

Santa Claus Viewed by Portland Youngsters

Boys and Girls Not Under Shelter of Parental Roofs, Interviewed as Kris Kringle.



PUT LITTLE LESTER ON LBY KNEE

with the tale that some person connected with the institution had kicked him on the ankle. He was obdurate and would say nothing either about what he wished for Christmas or what he thought of Santa Claus. The youngster in the next cot, however, was extremely interesting.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Pope Lee," he replied immediately. I could not for the life of me see any

striking resemblance to the late illustrious poet. It was explained to me later that the little fellow had been thus dubbed by a man formerly connected with the society, and the name, so comically speaking of him that the waif really had forgotten his real cognomen.

"Pope, my lad," said I, "did you ever see Santa Claus?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the Pope. "Ma'm was a falling of his and he invariably used it."

"Horse and wagon," was the dumbfounding reply.

"No, no," I corrected, "you mean, Pope, that you would like a horse and wagon for Christmas, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am," agreed the Pope.

As a matter of courtesy I refrained from interviewing the young lady patients and found my way down stairs where a hubbub announced the return of the school children. They awaited me in the recreation-room. I shall describe them collectively and individually and then go on with my tale.

Collectively I have never seen a jollier and happier lot of lads in my life. Individually, I feel that William Graham impressed me the most. William is the son of the institution. He is 10 years of age, well-built physically, and his gray matter is unusually prolific. One remark of William's that appealed to me very much was that his name was William and he did not like the boys and officers of the society to call him "Willie" as they persisted in doing. He is extremely modest and told me a short and adventurous tale of his wanderings that would serve well for the plot of a successful novel.

George Simons is another very promising youngster of the same age. Byron William Jackson, 11, is a very well-behaved boy of 12, remarkably good-looking and I think just a little out of his element. He is extremely modest and told me a short and adventurous tale of his wanderings that would serve well for the plot of a successful novel.

Leon Burt, aged 5; Gail Hartford, aged 6; and Earl Weyman, aged 7, are three very well-behaved and modest in their requests for Christmas favors. Frank Jacobson, aged 9, is the brother of Earl Weyman, and he is a boy that I shall ever remember. His face in particular is that of a perpetually smiling imp, but I must say that he is an amusing little fellow. He is a boy that I shall ever remember. His face in particular is that of a perpetually smiling imp, but I must say that he is an amusing little fellow.

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"Boys," I howled, "take things easy. One at a time, please."

"I forgot," said William, the orator. "I want a football."

"All right, William," I acquiesced, "and Elmer, what would you like?"

"Now, Elmer is an odd-looking boy, rather gawky in appearance, red-headed and freckled. He impressed me as being given to tales of 'Wild Dick, the

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"Why of course," she replied gently, her eyes dancing with amusement.

"I am serious," said I, feeling that she was mocking me.

"I was never more serious in my life," replied Mabel with a laugh.

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A MORE beautiful tale than that of the delightful old fraud, Santa Claus has never been told, and it is truly doubtful whether some pre-emptive romance with an imaginative and prolific brain may conceivably be a more pleasing delusion. Not a child lives that has not at one time during its life believed sincerely, the time-worn story of a jolly old fellow, garbed in a suit of red, fringed with immaculate fur, his face of a rosy hue and bedecked with a shaggy and generous gray beard, who with an amply filled sack of glittering toys, surreptitiously slipped down the chimney to hide a doll or a horn or a box of sweets in the stocking which adorned the mantelpiece. But sad, indeed, is the cruel awakening of the young mind and the shaking of that implicit belief of the existence of old Kris Kringle.

The years wear on and the children who grew incredulous now tell the same old tale to their children; the tale that has been handed down from generation to generation, and yet, well as I know that the myth is accepted by some children with the same sincerity as of old, I was a little curious to learn just how far the delusion might be practiced upon children who are without homes and without loving mothers and fathers to tell the glorious story.

Actuated by this desire I wended my way to the Boys' and Girls' Aid Society where I made known my wish. Mr. Gardner, the superintendent, received me very courteously and after showing me where the institution resorted to the boys' recreation room, where he introduced me to two little youngsters of 6 and 7. The younger was Lester Dutcher, and a knowing waif is he. He was but a little as regards age, and his hair of that light time, peculiarly Teutonic, was cropped so short that it made him look amusing. His complexion was not unlike ivory and his eyes, his eyes decidedly black and his mouth small. I put little Lester on my knee. I was a little embarrassed and did not know just how to word my first query, but hazarded:

"Well, Lester, how old are you?"

"Don't know," was his reply.

"I know," chimed in Charles, hastening to enlighten me, saying: "He's 6 and I'm 7."

"Well, Lester," said I, "I am surprised that you did not know your age. Perhaps you may tell me something about Santa Claus."

"Santa Claus," repeated he, looking up at me inquiringly.

"Yes, you have seen him, of course, and can tell me what he looks like," I suggested.

My answer was a smile. Charles, however, was better informed and cried gleefully:

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