

**A TANTALUS CUP;  
A NOVEL. IN THREE  
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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A tantalus cup; a novel. In three volumes, Vol. I by Mrs. Harry Bennett-Edwards

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**MRS. HARRY BENNETT-EDWARDS**

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A NOVEL. IN THREE  
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# A TANTALUS CUP.

A Novel.

BY  
MRS. HARRY BENNETT-EDWARDS.

" Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
And our hearts, though strong and brave,  
Still like muffled drums are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave."  
LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1879.

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## A TANTALUS CUP.



### CHAPTER I.

'HE's so ill-tempered, so morose—no one likes him.'

It was only a child they criticised; and they were right, for he was what they had made him. Not as he came from his Creator's hand, not Divine work; but human, and so they despised him. He was a reproach to them for their little care, their feeble intellect, which could not mould even a child into anything better than a creature 'so morose, so bad-tempered' that no one liked him.

They were an honourable family, and a pious ; much respected by their neighbours, and without self-reproach. It is easy to be honest where there is no temptation to sin ; easy to be pious where religion demands nothing beyond its outward observance ; easy to be respected when the purse is well filled and the table well covered.

They were irreproachable.

Is there value in numbers ? They were many, and each a reflection one of the other ; rapid emanations from a primary body, the composition of which they partook. There were variations, mixtures and admixtures, combinations and subtractions ; but the primary element remained pure and unadulterated in all. They were narrow-minded, they were bigoted ; Expansion, Space, Universe, Progression, Eternity, were meaningless words to them—vague terms ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’

But they were Christians, and that was enough.

Each child as it came to them had been conscientiously placed on the straight road of conventional uprightness, and followed it unswervingly ; all except one, and he was so morose, so bad-tempered, that no one liked him.

‘The devil stood godfather to him,’ the nurse said.

‘He is a fool,’ his sisters and brothers sneered.

‘Don’t notice him,’ replied his mother and father. And they did not notice him.

They were a handsome family, with the exception of the pale-faced, fair-haired, dreamy-eyed boy for whose sins his Satanic Majesty had stood sponsor, and seemed to be fulfilling his duties with at least as much zeal as is shown by terrestrial god-parents on behalf of those for whose redemption they make themselves answerable.



He was a wicked child. Listen.

One day he had drawn a picture, after a week's toil, and he had framed it in a magnificent chipped out paper frame, painted blue, and gold, and scarlet. The subject was God upon His throne, with the angels around Him, and the devils at His feet. The boy brought it to his mother, that she might admire the completed work of art. She took it from his hand, and scolding him for his profanity, tossed it into the fire, whilst he stood by her side horrorstricken at the sacrilege; for it was a sacred thing in his sight. He painted no more—then.

At another time he was in a passion—a wild burning rage—and he ran to his father, eyes, lips, and cheeks all aglow with anger :

The gardener had whipped his favourite dog 'wid' a great big stick till it was nearly quite dead.'

'And why had John been so cruel?' his father asked.

'Only 'cos Boss did run into a great heap of flower-pots, and wagged them all down with his tail.'

'And what was planted in the pots?'

'On'y them orchidisses you bought last week.'

'The brute! the *brute!* I'll have him killed; beating indeed! serve him right!'

And the father hastened away, to see for himself the extent of the injury his cherished orchids had sustained. The child clenched his little hands and screamed aloud in his passionate indignation, hugging the dog, which with limping steps had followed him into the house, and lavishing words of the tenderest pity upon the worthless cur. 'You didn't know you was going to wag 'em over, did you, Boss? poor Boss! they shan't kill you, for I'll kill 'em all first, that I will.'

'What are you going to kill now, you

cruel boy?' said his eldest sister, listening at the door.

'Anybody what kills Boss,' said the boy, standing up and looking defiance at the intruder.

'If this is the effect Boss has upon your temper,' said his sister, 'the sooner you and he are parted the better.'

And she caught the dog out of his small protecting arms, which clung to it with super-human strength. She left the room, and she left the boy raving like a little maniac. His mother heard him, and was told the horrible thing he had said; she sent him upstairs, and he was put to bed by nurse, whose last words before she left him were, 'That he would come to the gallows some day.'

He wished he might.

He never saw his dog again; he never asked what they had done with it, he only hated his sister, who with placid voice had