

AN ANGEL OF MERCY AMONG THE POOR OF OUR BIG EAST SIDE TENEMENTS.

Winifred Black Spends a Day with Mrs. George Parsons Lathrop, Who Has Pledged Her Life to the Helpless Sick of the Slums.



what strange fancies would have come to the great writer if he had seen his daughter down there among the children, in the dirt and squalor and the poverty.

A voice separated itself from the other voices. "Quick, quick!" said the voice. "Come quick! He'll kill that boy!"

A forlorn little ragamuffin of a girl ran screaming across the street. She tossed her thin arm at the window. "Come! come quick!" she said.

Before I could get downstairs Mrs. Lathrop was in the street. She had a boy in her arms and she carried him into the hallway.

A boy stood outside the door. "You can keep him there if you want to," said the boy at the door, "but I'll wait, an' when he comes out I'll fix him."

The child's peaked, sallow face was yellow with rage. Mrs. Lathrop gave the boy in the hall to me. She went outside and she knelt down and she talked to the avenger of his wrongs.

"Listen," she said. "He's smaller than you!" "I don't care," said the avenger. "I'll fix him!" His shrill little voice shook and he trembled from head to foot.

"Well," said Mrs. Lathrop, calmly, "if you want to do a woman's work, all right. Men don't do such things. Women and girls whelp babies." The avenger listened.

"You look like a man," said Mrs. Lathrop; "a big, brave man. I wouldn't let people think I'd bother paying a baby back." The avenger gazed at her a moment in utter silence. Then he lifted up his voice and wept loud and long.

Mrs. Lathrop took him in her arms and comforted him, and in a little while the affrighted babe and the avenger went out, hand in hand.

They each had a penny, and they walked straight toward the candy shop. "They say I pauperize the poor," said Mrs. Lathrop. "Perhaps I do."

"We went upstairs, and Mrs. Lathrop put on her bonnet. "It is time for me to start on my rounds," she said.

We took the little boy downstairs with us, and we went to a Third Avenue car and rode uptown.

Mrs. Lathrop put the little boy in the corner seat, propped his lame knee up so that he could see out of the window and see in comfort, and sat down beside him.

"I'm taking him to Roosevelt Hospital," she said. "They treat his knee twice a week. His mother hasn't time to take him there."

"Tell me," said I, "how did you begin?" "I read of some very sad cases," she said, quietly, "that may have influenced me a little; but I don't know; I think those things are arranged for us. I went to the Cancer Hospital to learn nursing."

"While I was there we had a patient, an old woman. She was such a cheery, kindly old soul that we all loved her."

"One day the doctor said to her: "You can't be cured; you'll have to go."

"So she went. "I hunted and hunted for her. "Four weeks ago I found her. "She was living with her sister, a woman with three children and with no food to give them."

"The poor old soul cried when she saw me. I told her I would take her with me. I came downtown and hunted for some rooms. I found the ones you saw. They are cheap and light. I am getting them ready for my old patient. Next week she is coming to live with me. I am not a trained nurse, you know, but I know something about nursing for all that, and I can do for these poor creatures what I could do for my own family."

"I expected to wait for work—but I found my work waiting for me. Every day there is a new patient."

"The poor, forlorn souls tell each other that there's some one who will nurse them and who will not charge them anything, and they hunt me out. Last night I stayed with a young girl. She was very ill, and the doctor said she must be kept quiet or she would die. I found her lying in a room which was thick with tobacco smoke. Two or three neighbors were sitting around the bed looking at the girl, and the girl's mother sat on the bed and cried and cried and cried."

"Well, I turned them all out and made the mother go and lie down, and let in some fresh air and bathed the girl a little, and she fell asleep holding my hand. "When I left there early in the morning she was asleep yet."

"The mother thinks I am some kind of a witch. They will spend their last penny for medicine or food for the sick, these people, but they will not use the most ordinary common sense in taking care of them. That's one of the things I am going to try to do—teach these mothers how to nurse a sick child."

When we reached the hospital Mrs. Lathrop took the little boy and went into

the operating room with him. I waited outside. It was cold, but I wanted to stop thinking of the little boy's delicate face and of his poor little twisted knee.

The young doctors came from the college across the street. They carried their books under their arms and they whistle and laughed together.

When Mrs. Lathrop brought the little boy out she was very pale.

"I was good," said the boy, in his shrill, trembling falsetto. "I was very good, like a big man; wasn't I?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Lathrop; "yes."

From the Roosevelt Hospital we went to another hospital over on Second Avenue.

"I'm so happy about this case," said Mrs. Lathrop. "It's a boy. A woman came to my house the other morning very early, about 7 o'clock, I think. She was

angry. She said that her little boy hadn't slept all night, and that he cried and cried, and she had no money, and the doctor wouldn't come, and so I went. I took the boy to a doctor I knew, and he said he child had hip disease and needed the most careful treatment, and needed it at once.

"I went to hospital after hospital, but the charity beds were all filled, and I had no more money. This morning a letter came with \$5 in it. That \$5 will pay one week's board at the hospital. I came to make all the arrangements now."

When she was talking with the physician in charge the little boy and I sat and watched her.

