



The Dark Cottage

Mary Cholmondeley

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Mary Cholmondeley began writing with serious intent in her teens. She wrote in her journal in 1877, "What a pleasure and interest it would be to me in life to write books. I must strike out a line of some kind, and if I do not marry (for at best that is hardly likely, as I possess neither beauty nor charms) I should want some definite occupation, besides the home duties." She succeeded in publishing some stories in *The Graphic* and elsewhere. Her first novel was *The Danvers Jewels* (1887), a detective story that won her a small following. It appeared in the *Temple Bar* magazine published by Richard Bentley, after fellow novelist Rhoda Broughton had introduced to George Bentley. It was followed by *Sir Charles Danvers* (1889), *Diana Tempest* (1893) and *A Devotee* (1897).

The satirical *Red Pottage* (1899) was a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic and is reprinted occasionally. It satirises religious hypocrisy and the narrowness of country life, and was denounced from a London pulpit as immoral. It was equally sensational because it "explored the issues of female sexuality and vocation, recurring topics in late-Victorian debates about the New Women." Despite the book's great success, however, the author received little money for it because she had sold the copyright.

A silent film, *Red Pottage* was made in 1918. *Diana Tempest* was reissued in 2009 for the first time in a century.

Later works such as *Moth and Rust* (1902) and *Notwithstanding* (1913) were less successful. *The Lowest Rung* (1908) and *The Romance of his Life* (1921) were collections of stories, the latter, her final book, dedicated to the essayist and critic Percy Lubbock. Lubbock later commemorated her in *Mary Cholmondeley: A Sketch from Memory* (1928) (font: Wikipedia)

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