

**NORTON: THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF CAROLINE NORTON (1808-1877)**

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## *Publisher's Note*

Caroline Norton's life reads like a rather improbable Victorian melodrama. She was born on 22 March 1808, the third child of Caroline Henrietta (née Callander - a novelist) and Thomas Sheridan (a poet, soldier and colonial administrator - son of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the dramatist.) Whilst they had a certain celebrity status, they were not wealthy, and her father was sickly. He left for the Cape of Good Hope for the sake of his health, together with her mother and eldest sister, Helen, when Caroline was only five. Caroline and Georgiana were sent to Scotland, while her elder brother, also named Richard Brinsley Sheridan, was at school. By the time she was nine her father had died. Her mother returned and the family was brought together again, living in a grace and favour residence in Hampton Park. There were now three boys (Richard, Frank and Charles - the latter two born at the Cape) and three girls (Helen, Caroline and Georgiana) all having to be cared for on a meagre pension.

The three girls (known widely as the 'Three Graces') felt some pressure to marry. At the age of fifteen Caroline was taken on a visit to Womersley Park, the home of Lord Grantley, by her governess. Beautiful and high-spirited, Caroline made a strong impression on George Norton, heir to the estate, and he proposed marriage to her. She was not sure, and did not love him, so he was told to wait for 3 years until she had reached the age of eighteen and had come out in society. In the meantime, Helen married in 1826 to Captain Price Blackwood, heir to Lord Dufferin. She was also uneasy to start with, but grew to love her husband. Caroline had hoped to receive other offers but, despite being named one of the twelve prettiest debutantes at Almack's, she did not. With her younger sister, Georgiana - "the beauty" - attracting much greater attention, Caroline was terrified of "living and dying a lonely old maid." As such, when George Norton repeat his offer, she accepted. They married on 30 June 1827. He was 26, she was 19. Her situation was similar to that of one of her characters in her novel, *Stuart of Dunleath* - "She had married a man she did not love; whom she did not profess to love; for certain advantages - to avoid certain pressing miseries."

Fresh miseries piled upon her. Her husband was frequently drunk and he beat her. Her fame - as a Sheridan and also as a poet - only served to inflame his temper. Her quick tongue and refusal to succumb provoked him further. The only relief was the birth of their son, Fletcher - on whom they both doted - and the publication of her book, *The Sorrows of Rosalie, a Tale with other poems* (1829). James Hogg praised this highly in *Noctes Ambrosianae* and it shows similarities in style and effect to Byron's verse.

Caroline took refuge in literary and political society, which George Norton only condoned because he hoped for some appointment or sinecure. Their new home at Storey's Gate became a noted Salon and Lord Melbourne - then Home Secretary, later Prime Minister - became a regular visitor. Other visitors included Disraeli, Abraham Hayward, Bulwer Lytton, and Samuel Rogers. George Norton was uncomfortable in such company and continued to physically assault her after the guests had gone.

Another two children followed, Brinsley in 1831 and William Charles in 1834, and there were patches of happiness, but the arguments grew worse and worse. Even though George Norton gained a lucrative position from Melbourne as a magistrate in the Metropolitan Police Courts (at £1,000 per annum), he was jealous when she was made editor of *La Belle Assemblée and Court Magazine*, claiming that it occupied too much of her time. On one occasion, when she was pregnant again, he threw her down a flight of stairs, causing her to miscarry. On another, he half strangled her. The Sheridan family refused further contact with him and the relationship went beyond the point of reconciliation when, in April 1836, Caroline Norton returned from her a visit to her sister to find that the children had been sent away and she was locked out of their house.

It was at this point that she learned that she was named in a divorce suit - George Norton suing her on the basis of her affections for Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister. *Norton vs Melbourne, 1836*, was a sensational scandal and the press had a field day. The Tories made political capital over the embarrassment of their Whig rivals. The accusations were ungrounded and the divorce suit failed, but Caroline Norton realised how weak women were in the eyes of the law. At that time woman had no legal status and all of their property belonged to the husband, who also had automatic rights to the custody of the children. In her own case that meant that George stopped her from seeing her children and received all the royalties from her poetry. As she was to say later, "I have no rights; I have only wrongs" (*Thrupps vs Norton, 1853*.)

