

MERRY CHRISTMAS

well do that. He happens to be standing outside in the street at this moment."

"Outside!" I exclaimed. "Why won't he come in?"

"He's afraid to," said Father Time. "He's frightened and he daren't come in unless you ask him. May I call him in?"

I signified assent, and Father Time went to the window for a moment and beckoned into the darkened street. Then I heard footsteps, clumsy and hesitant they seemed, upon the stairway. And in a moment a figure stood framed in the doorway—the figure of Father Christmas. He stood shuffling his feet, a timid, apologetic look upon his face.

How changed he was!

I had known in my mind's eye from childhood the face and form of Father Christmas as well as that of Old Time himself. Everybody knows, or once knew him—a jolly little rounded man, with a great muffler wound about him, a packet of toys upon his back, and with such merry, twinkling eyes and rosy cheeks as are only given by the touch of the driving snow and the rude fun of the North Wind. Why, there was once a time, not yet so long ago, when the very sound of his sleigh-