



Frank Swinnerton

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Frank Arthur Swinnerton, born in a London suburb on August 12, 1884, was a precocious boy who avowedly taught himself to read at the age of four. A series of illnesses as a child, including diphtheria, paralysis, and scarlet fever, caused poor health through most of his later boyhood. His family frequently endured straitened circumstances, especially after his father's death, when he and his brother became responsible for supporting the family.

He decided early to be a journalist and became an office boy for a Scottish newspaper publisher, Hay, Nisbet & Company, in 1898, at the age of fourteen. In 1900, having decided to become a man of letters rather than a journalist, he became a confidential clerk with publishers J. M. Dent. He worked there until 1907. In 1907 he joined Chatto & Windus, another British publisher, as a proofreader. In 1909, Chatto & Windus published his first novel, *The Merry Heart*, and made him an editor. He remained with Chatto & Windus through 1926, bringing novelists such as Aldous Huxley, A. A. Milne, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells to the firm. Before he was thirty Swinnerton had published several books, novels, and critical biographies. His first outstanding success came in 1917 with *Nocturne*, a short but almost perfect Cockney idyll. He went on publishing through his ninety-fourth year, completing sixty-one books, including forty-one novels. *A London Bookman*, *Tokefield Papers*, and *The Bookman's London* are volumes of essays. *The Georgian Scene* is a work of literary criticism; it is, with *Harvest Comedy*, one of the two books Swinnerton considered his best.

From 1937 to 1942 Swinnerton was chief reviewer of fiction for the *London Observer*. During World War II he served the British government as a civil servant in the Ministry of Information. His first wife was Helen Dircks, a poet. His second wife, whom he married in 1924, was Mary Dorothy Bennett; they had one daughter. Swinnerton was considered a competent novelist and a dependable storyteller. Critics rarely were enthusiastic, but they gave measured approval to many of his works, and he was accepted as a literary personality. His books sold well.

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