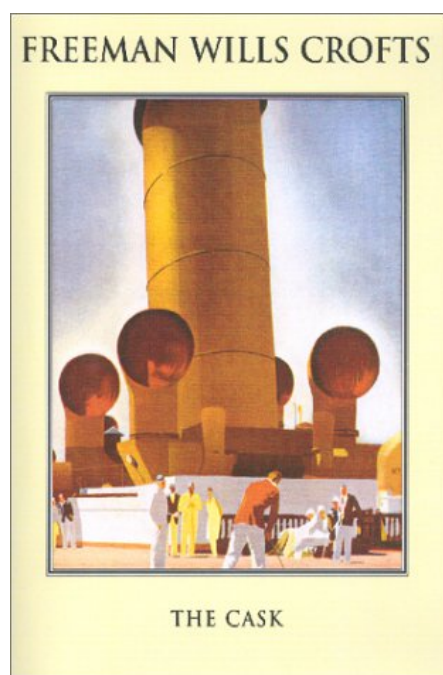




The Cask

Freeman Wills Crofts

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Paris. Shipping business, police techniques, investigative procedures, feature in this alibi puzzle plot.

The Cask Details

Date : Published 2001 by House of Stratus (first published 1920)

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Author : Freeman Wills Crofts

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Classics, Crime

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From Reader Review The Cask for online ebook

Ian says

A slow start but a most interesting and detailed book, the ending was well written and the journey was with waiting for, it's worth remembering the age of the book and reading it with this in mind. We tell stories differently today so the style can seem odd. Don't worry about it and enjoy reading something different.

Djj says

Superb early police procedural. A bit plodding at times, but it was published in 1920 so the slow unfolding of the plot is largely due to the style of the time (or so I'm assuming). A crazy story where a body turn up in a cask. A suspect is found after a lengthy police investigation. Then a detective goes over much the same ground. We learn much about casks, train schedules between London, Paris and Brussels, and police procedure of the time. I suspect this isn't for everyone, but I really enjoyed it.

Sloweducation says

Charmingly tedious mystery goes in for every Golden Age cliché. The sheer amount of deduction is altogether impressive, but the book is weighed down by the fact that it is mostly very uninteresting. This is my first Crofts, and apparently his trademark is the laboriously described railway timetable. No character is more than sketched. There is constant exposition, but none of it pertains to psychology in the least. A quite silly book by any measure, which could do with a hundred pages less, and yet there are things in it which I quite enjoyed. It is nearly a procedural, and the central mystery is unusually ingenious.

Elizabeth says

Nicely plotted, old fashioned mystery.

Kim says

The Cask (another one of this author's books that I've never heard of) is a novel written by Freeman Wills Crofts (again who I never heard of before I read one or two of his other novels) was published in 1920. It was his first novel which I only realized when I was finished, so I'm obviously not going to read all his novels in the order he wrote them. I think it would be impossible anyway, if you can find all his books you deserve an award, a few books perhaps. I read this book because I enjoyed the last one, and I was in a used bookstore and there it was. So if you go to used book stores where the books are really, really used, and dusty and smell funny, you may find this book. I know that the next time I find myself at that bookstore, a place I like going to because I can find books no one ever reads there, not for the cleanliness of the building,. And if I come across another Freeman Wills Crofts book I will buy it. As long as all the pages are there and none of the dozen or so cats that live there hasn't used it as a litter box that is. (The owner also has a cat rescue home there, you can come in and take one of the without a home cats from them, a wonderful thing to

do, but a little strange having them running around in a book store.)

Anyway, back to our author, way back in 1912 Crofts found himself working as a Junior Assistant to his uncle who was the chief engineer of the Belfast and Northern Counties Railway. He also got married about the same time, to the daughter of a bank manager, Mary Bellas Canning. (That's her name not the bank manager's) What he wanted to do was write, so in 1929 he abandoned his railway engineering career to become a full-time writer. I wonder what his wife thought of that. He had written his first book "*The Cask*" in 1920 and once he got started he didn't stop, producing a book almost every year for thirty years. He is best remembered (not by anyone I know) for his detective, Inspector Joseph French, who was introduced in his fifth book "*Inspector French's Greatest Case*" in 1924, so reading *The Cask* means we haven't met this famous detective yet. We do meet a whole bunch of other people though, and they spend much of their time either sending a cask back and forth between Paris and London, hauling the cask to the docks in Paris and London, putting whatever is put into the cask, which could be quite a number of things, rare coins, statues, even a body, stealing the cask, or trying to find the cask. How's that for a summary.