Caroline Norton decided that enough was enough and embarked on a career of campaigning to change the law. Her first campaign concerned the custody of children. Her lawyer friend Abraham Hayward introduced her to Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, serjeant-at-law and Member of Parliament for Reading. Having had considerable experience in child custody cases, he was already considering proposing a Bill on the subject. She wrote a number of pamphlets to plead the case that the prime concern should be the well-being of the children. Chief of these was *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill* (1839) written under the pseudonym of Pearce Stevenson. The Infant Custody Bill was duly passed in Parliament that year, but Caroline Norton was still largely denied access to her children. The few meetings that she had with them were heart-rending encounters, often ending with the children being forced out of her embrace. Her last meeting with all of them was at Christmas 1841, when she spent a whole week with them. In July 1842, William had a riding accident, fell ill and died before his mother could see him. After this, George Norton relented and allowed the remaining two boys to spend half the year with their mother.

Her literary career continued with the publication of *The Dream* (1840), *The Child of the Islands* (1845) and *Aunt Carry's Ballads* (1847), the first of which earned her the title of the "Byron of her sex" from the *Quarterly* magazine.

In 1848 she signed what amounted to a separation agreement with her husband, in which he guaranteed her an allowance of £500 per year, while she granted him access to a Trust Fund account and agreed to meet her own expenses. He soon reneged on the allowance when he learned that she had received legacies on the death of Lord Melbourne (who swore to her innocence on his death-bed) and her mother totalling £680 per annum. George Norton declared their agreement null and void on account of the fact that she was still his wife and, as such, was unable to make a contract. She retaliated by presenting a bill to him (from Thrupps, the carriage-makers, for £47) which she was unable to pay. He refused to pay and *Thrupps vs Norton, 1853*, was the result. Caroline Norton lost this case, as the bill had been presented to her before George Norton had reneged on the payments, but the case spurred her into action once again, this time to campaign for the right of married women to have a clear legal existence, to divorce, and to own property.

In 1854 she put her case forward in *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* (a full html text of this document is freely available on the internet at The Victorian Women Writers Project [Indiana] web site.) This was followed in 1855 with *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill*. The Bill became law in 1857 and gave women

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the right to inherit and bequeath property, to sue and be sued, to make contracts, and to keep her earnings if she had been deserted by her husband. Above all, it gave married women existence in the eyes of the law. The Bill was further strengthened in 1870.

During this period, Caroline Norton continued to earn a living as an author, publishing *The Lady of La Garaye* (1862) (often regarded as her finest poem), *Lost and Saved* (1863) (praised by *The Examiner* as, "A novel of rare excellence. ... Mrs Norton's best prose work"), *Old Sir Douglas* (1868) and *The Rose of Jericho* (1870).

Fletcher, died of tuberculosis in 1859, leaving Brinsley as a her sole surviving son. He acceded to the peerage in 1875 when both George Norton and his elder brother, Lord Grantley, died in 1875. Caroline Norton was free at last and, despite poor health, she married a long time friend, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, on 1 March 1877. Less than three months later, on 15 June 1877, she died - but it had been a happy coda to a troubled life. Her life is said to have inspired George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*.

Caroline Norton did not live to see the passage of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1882, but she had long since passed the torch to Barbara Leigh Smith (Bodichon) who was a more forthright advocate of the equality of women.

This project brings together the poetry, novels and pamphlets of Caroline Norton including *The Sorrows of Rosalie* (1829), *The Undying One* (1830), *The Wife and Woman's Reward* (1835), *The Coquette* (1835), *A Voice from the Factories* (1836), *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor* (1839), *The Dream* (1840), *The Child of the Islands* (1845), *Aunt Carry's Ballads* (1847), *Letters to the Mob* (1848), *Tales & Sketches* (1850), *Stuart of Dunleath* (1851), *A Letter to the Queen* (1855), *The Lady of La Garaye* (1862), *Lost and Saved* (1863), *Old Sir Douglas* (1868) and *The Rose of Jericho* (1870). There are also collections of her prose and poetry from the *Court Magazine* and *The English Annual*.

We are grateful to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and Cambridge University Library for permission to film volumes for this publication.

