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Jacques Futrelle

Complete Works



Series Fifteen

The Complete Works of
JACQUES FUTRELLE

(1875-1912)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

Jacques Futrelle

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The Complete Works of
JACQUES FUTRELLE



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Complete Works of Jacques Futrelle



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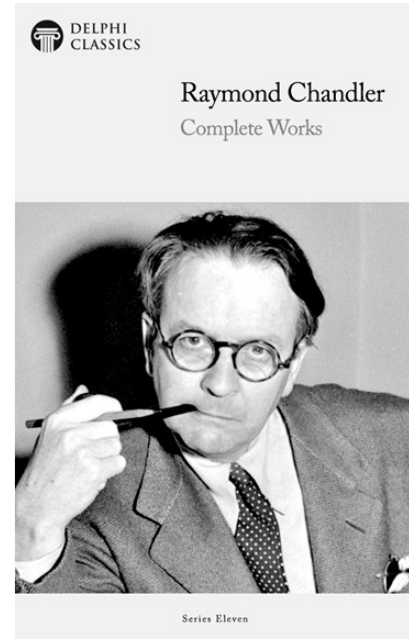
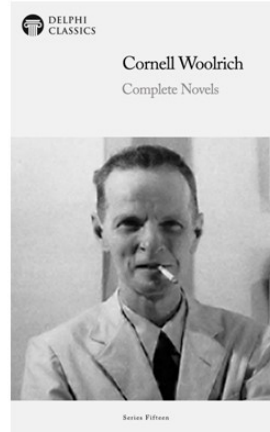
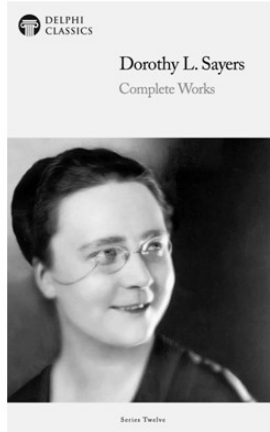
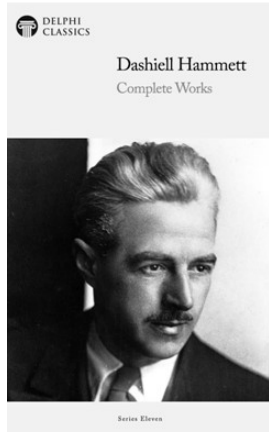
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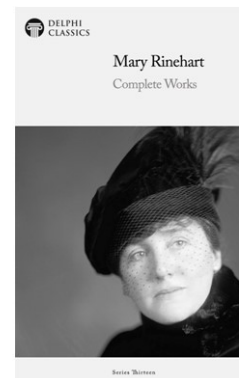
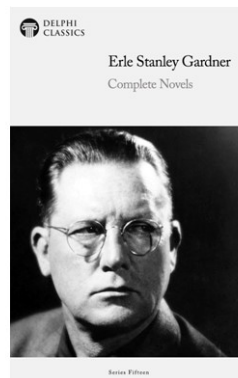
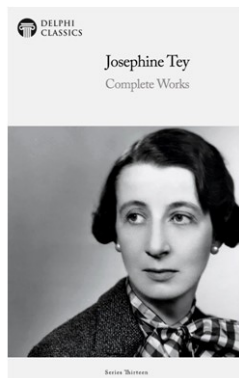
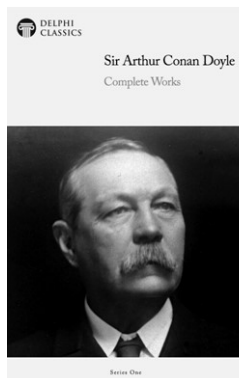
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The Novels



Zebulon, the count seat of Pike County, c. 1890, Georgia — Futrelle was born in Pike County in 1875; he was the descendant of French Huguenots.