Our book begins with the cask arriving in London, the director of a Steam Navigation Company (whatever that is) sees that a shipment of wine they are expecting has come in and he sends a "reliable man" to the docks to make sure everything is how it should be. It isn't. Broughton (that's the reliable guy) goes down to the docks and watches the casks being unloaded, when there is a problem, four casks fall out of the sling and land on their sides on the dock. One of these casks was found to be different from the rest, it was more strongly made and better finished and they knew it didn't have wine in it because they could see a heap of sawdust which escaped from a crack at one end. Broughton and the foreman, Harkness, see not just sawdust but also coins, and now were so curious as to what was in the cask they opened it and found it filled with gold coins, almost filled with them. There were three things in the cask, coins, sawdust, and a hand. That's what they saw at the time anyway, the hand later was found to be attached to a body. On the side of the cask is the name and address of the man who is supposed to be getting this lovely package, M. Leon Felix, and it is marked as containing statuary. Now the "fun" begins. Broughton goes off to the head office to report the find (why he isn't going to the police I don't know), and leaves Harkness guarding their treasure. Meanwhile Mr. Felix arrives to pick up his cask which they won't give him telling him he must go to the office first. Meanwhile Broughton and Mr. Avery go to the police, and after explaining the reason they are there Inspector Burnley goes with them to open the cask. When they get there, it is gone. A man of middle height, foreign-looking, with dark eyes and a short, pointed beard had showed up with the right paperwork and taken it. Ok, quickly now - I'm getting tired of writing this, Inspector Burnley and Broughton go off searching for the cask and they find it, after they find it it disappears again, then it turns up in Paris, but before anyone can get to it, it's back in London, then Paris, then London, you get the idea. We do somewhere along the way get the body out of it which at least puts us on the right track, and we get another inspector to help us, Inspector La Touche, I can't remember his first name. It's good he shows up or we'd still be going back and forth between the two cities. As for the cask, it has been quite busy, at one time or another it carried, sawdust, two statues, one of two women standing and one sitting, another with two women sitting and one standing, gold coins and a body. I don't know what happened to the wine. Going back and forth between cities, London and Paris, I just thought of a wonderful name for the book, "*A Tale of Two Cities*", but I believe that title may have already been taken. :-) Happy reading.

Ray Taylor says

Great Read

Good mystery and fun to read mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmmmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmmmm

Lisa Kucharski says

The beginning suffers a bit from showing us every bit of movement made and thought by the investigating police, and could have used a heavier hand by an editor. However, about the last third of the book when a lawyer gets involved and then a private detective is involved the story actually comes to life and it feels like you are reading about people and not just sifting through facts.

It certainly feels like a book that was written before 1920, though the copyright is 1920. In those 1910 years the books could be quite "tedious" for a reader from the 21st century. The book reflects style of the time and while Crofts has put together a wonderful crime to solve- he hasn't in this first book mastered bringing more life and vigor to the characters in the book. It does however, feel like what any policeman would have to do to pick up all the pieces of an investigation.

If you are interested in the period and this style you will enjoy the book. For me it was an easy book to put down and hard to get going with it. I persevered due to the fact that I've read another one and found it was of interest, and the end of this book was closer to the other book- more lively.

Fave quote: La Touche has just gained an important clue! "I cannot say, monsieur, how obliged I am to you," said La Touche in heartfelt tones, and by a sort of legerdemain, of which both participants remained profoundly unconscious, a twenty-franc bill passed from hand to hand. La Touche was extraordinarily pleased. He had broken the alibi.

Jack Heath says

Synopsis: when a cask arrives from Paris it holds gold and a body, rather than a statue! Officers Burnley and Lafarge delve into the puzzle.

Tiana Hadnt says

3.5 STARS!!!!!! The very slow beginning almost made me quit reading, but I'm glad I kept on. It was not the best written or plotted Golden Age detective novel, but for it to be the author's first mystery, it wasn't too bad. The killer is fairly obvious from the time we are introduced, but watching the multiple officers and detectives figure it out was quite enjoyable. I wouldn't suggest this as your first foray in Golden Age mysteries, but it's definitely worth a read if you already have a history of enjoying them.

Qu?nh says

Có th? coi The Cask là cu?n ti?u thuy?t kinh ?i?n v? âm m?u ng?y t?o ch?ng c? ngo?i ph?m. Truy?n thiên v? th? lo?i trình thám suy lu?n, quy trình ?i?u tra c?a c?nh sát ???c mô t? t? m?, âm m?u ng?y t?o ch?ng c? ???c g?y d?ng k? công. Th?c s? khá k? công! N?u ch?a t?ng làm trong ngành v?n t?i, ch?c tác gi? ?ã không vi?t

???c nh? v?y.