### Useful Web Sites to consult include:

A Celebration of Women Writers at <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~mmbt/women>  
(includes a biography and bibliography of Norton and links to a number of texts.)  
Victorian Web Sites at <http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Victorian.html>  
(the most comprehensive list of web sites on Victorian literature.)  
Victorian Women Writers Project  
at <http://www.indiana.edu/~lettrs/vwwp/vwwp-collection.html> (a substantial site with many html texts.)

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*Aunt Carry's Ballads for Children: Adventures of a Wood Sprite*, together with *The story of Blanche and Brutikin*. With illustrations by John Absolon.  
54pp + 8 illustrations. Joseph Cundall, London, 1847.

*The Child of the Islands, a poem*.  
xvi + 238pp. Chapman & Hall, London, 1845.

*The Coquette, and other Tales and Sketches in prose and verse*.  
Reprinted from the Court Magazine.  
2 vols, 247pp and 264pp. Edward Churton, London, 1835.

### REEL TWO

*The Dream, and other poems*.  
x + 301pp. Henry Colburn, London, 1840.

*The Lady of La Garaye (a True Story)*.  
2nd ed, 128 + (16)pp. Macmillan & Co, Cambridge, 1862.

*The English Annual for 1836*.  
(vi) + 376pp. Edward Churton, London, 1836.

### REEL THREE

*The Sorrows of Rosalie or, Love's Sacrifice, a Tale, with other poems*.  
xiv + 134pp. John Ebers & Co, London, 1829.

*The Undying One, and other poems*.  
2nd ed, viii + 272pp. Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, London, 1830.

*A Voice from the Factories, in serious verse*.  
Dedicated to the Right Honourable Lord Ashley. (Published anonymously.)  
40pp. John Murray, London, 1836.

*A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill*, by Pearce Stevenson, Esq (pseudonym.)  
124pp, James Ridgway, London, 1839.

*Letters to the Mob, by Libertas* (pseudonym.)  
Three Anti-Chartist letters reprinted from the Morning Chronicle, 1848.  
21pp. Thomas Bosworth, London, 1848.

*A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill*.  
155pp. Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1855.

*Remarks upon the Law of Marriage and Divorce, suggested by the Hon Mrs Norton's letter to the Queen*.  
47pp. James Ridgway, London, 1855.

### REEL FOUR

*The Wife and Woman's Reward*.  
3 vols, 308, 311 and 297pp. Saunders and Otley, London, 1835.

*Tales and Sketches in prose and verse*.  
(Churton's Library for the Million, Part III.)

*Part I was A History of Charlemagne* by G P R James and *Part II was History of the Conquest of Mexico* by the Revd J Hobart Caunter.)  
vi + 188pp. Churton, London, 1850.

### REEL FIVE

*Stuart of Dunleath: A Story of Modern Times*.  
3 vols, xii + 290, 299 and 345pp. Colburn & Co, London, 1851.

*The Rose of Jericho*. (Translated from the French.)  
Called by the Germans, "*Weinachts-Rose*;" or, *Christmas Rose*.  
viii + 162 + xvpp. Tinsley Brothers, London, 1870.

### REEL SIX

*Lost and Saved.*

3 vols, x + 294, vi + 301 and vi + 308pp. Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, successors to Henry Colburn, London, 1863.

**REEL SEVEN**

*Old Sir Douglas.*

3 vols, vii + 308, 307 and 308pp. Hurst and Blackett, London, 1868.

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## *Detailed List*

### REEL ONE

#### **Aunt Carry's Ballads for Children:**

Adventures of a Wood Sprite, together with The story of Blanche and Brutikin.  
With illustrations by John Absolon.  
54pp + 8 illustrations. Joseph Cundall, London, 1847.  
Written for Edith and Brinsley Sheridan (her niece and nephew.)

#### **The Child of the Islands, a poem.**

xvi + 238pp. Chapman & Hall, London, 1845.  
Dedicated to her brother, Richard Brinsley Sheridan.  
A poem on class and the condition of the English people.

#### **The Coquette, and other Tales and Sketches in prose and verse.**

Reprinted from the *Court Magazine*.  
2 vols, 247pp and 264pp. Edward Churton, London, 1835.

