

# 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 9 — Elizabeth of Austria



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**ELIZABETH [AMÉLIE EUGÉNIE]** (1837–1898), consort of Francis Joseph, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary, was the daughter of Duke Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria and Louisa Wilhelmina, daughter of Maximilian I. of Bavaria, and was born on the 24th of December 1837 at the castle of Possenhofen on Lake Starnberg. She inherited the quick intelligence and artistic taste displayed in general by members of the Wittelsbach royal house, and her education was the reverse of conventional. She accompanied her eccentric father on his hunting expeditions, becoming an expert rider and climber, visiting the peasants in their huts and sharing in rustic pleasures. The emperor of Austria, Francis Joseph, met the Bavarian ducal family at Ischl in August 1853, and immediately fell in love with Elizabeth, then a girl of sixteen, and reported to be the most beautiful princess in Europe. The marriage took place in Vienna on the 24th of April 1854. In the early days of her married life she frequently came into collision with Viennese prejudice. Her attempts to modify court etiquette, and her extreme fondness for horsemanship and frequent visits to the imperial riding school, scandalized Austrian society, while her predilection for Hungary and for everything Hungarian offended German sentiment. There is no doubt that her influence helped the establishment of the *Ausgleich* with Hungary, but outside Hungarian affairs the empress took small part in politics. She first visited Hungary in 1857, and ten years later was crowned queen. Her popularity with the Hungarians remained unchanged

throughout her life; and the castle of Gödöllő, presented as a coronation gift, was one of her favourite residences. Elizabeth was one of the most charitable of royal ladies, and her popularity with her Austrian subjects was more than restored by her assiduous care for the wounded in the campaign of 1866. Besides her public benefactions she constantly exercised personal and private charity. Her eldest daughter died in infancy; Gisela (b. 1856) married the Prince Leopold of Bavaria; and her youngest daughter Marie Valerie (b. 1868) married the Archduke Franz Salvator. The tragic death of her only son, the crown prince Rudolph, in 1889, was a shock from which she never really recovered. She was also deeply affected by the suicide of her cousin Louis II. of Bavaria, and again by the fate of her sister Sophia, duchess of Alençon, who perished in the fire of the Paris charity bazaar in 1897. The empress had shown signs of lung disease in 1861, when she spent some months in Madeira; but she was able to resume her outdoor sports, and for some years before 1882, when she had to give up riding, was a frequent visitor on English and Irish hunting fields. In her later years her dislike of publicity increased. Much of her time was spent in travel or at the Achilleion, the palace she had built in the Greek style in Corfu. She was walking from her hotel at Geneva to the steamer when she was stabbed by the anarchist Luigi Luccheni, on the 10th of September 1898, and died of the wound within a few hours. This aimless and dastardly crime completed the list of misfortunes of the Austrian house, and aroused intense indignation throughout Europe.

See A. de Burgh, *Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, a Memoir* (London, 1898); E. Friedmann and J. Paves, *Kaiserin Elisabeth* (Berlin, 1898); and the anonymous *Martyrdom of an Empress* (1899), containing a quantity of court gossip.



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