"I hope that doctor will have a place to put him," said the little boy. "She says his leg hurts more than mine. Where do you live?"

When I had told him where I lived he said: "I don't know that place. All the places I know is my house, an' the hospital, an' her house. Ain't it nice in her house?"

"Do you go there much?" "Oh, yes, lots," said the little boy. "I have to. My leg aches, you know, an' I cry; I just have to cry, no matter how I try, an' she's always got something to tell me, or to give me, er—"

"It's all right," said Mrs. Lathrop, coming buoyantly down the hall. "He'll take him for the first week, and by next week some one else will help."

"Do you have many offers of help?" "A great many. Not money often, but medicine and delicacies, and things like that. The world is full of good people."

She stopped in to see a sick woman. The woman lay in a cot bed in a dark basement room. She looked up at us with woolfish eyes. "Soup?" she said.

Mrs. Lathrop laughed. "Of course," she said; "you're hungry, too," and she opened her basket and took out a jar and poured something out of the jar into the pan and set the pan on the crazy stove and stirred what was in the pan and tasted it and smacked her lips. The old woman brightened, in spite of herself.

Mrs. Lathrop poured out the soup and sat down by the bed and fed it to the woman, spoonful by spoonful. When the soup was all gone the woman fell back upon her cot.

"Tain't so salty as some," she said.

Mrs. Lathrop washed the woman's face, and combed her hair, and talked to her, and petted her, and coaxed her, and the old woman lay and listened like a sullen child.

When we went out she called after us: "Will you come to-morrow?" "Yes," said Mrs. Lathrop. "I will come to-morrow."

And then there was a little girl to see, and a young woman who needed rubbing, and when we were back in the little Dutch house again it was 10 o'clock. We left the little boy at the foot of the stairs.

"No coffee, now, mind," said Mrs. Lathrop to the boy's mother. "I'll bring down some soup."

The fire was smoldering in the grate upstairs in the little yellow-and-white rooms. "Dear me," said Mrs. Lathrop; "this will never do! My patients will take cold!"

She blew the coals into a flame. She dusted the hearth. She laid the table, and she talked all the time, in a cheery, hopeful way, that made the dull day seem suddenly bright. Before luncheon was quite eaten there came a knock at the door.

"There," said Mrs. Lathrop; "I'm late again."

Two women came into the room. One carried a baby, and one held a little girl by the hand.

One of the women was a delicate, pretty little thing, with big blue German eyes, and a lot of blond hair.

"I'm much better than I was," she said, timidly. "I hate to trouble you all the time," she added, "but my husband is out of work."

"Trouble!" said Mrs. Lathrop. "Does it trouble you to do something to help your little baby?"

"No," said the woman, smiling a little; "no, but—"

"Well, then," said Mrs. Lathrop, abruptly, "don't say such things."

After the two women had gone, there came another, and then another, all for treatment, and then came a precise, neatly dressed young woman, who would not sit down.

"I'm a nurse," she said, "and I am interested. I came to see how you were getting on. Where did you graduate?"

"Nowhere," said Mrs. Lathrop.

"I beg your pardon," said the precise young woman.

"Nowhere," said Mrs. Lathrop. "I am not trained."

"Not trained?" said the precise young person. "But how can you nurse people if you're not trained? Aren't you afraid?"

"No," said Mrs. Lathrop, quietly. "I am not afraid. You see, I look at it in this way. These people who come to me are people who can't go to hospitals. They won't get any care if I don't help them and then the incurable ones, no one will bother with them, so I just do the best I can, and they seem to think I help them."

"Yes?" said the precise young woman, and then she lifted her eyebrows and went away.

"Oh," said Mrs. Lathrop, when the precise young woman was gone, "these poor things I'm trying to help are, many of them, beyond saving, but they're not beyond being comforted. They need so much more than medicine. They need companionship, and interest, and affection. They've usually been sick a long time, and all



"LET ME SEE"

DEATH OF MRS. LATHROP'S SISTER IN LONDON.



Mrs. George Parsons Lathrop has gone down to live in the East Side, and to nurse cancer patients.

Mrs. Lathrop is the youngest child of Nathaniel Hawthorne. She is a beautiful woman, a clever woman, and a very sensitive, dainty, luxurious woman.

Her friends are all wondering what in the world she's gone to the East Side for, and how she lives, now that she is there. I went down to see her one day last week. I left the Grand Street car at a queer little three-cornered block in the wilderness of tenements, and I found a quaint, Dutch looking, narrow little street, running off at a tangent, like the longest leg of a measuring compass.

I knocked at the first door I found. A fat, untidy woman came to the door. "Does Mrs. Lathrop live in this neighborhood?" I said. "She is a nurse."

"A nurse?" said the fat little woman, her stolid face suddenly alight with vivid interest. "She is upstairs."

A mite of a pale boy hobbled to the door, and looked out from behind the woman's skirts.

"You go upstairs," said the pale boy, in a strained falsetto, a-quiver with excitement, "an' you knock, an' she'll let you go right in."

I went up the narrow, shaking stairs. The baluster was wholly gone, and the walls were sodden with the dirt of years. At the head of the stairs was a narrow little door, with an iron knocker on it. I knocked, and the door opened.