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#### **The Dream, and other poems.**

x + 301pp. Henry Colburn, London, 1840.  
Dedicated to her grace the Duchess of Sutherland, this work was widely praised - earning the title of "*the Byron of poetesses*" from Henry Nelson Coleridge in the *Quarterly* magazine.

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## **The Lady of La Garaye (a True Story.)**

2nd ed, 128 + (16)pp. Macmillan & Co, Cambridge, 1862.

Based on a true story, this tells the story of a French noblewoman, the Countess of La Garaye, who is injured during a hunting accident, but instead of succumbing to self-pity, helps to establish a hospital for the poor.

## **The English Annual for 1836.**

(vi) + 376pp. Edward Churton, London, 1836.

Caroline Norton was the editor of this Journal from 1834 to 1838.

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## REEL THREE

### **The Sorrows of Rosalie or, Love's Sacrifice, a Tale, with other poems.**

xiv + 134pp. John Ebers & Co, London, 1829.

Dedicated to Lord Holland, this was Caroline Norton's first serious publication (she had co-authored *The Dandies Rout* with her sister when she was thirteen). It was written in the early years of her unhappy marriage.

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### **The Undying One, and other poems.**

2nd ed, viii + 272pp. Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, London, 1830.

A version of the legend of the Wandering Jew.

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## **A Voice from the Factories, in serious verse.**

4Opp. John Murray, London, 1836.  
Published anonymously, this was an appeal on behalf of factory children.  
From the Dedication to the Right Honourable Lord Ashley.

*"... as the noble-hearted and compassionate Howard became immortally connected with the removal of the abuses which for centuries disgraced our prison discipline; as the perseverance of Wilberforce created the dawn of the long-delayed emancipation of the negroes: - so, my Lord, I trust to see your name enrolled with the names of these great and good men, as the Liberator and Defender of those helpless beings, on whom are inflicted many of the evils both of slavery and imprisonment, without the odium of either."*  
London, October, 1836

"Ever a toiling child doth make us sad:  
'Tis an unnatural and mournful sight,  
Because we feel their smiles should be so glad,  
Because we know their eyes should be so bright.  
What is it, then, when, tasked beyond their might,  
They labour all day long for others' gain, -  
Nay, trespass on the still and pleasant night,  
While uncompleted hours of toil remain?  
Poor little FACTORY SLAVES - for you these lines complain!"

## **A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill,**

by Pearce Stevenson, Esq (pseudonym.)  
124pp, James Ridgway, London, 1839.  
This polemical pamphlet was part of the debate concerning Thomas Talfourd's Infant Custody Bill, which was enacted in 1839.

## **Letters to the Mob,**

by Libertas (pseudonym.)  
Three Anti-Chartist letters reprinted from the Morning Chronicle, 1848.  
21pp. Thomas Bosworth, London, 1848.

1848 was a year of revolutions in Europe. As these extracts show, Norton was no sympathiser:

*"I thought to head this, 'A letter to the People,' but you are not the people. You usurp their name; you represent yourselves as acting on their behalf; but they disown and fear you. They look with alarm on your tumultuous gatherings. They stand on the defensive against your attacks. They distrust you. They know you to be sections, more or less dangerous, of disturbers of the public peace."*

*"The Chartist dream of equality is the most cruel of all the temptations with which mob-traps are baited; for it is at once the most specious and the most false. There can be no equality, any more than there can be a sea without a shore! Superiority is not a thing of man's devising, but of God's appointing. Gradation is His law."*

## **A Letter to the Queen**

### **on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill.**

155pp. Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1855.

This is widely acknowledged to be one of Norton's most important publications. Whilst the Queen did not reply (nor was she expected to) this crystallised Norton's views on the unfairness of the English legal system to women and, together with the writings of Barbara Leigh Smith (Bodichon), helped to change the climate of opinion. The style of the piece, interweaving closely reasoned arguments with strongly worded polemic, can be seen from its opening address.