The Chase of the Golden Plate (1906)

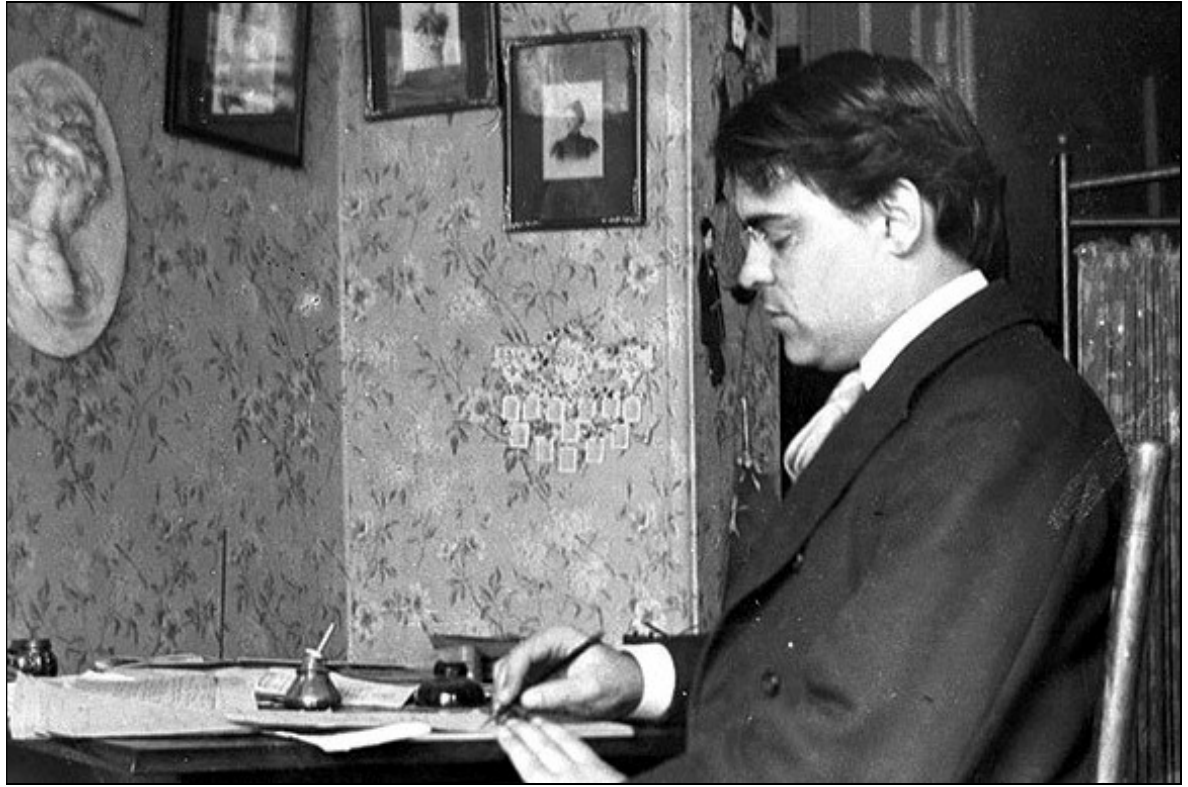


A master of detective fiction, regarded by some as the ‘American Conan Doyle’, Jacques Futrelle was born in Pike County, Georgia in 1875. He was the son of Harmon Heath Futrell, a teacher in Atlanta, and Linnie Bevill Futrell. The author’s grandson Robert later explained that ‘Jacques Futrelle’ was a literary pseudonym his grandfather assumed as a young man and that his birth name was John Heath Futrell. As a youth Futrelle decided against attending university and instead began a career in journalism in 1893 at the age of eighteen. In July 1895, he married a fellow writer, Lily May Peel and they had two children, Virginia and John Jr. (who would also later call himself Jacques). Futrelle and Peel remained together until his tragic death aboard the Titanic in April 1912.

