

**NEMESIS: A POEM,  
IN FOUR CANTOS**

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Nemesis: A Poem, in Four Cantos by John Bruce Norton

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**JOHN BRUCE NORTON**

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N E M E S I S:

A Poem,

IN FOUR CANTOS.

BY

JOHN BRUCE NORTON.

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1861.

Not always, nor on light occasion, I  
Seek with the crowd, nay, oft refuse, to sing,  
Lest weak should grow the too oft shaken string ;  
But treasure up and ponder silently  
Subjects for verse, which Earth, and Sea, and Sky,  
Each in the harmonious beauty of its kind,  
Wakes in the pensive Poet's tuneful mind.—  
Yet will I once, if only, ere I die,  
Concentrate all my gather'd thought in song ;  
One full strong burst, stronger because suppress'd :  
So doth the fabled bird in death prolong  
Strains a whole life-time pent within his breast :—  
So grows that Indian tree which lives to shoot  
Forth but a single bunch of luscious fruit.

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## P R E L U D E.

---

Oh! for a life of ages to enquire  
Into the wonderful, the true, the bright;  
Oh! for a pen dipt in a stream of fire,  
To chronicle in lines of living light  
The crowding forms that burst on fancy's sight.  
Oh! for such language as the Angelic train  
Utters in song before His throne, to write  
The perishing thought; for human words are vain  
To clothe the evanescent creatures of the brain.

So some rapt painter's night-born visions see  
Distinct, unveil'd a moment to his eyes,  
The tremulous outline of Divinity;  
Instant he starts, and on the canvass tries  
To catch the fleeting image 'ere it flies;  
Compares the faulty colours with his dream;  
Owns the work vain, and o'er his labour sighs—  
But hush—these querulous complainings seem  
Unfit—enough that I may deck an humble theme.



Not of vast cities, nor of mighty wars,  
 Heroic deeds, the birth of gods and kings,  
 Nor Commerce seeking undiscovered shores,  
 My rustic muse, tho' far too boldly, sings ;  
 But as a young bird, on time-practis'd wings  
 The Empyrean mounts with longer flight,  
 For loftier themes, in louder strains, she springs ;  
 Surveys new scenes with newly strengthen'd sight ;  
 Yet loves the fields and groves where first she saw the light.

Here not alone, as in first youth she wont,  
 Her warblings are of hill, and daisied vale,  
 Of leafy wood, or grassy-margin'd fount,  
 The sunny streamlet, and the shadowy dale ;  
 With sterner voice she would essay the tale  
 Of human passions check'd not in their rage,  
 And the sad meed of which they seldom fail ;  
 So love and falsehood mingle in the page,  
 And all the various acts of man usurp the stage.

## CANTO I.

---

He who hath stray'd by silver Darrent' side,  
If the more beaten track his steps forsook,  
Perchance hath mark'd a noiseless current glide  
Into its bosom from a winding brook ;  
Nor distant far, reclaim'd from woods, a nook  
Under the shelter of a friendly hill,  
Where nodding beech and feathery larch o'erlook  
A simple cot beside the pent-up rill,  
Which, from its course aside, there turns a noisy mill.

Thrown o'er the streamlet, by its bending ridge  
A tree gives access to that quiet place,  
Where those who trust them to the slippery bridge  
And slender rail, oft love to lean, and trace  
O'er the green flags the rapid waters race  
The narrow slope of velvet sward around  
A few tall hops with dark luxuriance grace ;  
The cot itself with creeping flowers is bound  
Up to the gabled thatch, with ivied chimnies crown'd.

High o'er the rustic porch long taught to twine,  
 Fair clematis her purple sister greets,  
 And blushing roses blend with eglantine,  
 Colours with colours vie, and sweets with sweets ;  
 On either side beneath, two time-worn seats  
 Of polish'd oak on rude supporters spring ;  
 Secure from rains or dews, or mists or heats—  
 Dear spot ! what checker'd memories dost thou bring,  
 Scene of the latest joys and earliest griefs I sing.

Of, but it boots not how long since, were seen  
 Two figures close together seated there,  
 When evening winds breath'd through the leafy screen ;  
 An old man one, with silvery-flowing hair,  
 And forehead wrinkled o'er by time or care ;  
 The other, in fresh youth, a playful child,  
 Whose flaxen locks fell o'er her shoulders fair ;  
 And when he press'd her ringlets waving wild,  
 She ever and anon look'd up at him, and smil'd.

'Twas thus they mostly sate ; an ancient book,  
 With brazen clasps, upon his knees was spread ;  
 The while with trembling tones, and anxious look,  
 From off the old black-letter'd page she read,  
 To whose dark lines his pointing finger led ;  
 Upon an ebon stick the old man leant,  
 And with attentive ear inclin'd his head ;  
 With eyes half clos'd, and body forward bent,  
 He listen'd how the tales of former ages went.