Mrs. Lathrop stood in the doorway. "Come right in," she said.

Mrs. Lathrop is tall and she is very straight. She has a glory of red hair, just beginning to whiten a little at the temples, and she has an eager, impressive, vital sort of face, a face with a ruddy color in the cheeks and a sudden, vivid gleam of light in the eyes, and a quick, sympathetic smile.

When she stood aside to let me in I almost gasped. The hall outside was so old, and so dark, and so hopelessly dingy and forlorn, that the sudden transition into the glory of cleanliness and light in Mrs. Lathrop's rooms was startling.

The floor of Mrs. Lathrop's rooms is yellow, clear, sunlight yellow, the walls are white and the woodwork is white, and the ceiling is white. There are white curtains at the window, the little table in the middle of the room is white, and there are a few black and white engravings, all religious in character, upon the walls. There was a coffee pot on the white table, and Mrs. Lathrop made an apology for it.

"I am very late at my breakfast," she said. "I was up till after midnight with a very sick patient, so I slept a little over time this morning. I hate to do that. It keeps me hurrying all day to catch up."

"Are you very busy?" "Busy?" said Mrs. Lathrop. "My dear, I don't know any word for what I am. I come down here just three weeks ago. I didn't intend to do a thing until the 1st of November, and then I only meant to do one kind of nursing, but people need me, and I have to go."

"Is there really so much nursing to do?" I began. "I thought the district nurses and the hospitals—"

"I thought so, too," said Mrs. Lathrop. "Every one thinks so—till they know. If you spent one day with me you would see how much there is to do, and how thankful I ought to be to be able to even begin to do it."

I looked around the clean, white and yellow sunny little room, and at the rack of religious books on the table, and at the bunch of wild Fall flowers on the mantel, and at the little flame that escaped in the low, old-fashioned grate.

"I should like to spend a day with you," I said.

"Do," said Mrs. Lathrop, "spend this day." So I did.

First we cleared the cup and saucer and plate and coffee pot off the table, then we washed the dishes; then Mrs. Lathrop lit a spirit lamp and boiled an egg.

"It's for the boy downstairs," she said. "He has a bad knee, and he's very miserable all the time. His mother told me she didn't see what could be the matter with him. He had three strong cups of coffee for breakfast every day, and two cups of coffee and two slices of bread for lunch every day, and at night some raw meat for his supper. He likes it better raw. So I told her I'd feed him, and I'm trying to do it."

She went downstairs to see the boy with the bad knee. She left the door open, and I could hear her go down the crazy stairs with a quick, firm tread.

"There!" piped the strained falsetto, knew she'd come. The street outside was noisy and full of shouting and the uproar of many voices, as the streets in the tenement district always are.

I stood in the window looking out at the quaint Dutch house across the way, and at the old little children who swarmed upon I warn steps, and I wondered



STOPPING A FIGHT



A HELPLESS INVALID

the operating room with him. I waited outside. It was cold, but I wanted to stop thinking of the little boy's delicate face and of his poor little twisted knee. The young doctors came from the college across the street. They carried their books under their arms and they whistle and laughed together. When Mrs. Lathrop brought the little boy out she was very pale. "I was good," said the boy, in his shrill, trembling falsetto. "I was very good, like a big man; wasn't I?" "Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Lathrop; "yes." From the Roosevelt Hospital we went to another hospital over on Second Avenue. "I'm so happy about this case," said Mrs. Lathrop. "It's a boy. A woman came to my house the other morning very early, about 7 o'clock, I think. She was

their friends are tired out with them, and they do get irritable, like the woman you saw to-day. But think of being hopelessly ill, dying by inches, in a dark tenement, alone—alone—I'm afraid I'd be cross, too.

"Of course I wish I were a trained nurse, but I'm not, and I must just do the best I can as I am. That's how my sister did. Una, you know—my beautiful sister, Una. She went into a sisterhood, spent her last years caring for little children and died among them."

"I can remember hearing people call her 'poor Una.' I always thought of her so, too. You know, she was engaged to be married, and her sweetheart was drowned. When she heard the news of his death she simply sighed and rose and left the room. She never cried or made any sort of display of emotion."

"Very soon after that she went to England and joined the sisterhood. She was an Episcopalian. I am a Catholic."

"My father?" I think he was a little of a Puritan. Since I have lived down here, and since I've known of the happiness of helping these helpless people, I do not say 'poor Una.'"

Mrs. Lathrop talked of her father, and of her love for him, and of her deep admiration for his books.

At 7 o'clock the fire burned out and the little rooms grew cold. "How short the days are," said Mrs. Lathrop. "I haven't done half I wanted to do."

When I went out I stood a moment in the hallway. I heard a halting step upon the stair behind me. I turned and saw the little lame boy, hitching himself up the stairs.

His little white face was drawn with pain, but he waved his poor little claw of a hand to me.

"She's home," he said; "I heard her."

When I told a man I know about Mrs. Lathrop and my day with her he laughed. "Pshaw," he said, "all those Hawthornes are crazy."

WINIFRED BLACK.