

M. R. JAMES

Count Magnus

*and*

Other Ghost Stories

THE COMPLETE GHOST STORIES  
OF M. R. JAMES, VOLUME I

*Edited with an Introduction and  
Notes by S. T. JOSHI*

PENGUIN BOOKS



M. R. JAMES

Count Magnus  
*and*  
Other Ghost Stories

THE COMPLETE GHOST STORIES  
OF M. R. JAMES, VOLUME I

*Edited with an Introduction and  
Notes by S. T. JOSHI*

PENGUIN BOOKS

---

# Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[CANON ALBERIC'S SCRAP-BOOK](#)

[LOST HEARTS](#)

[THE MEZZOTINT](#)

[THE ASH-TREE](#)

[NUMBER 13](#)

[COUNT MAGNUS](#)

["OH, WHISTLE, AND I'LL COME TO YOU, MY LAD"](#)

[THE TREASURE OF ABBOTT THOMAS](#)

[A SCHOOL STORY](#)

[THE ROSE GARDEN](#)

[THE TRACTATE MIDDOTH](#)

[CASTING THE RUNES](#)

[THE STALLS OF BARCHESTER CATHEDRAL](#)

[MARTIN'S CLOSE](#)

[MR. HUMPHREYS AND HIS INHERITANCE](#)

[APPENDIX](#)

[PREFACE TO GHOST-STORIES OF AN ANTIQUARY](#)

[PREFACE TO MORE GHOST STORIES OF AN ANTIQUARY](#)

[Explanatory Notes](#)

## COUNT MAGNUS AND OTHER GHOST STORIES

MONTAGUE RHODES JAMES was born in 1862 at Goodnestone, in Kent, but spent most of his early years at Livermere Hall in Suffolk. He attended Temple Grove preparatory school and Eton before beginning a long association with King's College, Cambridge, first as a student (1882), then as Fellow (1887), Dean (1889), Tutor (1900), and Provost (1905). He was also director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (1893-1908). His first volume of ghost stories, *Ghost-Stories of an Antiquary* appeared in 1904, followed by three other volumes: *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), *Thin Ghost* (1919), and *A Warning to the Curious* (1925). His *Collected Ghost Stories* appeared in 1931. In 1918 he became Provost of Eton, remaining in that office for the rest of his life. Throughout his career James published many distinguished works of scholarship, especially on medieval manuscripts, Biblical apocrypha, and church history; among his important publications were *The Wanderings and Homes of Manuscripts* (1919) and *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924). His autobiography, *Eton and King's*, was issued in 1926. Among his many honors was the Order of Merit bestowed upon him by King George V in 1930. James, who never married, died in 1936.

S. T. JOSHI is a widely published writer and editor. He has edited three Penguin Classics editions of H. P. Lovecraft's horror tales as well as Algernon Blackwood's *Ancient Sorceries and Other Strange Stories* (2002) and Lord Dunsany's *In the Land of Time and Other Fantasy Tales* (2004). Among his critical and biographical works are *The Weird Tale* (1990), *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* (1996), and *The Modern Weird Tale* (2001). He has edited works by Ambrose Bierce, H. L. Mencken, and other writers. He lives with his wife in upstate New York.

---

M. R. JAMES

Count Magnus  
*and*  
Other Ghost Stories

THE COMPLETE GHOST STORIES  
OF M. R. JAMES, VOLUME I

*Edited with an Introduction and  
Notes by S. T. JOSHI*

PENGUIN BOOKS

---

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,  
Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell,  
Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,

Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany,  
Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,

Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:  
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in Penguin Books 2005

Introduction copyright © S. T. Joshi, 2005  
All rights reserved

“A Night in King's College Chapel” is . R. James.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

James, M. R. (Montague Rhodes), 1862-1936

Count Magnus and other ghost stories : the complete ghost stories of  
M. R. James /M. R. James ; edited with an introduction and notes by S. T. Joshi  
p. cm.—(Penguin classics)

eISBN : 978-0-143-03939-6

1. Ghost stories, English. I. Joshi, S. T., 1958- II. Title. III. Series.

PR6019.A565A6 2005

823'.912—dc22 2005043371

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

<http://us.penguin.com>

---

## Introduction

In one sense, it is exceptionally odd that M. R. James (1862- 1936) would become the leading twentieth-century author of ghost stories; in another sense—especially when we consider the sort of ghost stories James came to write—it seems eminently natural and inevitable. James led a double, perhaps a triple, life—first as one of the most distinguished scholars of medieval manuscripts and early Christianity of his time, second as a noted professor and administrator at Cambridge University and then at Eton College, and finally as a writer of ghost stories. It is no surprise that only that latter body of work continues to attract the attention and fascination of readers worldwide: James's scholarship, although fundamentally sound, has now been largely superseded, and in any event its audience is necessarily limited to a small cadre of the learned, whereas the ghost stories are of universal appeal and have never been surpassed by those many authors who have chosen to pay the tribute by imitation.

Montague Rhodes James was born on August 1, 1862, at the vicarage of Goodnestone, in Kent, the fourth child and third son of Herbert and Mary Emily James. Three years later Herbert was transferred to Livermere Hall, near Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, a home that remained in the James family until Herbert's death in 1909, and remained close to M. R. James's heart long after that.<sup>1</sup> Herbert had fallen under the influence of the evangelical movement of the time, but there is little evidence that his children became doctrinaire or fundamentalist in their religion; indeed, it was a lasting disappointment for Herbert when Montague eventually decided not to pursue holy orders.