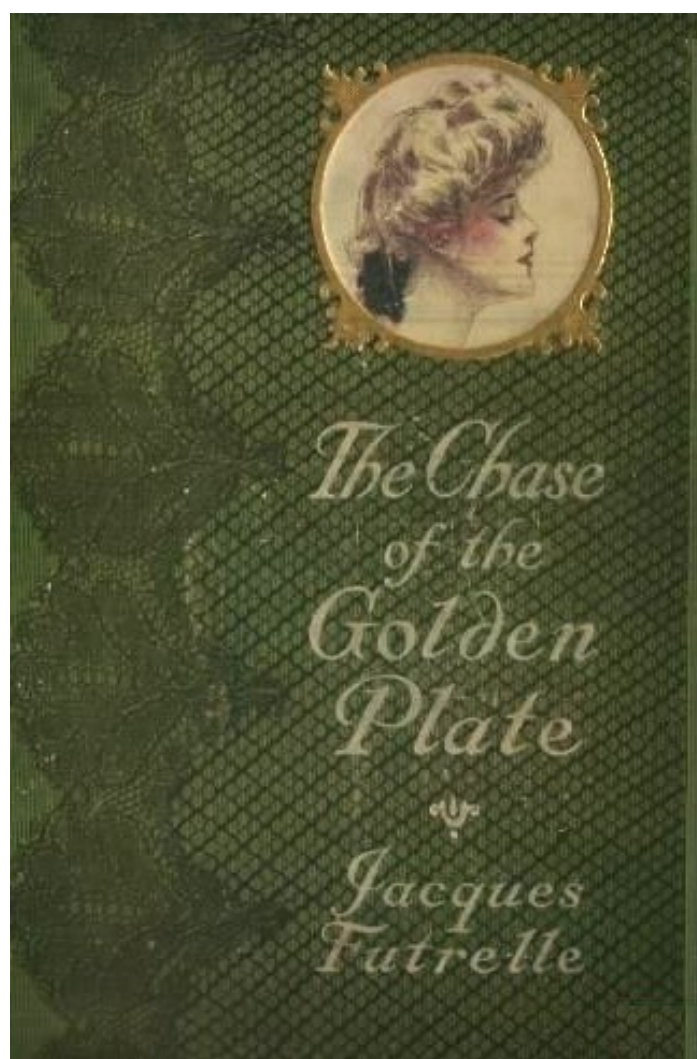
He started his journalist career working for the *Atlanta Journal*, where he ran the sports section in 1893, before leaving the following year for a position at *The Boston Post*. In 1895, he returned to Georgia and *The Atlanta Journal* and set up the first sports section at the newspaper. In 1898, he worked as the telegraph editor at *The New York Herald* where he covered the Spanish American War. It was a demanding role that required him to labour tirelessly for three months and exhausted him to the point that at the war’s conclusion he needed a period of rest and convalescence. He then joined the staff of the *Boston American*, where in 1905 he introduced his enduring creation ‘The Thinking Machine’ in the short story *The Problem of Cell 13*. The following year, Futrelle left the *Boston American* to pursue a career as a novelist.

His first foray into novel writing, *The Chase of the Golden Plate* was published in 1906 by Dodd, Mead & Company. Will Grefé, who became well known for his work in some of the leading publications of the period, provided illustrations for the text. The novel was also serialised in five parts in *The Saturday Evening Post* in September and October 1906. *The Saturday Evening Post* is an American general interest magazine, established in August 1821 in Philadelphia at the printing shop used by Benjamin Franklin to produce his newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. In 1897, after years of dwindling readership, *The Saturday Evening Post* was purchased by the publisher Cyrus Curtis, who transformed its fortunes and turned it into one of the most widely circulated publications in the country in the early 1900’s.