*"Madam,*

*On Tuesday, June 13th, of last session, Lord Chancellor Cranworth brought forward a measure for the reform of the Marriage laws of England; which measure was afterwards withdrawn. In March, 1855, in this present session, the Solicitor General stated, that a bill on the same subject was "nearly prepared," and would be brought forward "immediately after the Easter recess." On May 10th, being pressed to name a time, he stated that it would be proposed "as soon as the House had expressed an opinion on the Testamentary Jurisdiction Bill." That time has not arrived: and meanwhile, - as one who has grievously suffered, and is still suffering, under the present imperfect state of the law, - I address your majesty on the subject.*

*I do not do so in the way of appeal. The vague romance of "carrying my wrongs to the foot of the throne," forms no part of my intention: for I knew the throne is powerless to redress them. I know those pleasant tales of an earlier and simpler time, when oppressed subjects travelled to the presence of some glorious prince or princess, who instantly set their affairs to rights without reference to law, are quaint old histories, or fairy fables, fit only for the amusement of children.*

*I connect your Majesty's name with these pages from a different motive: for two reasons: of which one, indeed, is a sequence to the other. First, because I desire to point out the grotesque anomaly which ordains that married women shall be "non-existent" in a country governed by a female sovereign; and secondly, because, whatever measure for the reform of these statutes may be proposed, it cannot become "the law of the land" without your Majesty's assent and sign manual. In England there is no Salique law. If there were, - if the principles which guide all legislation for the inferior sex in this country, were carried out in their integrity as far as the throne, - your Majesty would be by birth a subject, and Hanover and England would be still under one King.*

*A married woman in England has no legal existence: her being is absorbed in that of her husband. Years of separation or desertion cannot alter this position. Unless divorced by special enactment in the House of Lords, the legal fiction holds her to be "one" with her husband, even though she may never see or hear of him.*

*She has no possessions, unless by special settlement; her property is his property. Lord Ellenborough mentions a case in which a sailor bequeathed "all he was worth" to a woman he cohabited with; and afterwards married, in the West Indies, a woman of considerable fortune. At this man's death it was held, - notwithstanding the hardship of the case, - that the will swept away from his widow, in favour of his mistress, every shilling of the property. It is now provided that a will shall be revoked by marriage: but the claim of the husband to all that is his wife's exists in full force. An English wife has no legal right even to her clothes or ornaments; her husband may take them and sell them if he pleases, even though they be the gifts of relatives or friends, or bought before marriage.*

*An English wife cannot make a will. She may have children or kindred whom she may earnestly desire to benefit; - she may be separated from her husband, who may be living with a mistress; no matter: the law gives what she has to him, and no will she could make would be valid.*

*An English wife cannot legally claim her own earnings. Whether wages for manual labour, or payment for intellectual exertion, whether she weed potatoes, or keep a school, her salary is the husband's; and he could compel a second payment, and treat the first as void, if paid to the wife without his sanction.*

*An English wife may not leave her husband's house. Not only can he sue her for "restitution of conjugal rights," but he has a right to enter the house of any friend or relation with whom she may take refuge, and who may "harbour her," - as it is termed, - and carry her away by force, with or without the aid of the police.*

*If the wife sue for separation for cruelty, it must be "cruelty that endangers life or limb," and if she has once forgiven, or, in legal phrase, "condoned" his offences, she cannot plead them; through her past forgiveness only proves that she endured as long as endurance was possible.*

*If her husband take proceedings for a divorce, she is not, in the first instance, allowed to defend herself. She has no means of proving the falsehood of his allegations. She is not represented by attorney, nor permitted to be considered a party to the suit between him and her supposed lover, for 'damages.'*

## **Remarks upon the Law of Marriage and Divorce,**

suggested by the Hon Mrs Norton's letter to the Queen.

47pp. James Ridgway, London, 1855.

## **REEL FOUR**

### **The Wife and Woman's Reward.**

3 vols, 308, 311 and 297pp. Saunders and Otley, London, 1835.

These two stories, *The Wife and Woman's Reward*, were closely based on her own experiences.

### **Tales and Sketches in prose and verse.**

(Churton's Library for the Million, Part III.

Part I was *A History of Charlemagne* by G P R James

and Part II was *History of the Conquest of Mexico* by the Revd J Hobart Caunter.)

vi + 188pp. Churton, London, 1850.

