

MERRY CHRISTMAS

He looked about him, as it were, with a new and kindling interest.

"A pleasant room," he said, "and what better, sir, than the wind without and a brave fire within!"

Then his eye fell upon the mantelpiece, where lay among the litter of books and pipes a little toy horse.

"Ah!" said Father Christmas, almost gayly, "children in the house!"

"One," I answered, "the sweetest boy in all the world."

"I'll be bound he is!" said Father Christmas, and he broke now into a merry laugh that did one's heart good to hear. "They all are! Lord bless me! The number that I have seen, and each and every one—and quite right, too—the sweetest child in all the world! And how old, do you say? Two and a half all but two months except a week? The very sweetest age of all, I'll bet you say, eh, what? They all do!"

And the old man broke again into such a jolly chuckling of laughter that his snow-white locks shook upon his head.

"But stop a bit," he added. "This horse is broken—tut, tut,—a hind leg nearly off. This won't do!"