



The Roman Years of a South Carolina Artist: Caroline Carson's Letters Home, 1872-1892 (Women's Diaries and Letters of the South)

Caroline Carson, William H. Pease, Jane H. Pease

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Caroline Petigru Carson (1820-1892), the elder daughter of Charleston intellectual James Louis Petigru and sister of the novelist Susan Petigru King, seemed destined from birth for life as a southern plantation mistress. Yet, like her sister, Carson challenged the conventions of nineteenth-century Charleston and defied traditional expectations by living apart from her husband and later as a very merry widow. Like her father unwilling to support secession, Carson, a staunch Unionist, left her native South Carolina at the onset of the Civil War. She settled first in New York and then, a decade later, in Rome among the prestigious social circles for which her background and bearing fitted her. In both locales she created for herself the life of an artist and southern expatriate. From Italy, Carson wrote hundreds of discursive letters to her younger son in America. Gathered in this collection, these narratives offer intimate insights into the emotional life of a mature woman, the accomplishments of an artist determined both to perfect her craft and sell her work, and the intellectual and social pursuits of a well-educated, vivacious American living abroad. With painterly eye and incisive pen, Carson vividly portrays both the life she observed and the life she led in Rome. Her letters reverberate with street scenes, riots and demonstrations, secular celebrations of a newly united Italy and traditional religious pageantry, an intense friendship with a Roman duke, and the scandalous lives of her fellow Americans. Interspersed are snatches of conversations with artists, writers, and famous visitors to the Eternal City, many of whom she lured to her weekly salon. Letters written in the summer from Italian, Swiss, and German resorts depict not only the contrasting styles of wealthy American tourists and vacationing European aristocrats but the coastal and mountain scenery that is also pictured in the Carson paintings that are included in this volume.

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