The Forsaken Child (1)  
On Reading an Old Letter (29)  
Kate Bouverie (33)  
Christmas (48)  
The Coquette (54)  
The Friend of our Early Days (70)  
The Forsaken (72)  
The Lost Election (74)  
Mona Water (88)  
Lines on Seeing Mr. Landseer's Picture of the Death of a Stag (93)  
The Forsaken (97)  
The Young Heir's Death-Bed (104)  
Lines )109)  
"I do not Ask thy Love from Fate" (111)  
The Spirit of the Hurricane (113)  
The Traitor (128)  
Lament of the Poet Savage (133)  
Summer's Gone (138)  
To Lady Graham. On New Year's Day (140)  
On the Death of Sir Walter Scott (142)  
The Farewell (144)  
Night (146)  
The Broken Vow (148)  
The Two Harps (157)  
Lines (159)  
The Two Pictures (160)  
Song of the Irish Peasant Wife (164)  
Curious Customs in the County of Middlesex (165)  
The Haunted Wood of Amesoy (181)

## REEL FIVE

### **Stuart of Dunleath: A Story of Modern Times.**

3 vols, xii + 290, 299 and 345pp. Colburn & Co, London, 1851.

Like many of Caroline Norton's prose works this novel boasts a very fine opening. It is written in a conversational style and goes from the specific to the universal and back again, pondering on the profound effects that the delivery of the morning post can have.

" CHAPTER I. A LETTER.

THE post has just come in. A common-place everyday occurrence; connected in the general mind with pasted stamps and Christmas-boxes. No longer the romantic event it used to be, when, with piquant irregularity, unexpected messengers alighted from their reeking steeds at the gates of fair castles, and presented on bended knee, some solitary missive confided to their charge. A mere matter of course; not to be thought of in any other light.

And yet it is a startling reflection, that, at a particular hour of the morning, there is to thousands of the millions a second waking as it were; a waking of the heart after the waking of the body. Thousands are astir, each in his separate home; all occupied with a similar interest; the chief, perhaps the only point of sympathy, in their various lives.

The post is come in. " A noun of multitude, signifying many." The epistles which lay huddled together in the mail-bag, have been sorted and delivered according to their several addresses. They have been scattered along the rows of houses like seed in a ploughed furrow, and according to the seed sown, is the crop raised; tears for some, and smiles for others; joy and grief, like unseen spirits, entering with the post.

The letters are come.

That far-travelled treasure, the ship-letter, with its news from distant climes: - the love-letter; the remittance, or refusal to remit; the attorney's letter, with a threat of "ulterior measures," terrible in its vagueness; the maternal counsel; the keen and bitter reproach; the half-jesting, half scandalous gossip, immediately to be repeated and multiplied as though a stereotyped edition were called for; the vain appeal, written with anguish, blotted with tears; the letter of empty compliment or ceremony; the black-edged, black-sealed, ominous-looking announcement or the death of a friend or relation - all these have arrived at their destination.

How troubled is the stream of life's waters as the spirit of the hour passes over its face. If we could look into these homes whose blank windows and closed doors wear so exactly the same aspect as they did an hour ago, what changes we might behold! There sits a matron weeping; her gentle girls are weeping too; they rose cheerfully this morning; all was as usual; the morning-prayer, the household task, the plans for the morrow; but the storm has swept over them. They know themselves widowed and orphaned - since the post came in."

### **The Rose of Jericho.**

(Translated from the French.)

Called by the Germans, "Weinachts-Rose;" or, Christmas Rose.  
viii + 162 + xvpp. Tinsley Brothers, London, 1870.

## REEL SIX

### **Lost and Saved.**

3 vols, x +294, vi + 301 and vi + 308pp. Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, successors to Henry Colburn, London, 1863.  
The *Times* declared that "*Lost and Saved will be read with eager interest. It is a vigorous novel.*" The *Examiner* called it, "*A novel of rare excellence. It is Mrs Norton's best prose work.*" It gained a reputation as a scandalous work - with a central

theme of illicit love - and many readers inevitably drew parallels with Caroline Norton's own life story.

**REEL SEVEN**

**Old Sir Douglas.**

3 vols, vii + 308, 307 and 308pp. Hurst and Blackett, London, 1868.

