



Queen Of Science (Canongate Classics)

Mary Somerville

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Edited and introduced by Dorothy McMillan.

Born in Jedburgh in 1780, Mary Fairfax was the daughter of one of Nelson's captains, and in common with most girls of her time and station she was given the kind of education which prizes gentility over ability. Nevertheless, she taught herself algebra in secret, and made her reputation in celestial mechanics with her 1831 translation of Laplace's *Mécanique céleste* as *The Mechanism of the Heavens*.

As she was equally interested in art, literature and nature Somerville's lively memoirs give a fascinating picture of her life and times from childhood in Burntisland to international recognition and retirement in Naples. She tells of her friendship with Maria Edgeworth and of her encounters with Scott and Fenimore Cooper. She remembers comets and eclipses, high society in London and Paris, Charles Babbage and his calculating engine, the Risorgimento in Italy and the eruption of Vesuvius.

Selected by her daughter and first published in 1973, these are the memoirs of a remarkable woman who became one of the most gifted mathematicians and scientists of the nineteenth century. Oxford's Somerville College was named after her, and the present volume, re-edited by Dorothy McMillan, draws on manuscripts owned by the college and offers the first unexpurgated edition of these revelatory writings.

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