



The Benefactress

Elizabeth von Arnim

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Australian-born novelist, born Mary Annette Beauchamp. By marriage she became Gräfin (Countess) von Arnim-Schlagenthin, and by a second marriage, Countess Russell. Although known in her early life as Mary, after the publication of her first book, she was known to her readers, eventually to her friends, and finally even to her family as Elizabeth, and she is now invariably referred to as Elizabeth von Arnim. She also wrote under the pen name Alice Cholmondeley.

Arnim would later refer to her domineering first husband as the "Man of Wrath" and writing became her refuge from what turned out to be an incompatible marriage. Arnim's husband had increasing debts and was eventually sent to prison for fraud. This was when she created her pen name "Elizabeth" and launched her career as a writer by publishing her semi-autobiographical, brooding, yet satirical Elizabeth and her German Garden (1898). Detailing her struggles both to create a garden on the estate and her attempts to integrate into German high-class Junker society, it was such a success that it was reprinted twenty times in its first year. A bitter-sweet memoir and companion to it was The Solitary Summer (1899). Other works, such as the The Benefactress (1902), Vera (1921), and Love (1925), were also semi-autobiographical. Other titles dealing with feminist protest and witty observations of life in provincial Germany were to follow, including The Princess Priscilla's Fortnight (1905) and Fraulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther (1907).

Although she never wrote a traditional autobiography, All the Dogs of My Life, her 1936 account of her love for her pets, contains many glimpses of the glittering social circle of which she was part.

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