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## *Brief Chronology*

**1808:** 22 March. Birth of Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Sheridan, daughter of Caroline :Henrietta (née Callander) of Craigforth, Scotland, and Thomas Sheridan, son :of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

Publication of Goethe's *Faust, Part I*.

**1811:** Publication of *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen.

**1813:** Caroline's father, Thomas Sheridan, leaves for the Cape of Good Hope, for :the sake of his health, together with his wife, Henrietta, and eldest daughter, :Helen. Caroline and Georgiana are left in the care of two Scottish aunts.

Publication of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

**1814:** Publication of *Waverley* by Sir Walter Scott and *The Excursion* by :Wordsworth. George Stephenson builds first practical steam locomotive.

**1815:** The Battle of Waterloo.

**1817:** Caroline's father dies. Henrietta Sheridan returns to England with Helen and :two boys, Frank and Charles, born at the Cape. Together with Caroline, :Georgiana and Richard (the eldest brother) they move into a grace and favour :residence in Hampton Court. Caroline Sheridan is sent to school in Surrey.

Publication of *Biographia Literaria* by Coleridge.

**1818:** Publication of *Endymion* by Keats and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley.

Posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* by Jane Austen.

**1820:** Accession of George IV. The trial of Queen Caroline of Brunswick.

**1823:** Caroline Sheridan meets George Norton at Womersley Park, the home of his :elder brother, Lord Grantley. George proposes to her, but is told that he must :wait three years for her answer (until she is eighteen).

**1824:** Death of Lord Byron (1788-1824). Byron's *Don Juan* is completed.

**1825:** Publication of *The Dandies Rout* by Helen and Caroline Sheridan.

**1826:** Caroline Sheridan's eldest sister, Helen, marries Captain Price Blackwood.

Publication of *Vivian Grey* by Disraeli.

**1827:** 30 June. Marriage of Caroline Sheridan and George Chapple Norton at :St George's, Hanover Square, London.

Death of Beethoven (1770-1827).

**1829:** 10 July. Birth of Fletcher Sheridan, Caroline Norton's first son.

Publication of *The Sorrows of Rosalie* by Caroline Norton.

Passage of Catholic Emancipation Bill.

**1830:** Death of King George IV. Accession of King William IV.

Performance of *The Gypsy Father* by Caroline Norton.

Publication of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* and Cobbett's *Rural Rides*.

**1831:** 4 November. Birth of Brinsley Norton, Caroline Norton's second son.

**1832:** Caroline Norton made editor of *La Belle Assemblée and Court Magazine*. :Death of Goethe (1749-1832) and posthumous publication of *Faust, Part II*.

Passage of Reform Bill.

**1833:** Birth of William Charles Norton, Caroline Norton's third and last son.

Abolition of slavery in British colonies.

**1834:** Birth of William Charles Norton. Melbourne is made Prime Minister, but is :dismissed by the King after a few months and replaced by Sir Robert Peel.

# Norton: The Collected Writings

**1835:** Lord Melbourne's second ministry (1835-1841).

Publication of *The Wife, and Woman's Reward* by Caroline Norton.

**1836:** 23 June. Divorce Trial - *Norton vs Melbourne*. Caroline Norton is found :guiltless, but George Norton keeps the children and all her earnings.

Publication of *A Voice from the Factories* by Caroline Norton.

**1837:** Death of King William IV. Accession of Queen Victoria.

Publication of *Pickwick Papers* by Dickens.

**1838:** Rise of Chartism in England.

Publication of *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* by Dickens.

**1839:** Publication of *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody :Bill* by Caroline Norton. Passage of the Infant Custody Bill.

**1840:** Publication of *The Dream, and other poems* by Caroline Norton.

**1841:** Caroline Norton is allowed to see her children for a week at Christmas.

**1842:** Death of Caroline Norton's youngest son, William, from complications following a riding accident.

**1843:** William Wordsworth is appointed poet laureate, despite Caroline Norton's :wishes to receive the title.

**1845:** Publication of *The Child of the Isles* by Caroline Norton.

**1847:** Publication of *Aunt Carry's Ballads for Children* by Caroline Norton.

Publication of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë.

