

# *Meek* F.E. Sillanpää *Heritage*

Nobel Prize Winner



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## MEEK HERITAGE

by

F. E. SILLANPÄÄ

MEEK HERITAGE (1919), Sillanpää's second novel, appeared shortly after the tragic Finnish civil war between Whites and Reds. It established him immediately as the foremost Finnish author of the day. With sympathy but entirely without sentimentality, Sillanpää describes the struggles of his people without, however, taking sides; rather he condemns both sides. "In this philosophic, almost unbiased social study, the author tries to free himself from the anguish that had gripped him during the struggles of his people. The temperamental lyricist had become the stern objective historian. With a pitying eye Sillanpää lays bare the tragedy of elemental man," says Lauri Viljanen. This book won Sillanpää a government pension for life.

F. E. SILLANPÄÄ

# MEEK HERITAGE

*Translated from the Finnish by*  
ALEXANDER MATSON M.A. Ph.D.

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1966

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FRANS EEMIL SILLANPÄÄ was born in the town of Hammenkyro, Finland on 16 September, 1888. His fore-fathers were independent farmers but his father was a landless peasant.

His father at great sacrifice sent him to school. He was a good student. He matriculated in 1908. Having decided that his vocation was writing, he left the university

without taking his examinations for a degree and returned home on Christmas Eve of 1913. The perennial under-graduate passed through a mental crisis which finally drove him to seek expression in writing. Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Strindberg particularly fired his imagination. Realism and idealism are fused with remarkable psychological insight in his novels and short stories. He published his first novel in 1916 and in the same year married Sigrid Maria Salomaki, a very good looking servant girl.

His second novel MEEK HERITAGE (1919), concerned with the clash of the Reds and the Whites in the Finnish Revolution, won him fame in his own country and a Government pension for life.

Sillanpää has received government prizes for most of his novels, and in 1936 was made an honorary Doctor of Philosophy by the three-hundred-year-old State University of Finland.

Sillanpää was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1939 in the midst of his country's war with the Soviet Union. His name had been proposed annually for seven or eight years, and was considered in 1915 and 1916. Although Sillanpää writes, only in Finnish, he speaks Swedish and has always opposed the narrow Finnish chauvinism that seeks to oust the Swedish language from Finland.

Sillanpää has sad brooding eyes, grim determined lips and yet withal a kind, twinkling expression. Completely bald, he is tall, heavy, and huge of frame, a great bearish person weighing at least 250 pounds. He is a devoted father, and raises his seven children with an iron hand, teaching them, among other things, to handle all animals and insects without fear. His capacity for alcohol is epic among his countrymen.