



The Poetry of Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton - Volume 6: Volume 6

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Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton was born in London on March 22nd 1808. One of three sisters famed for their beauty and talents they became known as 'The Three Graces'. In 1817 her father died whilst serving as the Colonial Secretary at the Cape of Good Hope and the family was left penniless but able to arrange a 'grace and favour' apartment at Hampton Court for several years. In 1827 Caroline married George Chapple Norton a barrister and Member of Parliament. Caroline used her beauty, wit, and political connections, to establish herself as a society hostess. Her unorthodox behaviour and candid conversation raised eyebrows among 19th-century British high society; ensuring enemies and admirers in equal measure. In spite of his jealousy and pride, Norton encouraged his wife to use her connections to advance his career. With her influence in 1831 he was made a Metropolitan Police Magistrate. But their marriage proved unhappy. Norton was unsuccessful as a barrister and the couple fought bitterly over money. During these difficult years, Caroline turned to prose and poetry. Her first book, *The Sorrows of Rosalie* (1829), was well received. *The Undying One* (1830), a romance founded upon the legend of the Wandering Jew soon followed. By 1836, Caroline had left her husband and was living on her earnings as an author, but Norton claimed these, arguing in court that, as her husband, Caroline's earnings were legally his. Paid nothing by her husband, her earnings confiscated, Caroline used the law to her own advantage by running up bills in her husband's name and telling the creditors when they came to collect, that if they wished to be paid, they could sue her husband. Norton abducted their children and refused to tell Caroline of their whereabouts and accused her of an ongoing affair with her close friend, Lord Melbourne, the Whig Prime Minister. He demanded £10,000 from Melbourne, who refused to be blackmailed, and Norton took him to court. The trial lasted nine days, and victory was Melbourne's. However, the publicity almost brought down the government. Caroline's reputation was ruined as was her friendship with Lord Melbourne. Vindictively Norton continued to prevent Caroline seeing her three sons, and blocked her from receiving a divorce. According to British law in 1836, children were the legal property of their father, and there was little Caroline could do to regain custody. In 1842 her son William was out riding and fell from his horse. According to Caroline, the wounds were minor; but not properly treated and blood-poisoning set in. Norton, realising that the child was near death, sent for Caroline but William died before she arrived in Scotland. Caroline became passionately involved in the passage of laws promoting social justice, especially those granting rights to married and divorced women. Her poems "A Voice from the Factories" (1836) and "The Child of the Islands" (1845) centred around her political views. Legally unable to divorce her husband, Caroline engaged in a five-year affair with prominent Conservative politician Sidney Herbert in the early 1840s. The affair ended with his marriage to another in 1846. With the death of George Norton in 1875 she married an old friend, Scottish historical writer and politician Sir W. Stirling Maxwell in March 1877. Caroline died in London three months later on June 15th.

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