Gi?ng v?n không ph?i ?i?m m?nh, mang thiên h??ng k? chuy?n, không có nhi?u y?u t? tr? tình hay tâm lý. T? gi?a truy?n v? cu?i có kha khá d? ki?n, khi?n ng??i ??c khó nh? và d? c?m th?y r?i. Tuy v?y, v? án khá h?p d?n, ??c gi? d? b? cu?n hút vào m?ch truy?n. Ph?n cu?i truy?n ?ã có m?t cú plot twist r?t hay, dù ch?a hoàn h?o l?m.

Susan says

Freeman Wills Crofts (1879-1957) was one of the most successful of the crime writers from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, writing a book almost every year during his writing career. He was a member of the Detection Club, alongside Agatha Christie and Dorothy L Sayers and became a full time writer in 1929. The Cask was his first ever novel, written in 1920 when he found himself off work with a long illness. Although it was written a long time ago (even for a Golden Age novel, it is one of the earliest I have come across), it has aged well. Yes, it is dated in that people use horses and carts far more often than a car and phone calls are still novel enough to be easily traced, but it is the human emotions that matter and this novel deals with the classic themes of jealousy and revenge.

The Cask takes place in both London and Paris. When a cask arrives in London from Paris it causes suspicion. Supposed to hold a statue, gold rolls out when it is opened slightly and there is a glimpse of a hand. What follows is the disappearance of the cask, tracking it down and then trying to decide where it came from and who is to blame for the body inside. Inspector Burnley is the English detective sent in search of the truth, working in Paris alongside Lefarge. Both the detectives are intelligent, hard working and follow up the clues thoroughly. There is also George La Touche, a private detective, who almost loses his life in his attempt to discover what happened. This is very much a puzzle - with clues that are confusing but which can be followed (personally I gave up and simply enjoyed the story, but I am sure you could solve it if you made notes!). It is interesting to read this very early example of the genre and it is easy to see why Crofts is revered by those who enjoy books from this era.

Glenn T. Miller says

This was a good read. The plot is involved, but the clues are all there. Well worth the summer.

Val says

I thought this was a very competent detective novel. If I had put on my anorak and hunted out contemporary train timetables and street maps the chronology and geography would have been faultless. The two detectives are painstaking in their investigation, then stop when they are satisfied that they have the culprit and sufficient evidence for a conviction. The private detective also investigates to give the accused the best chance of a defence in court. Everybody does their job.

The only problem with the book is that I didn't particularly care about any of the characters. We know what they do, what they wear and look like, what they eat and how they spend their spare time, but very little about what they think and feel. The author's preoccupation is with the plot and creating a puzzle for us to solve, which he does well. I don't think I would want to read more of them though.

This is an early example of a very popular genre and later writers improved on it. I think some reminders or recaps are helpful, but to have a new detective re-investigate the whole thing was a bit more repetition than I

wanted. It is plausible and well reasoned and he does show how tiny overlooked clues can make all the difference.

MrsER says

If Mr. Crofts other books are like this one, I don't think I want to read them. While well written, the book is sterile, reads like a diary almost. All--and I mean ALL--the actions are minutely described. Some characters who appeared at the beginning of the story, whose actions are described ad nauseam, completely vanish soon afterwards. Another annoying thing was the constant misspelling of French. For example Metropolitaine, instead of Métropolitain; Gare du Lyon instead of Gare de Lyon; Toisson d'Or instead of Toison d'Or. Little mistakes, I know, but irritating nevertheless. I immediately suspected the criminal, but it seemed the entirety of Scotland Yard and Sûreté were completely blinded by his appearance of honesty; not even the fact that one of the people involved in his alibi could not be traced raises their suspicions. Really? The cask is in the forefront non-stop, to a point that every time I read the word it made me grind my teeth. The detectives and chief keep rethinking the "facts" on and on and on. So, I started jumping paragraphs, than a whole page, until I went to the last chapter, and, lo and behold, I was correct in my assumption of the perpetrator of the crime! It gets two stars because it kept me reading for longer than my shattered nerves could take! ;-)

Beth (bibliobeth) says

If I could give three and a half stars to this novel, I definitely would! An intriguing and entertaining golden age mystery with so many strands, twists and turns I was desperate to discover "who dunnit."