A detective novel centring on the chaos caused by a thief executing a daring heist at a high society masquerade ball, *The Chase of the Golden Plate* features the author’s most famous literary creation: the character of Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, also called ‘The Thinking Machine’. Van Dusen appears in a series of short stories by Futrelle, where he applies rigorous logic or ratiocination to solve crimes and seemingly impossible mysteries. In the novel, he employs his unique and exceptional skills to unearth the truth behind two separate thefts of a golden plate and determine whether the police have arrested the right person.



Futrelle sits at a writing desk at his home, c. 1904



The first edition

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PART III. THE THINKING MACHINE

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“ ‘You really do not love him, anyway,’ he
ventured ”

The original frontispiece

The Chase of the Golden Plate

By
Jacques Futrelle

With Illustrations by Will Grefé
and Decorations by E. A. Poucher



New York
Dodd, Mead & Company
1906

The first edition's title page

To
Three Women I Love:

Fama,
and
Mayzie,
and
Berta



PART I. THE BURGLAR AND THE GIRL



CHAPTER I



CARDINAL RICHELIEU AND the Mikado stepped out on a narrow balcony overlooking the entrance to Seven Oaks, lighted their cigarettes and stood idly watching the throng as it poured up the wide marble steps. Here was an over-corpulent Dowager Empress of China, there an Indian warrior in full paint and toggery, and mincing along behind him two giggling Geisha girls. Next, in splendid robes of rank, came the Czar of Russia. The Mikado smiled.

“An old enemy of mine,” he remarked to the Cardinal.

A Watteau Shepherdess was assisted out of an automobile by Christopher Columbus and they came up the walk arm-in-arm, while a Pierrette ran beside them laughing up into their faces. D’Artagnan, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos swaggered along with insolent, clanking swords.

“Ah!” exclaimed the Cardinal. “There are four gentlemen whom I know well.”

Mary Queen of Scots, Pocahontas, the Sultan of Turkey, and Mr. Micawber chatted amicably together in one language. Behind them came a figure which immediately arrested attention. It was a Burglar, with dark lantern in one hand and revolver in the other. A black mask was drawn down to his lips, a slouch hat shaded his eyes, and a kit of the tools of his profession swung from one shoulder.

“By George!” commented the Cardinal. “Now, that’s clever.”

“Looks like the real thing,” the Mikado added.

The Burglar stood aside a moment, allowing a diamond-burdened Queen Elizabeth to pass, then came on up the steps. The Cardinal and the Mikado passed through an open window into the reception-room to witness his arrival.



“A figure which immediately arrested attention”

“Her Royal Highness, Queen Elizabeth!” the graven-faced servant announced.

The Burglar handed a card to the liveried Voice and noted, with obvious amusement, a fleeting expression of astonishment on the stolid face. Perhaps it was there because the card had been offered in that hand which held the revolver. The Voice glanced at the name on the card and took a deep breath of relief.

“Bill, the Burglar!” he announced.

There was a murmur of astonishment and interest in the reception-hall and the ballroom beyond. Thus it was that the Burglar found himself the centre of attention for a moment, while a ripple of laughter ran around. The entrance of a Clown, bounding in behind him, drew all eyes away, however, and the Burglar was absorbed in the crowd.

It was only a few minutes later that Cardinal Richelieu and the Mikado, seeking diversion, isolated the Burglar and dragged him off to the smoking-room. There the Czar of Russia, who was on such terms of intimacy with the Mikado that he called him Mike, joined them, and they smoked together.

“How did you ever come to hit on a costume like that?” asked the Cardinal of the Burglar.

The Burglar laughed, disclosing two rows of strong, white teeth. A cleft in the square-cut, clean-shaven chin, visible below the mask, became more pronounced. A woman would have called it a dimple.

“I wanted something different,” he explained. “I couldn’t imagine anything more extraordinary than a real burglar here ready to do business, so I came.”

“It’s lucky the police didn’t see you,” remarked the Czar.

Again the Burglar laughed. He was evidently a good-natured craftsman, despite his sinister garb.

