

HOLIDAY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

CHIT CHAT

LAURA and Harry Graham could scarcely feel sure that they ever had a mamma, because she died while they were yet very young indeed ; but Frank, who was some years older, recollected perfectly well what pretty playthings she used to give him, and missed his kind, good mamma so extremely, that he one day asked if he might " go to a shop and buy a new mamma ? "

When his mamma, Lady Graham, after a long and painful illness, was at last taken away to the better world, for which she had been many years preparing, her only sorrow and anxiety seemed to be that she left behind her three such very dear children, who were now to be entirely under the care of their papa, Sir Edward Graham ; and it was with many prayers and tears that she tried to make her mind more easy about their future education and future happiness.

Sir Edward felt such extreme grief on the death of Lady Graham, that instead of being able to remain at home with his young family, and to

interest his mind as he would wish to have done, by attending to them, he was ordered by Dr. Bell to set off immediately for Paris, Rome, and Naples, where it was hoped he might leave his distresses behind him while he travelled, or, at all events, forget them.

Luckily the children had a very good, kind uncle, Major David Graham, and their grandmamma, Lady Harriet Graham, who were both exceedingly happy to take charge of them, observing that no house could be cheerful without a few little people being there, and that now they would have constant amusement in trying to make Frank, Harry, and Laura as happy as possible, and even still happier.

"That is the thing I am almost afraid of!" said Sir Edward, smiling. "Uncles and grandmamas are only too kind, and my small family will be quite spoiled with indulgence."

"Not if you leave that old vixen, Mrs. Crabtree, as governor of the nursery," answered Major Graham, laughing. "I believe there never was such a tyrant since the time when nurserymaids were invented."

"She means it all well. I am certain that Mrs. Crabtree is devotedly fond of my children, and would go through fire and water to serve them; but she is a little severe, perhaps. Her idea is, that if you never forgive a first fault, you will never hear of a second, which is probably true enough. At all events, her harshness will be the best remedy for your extreme indulgence; there-

fore let me beg that you and my mother will seldom interfere with her 'method,' especially in respect to Harry and Laura. As for Frank, he is too old for nursery discipline now, and he goes to sea next year, with my friend Gordon, who has promised to rate him as a volunteer of the first class, on board the *Thunderbolt*."

In spite of Mrs. Crabtree's admirable "system" with children, Harry and Laura became, from this time, two of the most heedless, frolicsome beings in the world, and had to be punished frequently. When Lady Harriet and Major Graham spoke kindly to Harry and Laura about anything wrong that had been done, they both felt more sad and sorry than after the severest punishments of Mrs. Crabtree, who frequently observed, that "if those children were shut up in a dark room alone, with nothing to do, they would still find some way of being mischievous."

"Harry!" said Major Graham one day, "you remind me of a monkey which belonged to the colonel of our regiment. He was famous for contriving to play all sorts of pranks when no one supposed them to be possible, and I recollect once having a valuable French clock, which the malicious creature seemed particularly determined to break. Many a time I caught him in the act, and saved my beautiful clock; but one day, being suddenly summoned out of the room, I hastily fastened his chain to a table, so that he could not possibly, even at the full extent of his paw, so