

## 10 THE QUALITIES OF MERCY

seldom seen apart. He shared her games ; he attended her walks ; her day-nursery was his citadel, and he slept at the door of her night-nursery. He lay in the hall when she took her dinner with her grandparents and a fluctuating company of uncles and aunts in the big panelled dining-room. When the uncles were at home, it was a regular and delightful game to see which of them could smuggle in Captain Muggs, and keep him hidden under the table from the Argus eyes of the grandparents ! Mercy would choke and gurgle with laughter, and grow hot and cold with excitement as the meal proceeded. She would feel the dog's blunt nose upon her knee, and quiver and shiver with a sense of the enormity of somebody's courage, and the certainty of eventual discovery.

Sometimes grandmother would lift her delicately aquiline nose and give a little sniff. . . . " I am sure there is a dog in the room," she would say. Or grandfather would catch somebody surreptitiously feeding Captain Muggs, and would stamp his foot upon the floor with a stern word of command : " Get out, you brute ! "

Then the brindled dog would fly, the butler holding the door for his exit with as much ceremony as though he were one of the family, which he was in Mercy's eyes.

He was her own discovery—her special protégé. It was she who had seen a wicked man beating the lanky, half-starved puppy, and had sacrificed a bright half-crown recently bestowed by Uncle Alec to save the poor dog, whom she had carried home in her mailcart, and taken with a long story to grandpapa, who had suffered her to keep the creature under certain well-defined conditions.

" A mongrel, my dear ; nothing but a mongrel," he had told her ; but Mercy loved him all the better for that. It was the uncles who had dubbed him " Muggs " ; partly because of his mongrel parentage, partly because of his broad blunt nose and jowl—" a fine old mug of his own " Uncle Frank had called it. But as Mercy was not quite sure that she liked the name of Muggs, the soldier uncle gave him " brevet rank "—whatever that might be—and Captain Muggs became an institution at Quentin Easter.