“That was my one fear — that I would be pinched before I arrived,” he replied. “‘Pinched,’ I may explain, is a technical term in my profession meaning juggled, nabbed, collared, run in. It seemed that my fears had some foundation, too, for when I drove up in my auto and stepped out a couple of plain-clothes men stared at me pretty hard.”

He laid aside the dark lantern and revolver to light a fresh cigarette. The Mikado picked up the lantern and flashed the light on and off several times, while the Czar sighted the revolver at the floor.

“Better not do that,” suggested the Burglar casually. “It’s loaded.”

“Loaded?” repeated the Czar. He laid down the revolver gingerly.

“Surest thing, you know,” and the Burglar laughed quizzically. “I’m the real thing, you see, so naturally my revolver is loaded. I think I ought to be able to make quite a good haul, as we say, before unmasking-time.”

“If you’re as clever as your appearance would indicate,” said the Cardinal admiringly, “I see no reason why it shouldn’t be worth while. You might, for instance, make a collection of Elizabethan jewels. I have noticed four Elizabeths so far, and it’s early yet.”

“Oh, I’ll make it pay,” the Burglar assured him lightly. “I’m pretty clever; practised a good deal, you know. Just to show you that I am an expert, here is a watch and pin I took from my friend, the Czar, five minutes ago.”

He extended a well-gloved hand in which lay the watch and diamond pin. The Czar stared at them a moment in frank astonishment; patted himself all over in sudden trepidation; then laughed sheepishly. The Mikado tilted his cigar up to a level with the slant eyes of his mask, and laughed.

“In the language of diplomacy, Nick,” he told the Czar, “you are what is known as ‘easy.’ I thought I had convinced you of that.”

“Gad, you are clever,” remarked the Cardinal. “I might have used you along with D’Artagnan and the others.”

The Burglar laughed again and stood up lazily.

“Come on, this is stupid,” he suggested. “Let’s go out and see what’s doing.”

“Say, just between ourselves tell us who you are,” urged the Czar. “Your voice seems familiar, but I can’t place you.”

“Wait till unmasking-time,” retorted the Burglar good-naturedly. “Then you’ll know. Or if you think you could bribe that stone image who took my card at the door you might try. He’ll remember me. I never saw a man so startled in all my life as he was when I appeared.”

The quartet sauntered out into the ballroom just as the signal for the grand march was given. A few minutes later the kaleidoscopic picture began to move. Stuyvesant Randolph, the host, as Sir Walter Raleigh, and his superb wife, as Cleopatra, looked upon the mass of colour, and gleaming shoulders, and jewels, and brilliant uniforms, and found it good — extremely good.

Mr. Randolph smiled behind his mask at the striking incongruities on every hand: Queen Elizabeth and Mr. Micawber; Cardinal Richelieu and a Pierrette; a Clown dancing attendance on Marie Antoinette. The Czar of Russia paid deep and devoted

attention to a light-footed Geisha girl, while the Mikado and Folly, a jingling thing in bells and abbreviated skirts, romped together.

The grotesque figure of the march was the Burglar. His revolver was thrust carelessly into a pocket and the dark lantern hung at his belt. He was pouring a stream of pleasing nonsense into the august ear of Lady Macbeth, nimbly seeking at the same time to evade the pompous train of the Dowager Empress. The grand march came to an end and the chattering throng broke up into little groups.

Cardinal Richelieu strolled along with a Pierrette on his arm.

“Business good?” he inquired of the Burglar.

“Expect it to be,” was the reply.

The Pierrette came and, standing on her tip-toes — silly, impractical sort of toes they were — made a *moue* at the Burglar.

“Oooh!” she exclaimed. “You are perfectly horrid.”

“Thank you,” retorted the Burglar.

He bowed gravely, and the Cardinal, with his companion, passed on. The Burglar stood gazing after them a moment, then glanced around the room, curiously, two or three times. He might have been looking for someone. Finally he wandered away aimlessly through the crowd.



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End of Sample