just what to do in Brookside," she said presently.

"There was the church and our regular church work, Sunday-school and district visiting, with dear Mr. Ellersley to direct it all, but here—"

"Here is regular church work, too," interrupted Mrs. Craydock.

Miss Esther shook her head. "There are a great many who are doing it," she said; "the church is rich and full, but there are hundreds outside of it, and no one cares for their souls. It breaks my heart to see them staggering along under their burdens of sin and shame, and hard toil, while I sit here by the fire, warm and comfortable. I want to do something for the neglected ones."

"Keep your eyes and ears open, and watch your opportunity." This was Mrs. Craydock's advice, as she smiled over her knitting.

Just then, Betty, the maid of all work, came up stairs to say that there was an old woman at the door, who insisted on seeing the mistress, "and all I could do, she wouldn't take herself away, till I'd brought you word, and there she sits under the stoop, a-trotting of her foot, and a-shaking her head, and a-mumbling over words as I can't understand nor make sense of, and a-twirling of her thumbs."

Miss Esther rose with alacrity, and was half way down stairs before Betty had finished her tale.

Under the porch she found the feeble old woman, waiting with bowed head. At the sound of the light step on the stair she lifted her face—a poor, pinched

face, full of sorrow and of years—and rising, dropped a curtsey.

"Is it the mistress?" she asked, and Miss Esther answered gently:

"Yes; what can I do for you?"

"Is it the mistress that put a flower into the hand of my little lass next Saturday four weeks, and bade her love the Lord?"

Miss Esther pondered a moment. It had been such a very small act of kindness that the memory of it had quite escaped her, until it was thus recalled.

"It was on the steps of your own door," continued the woman, eagerly, "and my little lass was passing by; do you mind her, mistress, with blue eyes, and hair like threads of gold, and a smile like the dawning of the day?"

Miss Esther nodded.

"Then, for the good Lord's sake, that you bade her love, come with me, mistress, for my lass is dying, and she begged old granny to fetch you."

Miss Esther waited to ask no questions, but slipping on her shawl and bonnet, quietly followed the feeble but rapid steps of her guide. It was a long and dreary walk from No. 15 Hawthorn street to the small house at the end of Slater court, and but few words passed between them until they reached the door. Then the poor grandame paused, and laid her trembling old hand on her heart. "Go ye in first, mistress," she gasped; "go ye in first, for if the change hasn't come a'-ready to my little lass, she'll grieve to see granny so out of breath: she's wonderful pitiful, is my little Em'ly!"

Miss Esther stepped across the bare creaking boards of the entry and pushed open the door that stood ajar. The bit of a room within was darkened by an old quilt pinned up at the window, but in one corner Miss Esther spied the bed on which lay the little lass so white and still, that for an instant she thought the change dreaded by the old grandmother had indeed come. Another old woman, left to watch, had fallen asleep, and sat at the bed's head with her chin dropped upon her breast, breathing heavily. As Miss Esther drew near, little Em'ly opened her eyes with a glad smile of recognition.

"I thought grammy'd find you," she said in a very weak, pitying voice. "I told her the street, and just how the house looked, and just how you looked, and I knew you'd come!"

"I was glad you sent for me," said Miss Esther, kneeling beside the bed, and tenderly smoothing the child's bright hair. "What can I do for you?"

"You said for me to love the Lord, and you gave me a posy," answered little Em'ly, "and every time I looked at the posy, I thought I must love the Lord. So then I told grammy how was I to do it? and grammy said He made me, and I must be good, and