

CHAPTER II

THE GRAND FEAST

LADY HARRIET GRAHAM was an extremely thin, delicate, old lady, with a very pale face and a sweet, gentle voice, which the children delighted to hear, for it always spoke kindly to them, and sounded like music, after the loud, rough tones of Mrs. Crabtree. She wore her own grey hair, which had become almost as white as the widow's cap which covered her head. The rest of her dress was generally black velvet, and she usually sat in a comfortable arm-chair by the fireside, watching her grandchildren at play, with a large work-bag by her side, and a prodigious Bible open on the table before her. Lady Harriet often said that it made her young again to see the joyous gambols of Harry and Laura : and when unable any longer to bear their noise, she sometimes kept them quiet by telling them the most delightful stories about what had happened to herself when she was young.

Once upon a time, however, Lady Harriet suddenly became so very ill that Dr. Bell said she must spend a few days in the country, for change of air, and accordingly she determined on passing a quiet

week at Holiday House with her relations, Lord and Lady Rockville. Meanwhile, Harry and Laura were to be left under the sole care of Mrs. Crabtree ; so it might have been expected that they would both feel more frightened of her, now that she was reigning monarch of the house, than ever. Harry would obey those he loved, if they only held up a little finger, but all the terrors of Mrs. Crabtree were generally forgotten soon after she left the room ; therefore he thought little at first about the many threats she held out, if he behaved ill, but he listened most seriously when his dear, sick grandmamma told him, in a faint, weak voice, on the day of her departure from home, how very well he ought to behave in her absence, as no one remained but the maids to keep him in order, and that she hoped Mrs. Crabtree would write her a letter full of good news about his excellent conduct.

Harry felt as if he would gladly sit still without stirring till his grandmamma came back, if that could only please her ; and there never was any one more determined to be a good boy than he, at the moment when Lady Harriet's carriage came round to the door. Laura, Frank and Harry helped to carry all the pillows, boxes, books and baskets, which were necessary for the journey, of which there seemed to be about fifty ; then they arranged the cushions as comfortably as possible, and watched very sorrowfully when their grandmamma, after kindly embracing them both, was carefully supported by Major Graham and her own

maid, Harrison, into the chariot. Uncle David gave each of the children a pretty picture-book before taking leave, and said, as he was stepping into the carriage, " Now, children ! I have only one piece of serious, important advice to give you all, so attend to me ! Never crack nuts with your teeth."

When the carriage had driven off, Mrs. Crabtree became so busy scolding Betty, and storming at Jack, the foot-boy, for not cleaning her shoes well enough, that she left Harry and Laura standing in the passage, not knowing exactly what they ought to do first, and Frank, seeing them looking rather melancholy and bewildered at the loss of their grandmamma, stopped a moment as he passed on the way to school, and said in a very kind, affectionate voice,—

" Now, Harry and Laura, listen, both of you—here is a grand opportunity to show everybody that we can be trusted to ourselves, without getting into any scrapes ; so that if grandmamma is ever ill again and obliged to go away, she need not feel so sad and anxious as she did to-day. I mean to become nine times more attentive to my lessons than usual this morning, to show how trustworthy we are, and if you are wise, pray march straight up to the nursery yourselves. I have arranged a gown and cap of Mrs. Crabtree's on the large arm-chair, to look as like herself as possible, that you may be reminded how soon she will come back, and you must not behave