**1848:** The year of revolutions in Europe, with riots in France, Italy, Spain, Germany :and Austria. Publication of *Letters to the Mob* by Caroline Norton.

George and Caroline Norton sign a 'separation agreement.

Death of Lord Melbourne, leaving Caroline Norton a legacy of £200 a year.

**1850:** Publication of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Tennyson succeeds Wordsworth as poet laureate.

**1851:** Death of Caroline Norton's mother, Henrietta Sheridan, leaving Caroline :a legacy of £480 a year.

Publication of *Stuart of Dunleath* by Caroline Norton.

The Great Exhibition in London.

**1853:** *Thrupps vs Norton*, re debt owed by Caroline Norton but passed to her :husband. Caroline Norton gains sympathy, but loses the case.

The Crimean War (1853-1856).

**1854:** Publication of *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* by :Caroline Norton.

**1855:** Publication of *A Letter to the Queen* by Caroline Norton.

Publication of *The Warden* by Trollope.

**1857:** Passage of the Divorce Bill. The Indian Mutiny.

**1859:** 13 October. Death of Caroline Norton's eldest son, Fletcher from tuberculosis.

**1860:** Publication of *the Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot.

**1862:** Publication of *The Lady of La Garaye* by Caroline Norton.

**1863:** Publication of *Lost and Saved* by Caroline Norton.

## Norton: The Collected Writings

**1864:** Publication of *War and Peace* by Tolstoy.

**1867:** Publication of *Old Sir Douglas* by Caroline Norton.

**1875:** Deaths of George Norton and his elder brother, Lord Grantley. Caroline :Norton's second son, Brinsley, succeeds to the title.

**1877:** 1 March. Marriage of Caroline Norton and William Stirling-Maxwell.

15 June. Death of Caroline Stirling-Maxwell.

24 July. Death of Brinsley Sheridan.

**1882:** Passage of the Married Woman's Property Act.

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*A Picture of Sappho*

I.

THOU! whose impassion'd face  
The Painter loves to trace,  
Theme of the Sculptor's art and Poet's story –  
How many a wand'ring thought  
Thy loveliness hath brought,  
Warming the heart with its imagined glory!

II.

Yet, was it History's truth,  
That tale of wasted youth,  
Of endless grief, and Love forsaken pining?  
What wert thou, thou whose woe  
The old traditions show  
With Fame's cold light around thee vainly shining?

III.

Didst thou indeed sit there  
In languid lone despair –  
Thy harp neglected by thee idly lying –  
Thy soft and earnest gaze  
Watching the lingering rays  
In the far west, where summer-day was dying –

IV.

While with low rustling wings:  
Among the quivering strings  
The murmuring breeze faint melody was making,  
As though it wooed thy hand  
To strike with new command,  
Or mourn'd with thee because thy heart was breaking?

V.

Dids't thou, as day by day  
Roll'd heavily away,  
And left anxious, nerveless, and dejected,  
Wandering thro' bowers beloved –  
Roving where he had roved –  
Yearn for his presence, as for one expected?

VI.

Didst thou, with fond wild eyes  
Fix'd on the starry skies,  
Wait feverishly for each new day to waken –  
Trusting some glorious morn  
Might witness his return,  
Unwilling to believe thyself forsaken?

VII.

And when conviction came,  
Chilling that heart of flame,  
Dids't thou, O saddest of earth's grieving daughters!  
From the Leucadian steep  
Dash, with a desperate leap,  
And hide thyself within the whelming waters?

VIII.

Yea, in their hollow breast  
Thy heart at length found rest!  
The ever-moving waves above thee closing –  
The winds, whose ruffling sigh  
Swept the blue waters by,  
Disturb'd thee not! – thou wert in peace reposing!

IX.

Such is the tale they tell!

Vain was thy beauty's spell –  
Vain all the praise thy song could still inspire –  
Through many a happy band  
Rung with less skilful hand  
The borrowed love-notes of thy echoing lyre.

X.

FAME, to thy breaking heart  
No comfort could impart,  
In vain thy brow the laurel wreath was wearing;  
One grief and one alone  
Could bow thy bright head down –  
Thou wert a WOMAN, and wert left despairing!

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