

The Qualities of Mercy

BOOK I

CHILDHOOD

CHAPTER I

A FIRST ADVENTURE

MERCY was six years old. The seventh birthday of which she thought such great things was looming upon the horizon of her sky. In six weeks it would be here. But six weeks sounds to six years a period of portentous length.

"When I am seven I shall be growed up," Mercy asserted; and Captain Muggs, who knew most things, wagged an assenting tail. The quality of Mercy's r's was still somewhat uncertain, though her grandmother, Lady Sarah Quentin, took great pains to teach the child a clear enunciation and a correct method of speech. As Mercy lived her life almost entirely amongst grown-ups, and was of an observant and initiative turn, her powers of expression were in advance of her years; and so, perhaps, were some of her ideas.

"Gwown-up people go out when they like. I *fink* I will go out too, by myself, with you, Muggy darling; and p'waps if we do we'll have an adventure."

This was how it came about that, upon a particularly charming day in late April, Mercy, attended by Captain Muggs, committed that audacious breach of rule which she afterwards spoke of as "wunning away."

Captain Muggs was Mercy's shadow. The pair were