The young Montague received his education first at Temple Grove preparatory school (1873-76) then Eton College (1876- 82), where he gained a lifelong attachment to his tutor, Henry Elford Luxmoore. Luxmoore may have seen in James—who was already exhibiting an interest in what might be called biblical archaeology (notably the apocryphal books of the Old and New Testament and the apocalyptic literature of the early Middle Ages)—the wide-ranging scholar that he did not have the opportunity to be. At the same time, Eton also saw James's initial interest in the ghost story. In a letter to his parents he speaks of stumbling upon the work of the medieval writer Walter Map (whose *De Nugis Curialium* James would later edit and translate), “which contains some extraordinary stories about Ghosts, Vampires, Woodnymphs etc.”<sup>2</sup> His reading of the great Irish supernaturalist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, who would remain his favorite writer of horror tales, also dates to his Eton days. There is evidence that he wrote—or, at any rate, told—his first ghost stories as early as 1877, certainly, by 1880, when the *Eton Rambler* published his essay on “Ghost Stories” (see Appendix), his interest was well established.

But for the time being, scholarship was paramount. It was inevitable that, after graduating from Eton, James would advance to King's College, Cambridge: for centuries King's had been a close corporation reserved exclusively for graduates of Eton, and even after the reforms of 1861 it was still largely an Etonian preserve. James's years as a collegian at King's (1882-87) saw the flowering of his interest in Biblical curiosa, medieval manuscripts, and church history. This work only continued when James was successively named Fellow (1887), Dean (1889), and finally Tutor (1900) of King's. His first scholarly article had been published as early as 1879, but beginning in 1887 he commenced a series of publications—books, monographs, editions, articles, and reviews—that would not cease until his death. In 1893 James also became the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, a post he would hold until 1908.



How exactly James found the time for all this work, let alone the writing of ghost stories, was a puzzle to friends and colleagues alike, especially when one considers James's other interests—his devotion to Dickens, P. G. Wodehouse, and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories; his interest in card games and crossword puzzles; and, of course, the abundant conviviality he showed to friends, students, and almost any others who came within his horizon. A charming and often-told anecdote gets to the heart of the matter:

When Monty was in his early thirties, Lord Acton came here [to King's] . . . “You know Montagu James?” he asked a King's man. “Yes, I know him.” “Is it true that he is ready to spend every evening playing games or talking with undergraduates?” “Yes, the evenings and more.” “And do you know the MSS in knowledge of MSS he is already third or fourth in Europe?” “I am interested to hear you say so, Sir.” “Then how does he manage it?” “We have not yet found out.”<sup>3</sup>

The matter becomes even more baffling when we consider the extensive travel in which James engaged from as early as 1892, when he took his first bicycle tour of the Continent. From 1895 to 1914 he took at least one trip to France a year, chiefly for the purpose of examining medieval cathedrals; he would later maintain that he had personally seen 141 out of the 143 extant cathedrals in France. Trips to Scandinavia followed in 1899 and 1900.

James's ghost stories were manifestly an amusement of his lighter hours, although they need not be esteemed lightly on that account. We may date the commencement of his supernatural writing to the rather frivolous tale “A Night in King's College Chapel” (probably written in 1892), but it was not long before he produced weightier work. A celebrated meeting of the Chitchat Society (a literary and social group at Cambridge) on October 28, 1893, saw James read his two earliest ghost stories, “Candor Alberic's Scrap-book” and “Lost Hearts.” Thus began a long tradition, extending well in the 1920s when James would read drafts of his tales to a succession of friends, collegians, and other groups, usually at Christmas time. Although these first two stories were published in magazines in 1893, James would very likely not have considered book publication of his tales had not a close friend, James McBryde, undertaken the task of illustrating several of them. McBryde's sudden death in 1900, after completing only four illustrations, appears to have led James to issue *Ghost-Stories of an Antiquary* (1904) as a tribute to his friend's memory.

A year after this volume came out, James was made Provost of King's College. It proved to be a difficult assignment: not only had he been selected only after two others had declined the post, but the tedium of administrative work began to weigh upon his temperament. It was also at this time that the struggle between the “pious” and the “ungodly” began to emerge for control of Cambridge's intellectual culture; James, manifestly on the side of the “pious,” was notably uncharitable toward such of his “ungodly” Cambridge colleagues as James George Frazer and Bertrand Russell. The war years were particularly stressful: Cambridge seemed emptied of its finest youths, many of whom (such as Rupert Brooke, whose participation in Cambridge theatricals had attracted James's admiration) left their bodies on the battlefields of France. Although a second volume of tales, *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, appeared in 1911, along with an array of impressive scholarly work, this was a markedly unhappy time in James's life.

The return to Eton in 1918, this time as Provost, could only have been a relief. As Provost of King's, James had been criticized for failing to be an intellectual pioneer; his scholarship seemed

increasingly remote and unrelated to present-day concerns. A close friend, A. C. Benson, who had known James since his Eton days, wrote somewhat uncharitably in his diary: “his mind is the mind of a nice child—he hates and fears all problems, all speculation; all originality or novelty of view. His spirit is both timid and unadventurous.”<sup>4</sup> Eton was, however, exactly the place for James: his instinctive empathy with the enchantments and travails of schoolboy life, the unaffectedly avuncular or even grandfatherly air he exhibited, and the prodigious learning that he carried so unassumingly were perfectly suited to the education of British youth. Administrative mundanities were safely in the hands of a Head Master; James, although he faced the terror of dining with the King and Queen once every year, could devote himself wholly to nurturing his charges with quiet encouragement.

It was during his Provostship that his two final collections of ghost stories, *A Thin Ghost* (1919) and *A Warning to the Curious* (1925), appeared, followed by the gathering of all four volumes, plus a few additional tales, as *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (1931). Such important works of scholarship as *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), and such popular works as *The Wanderings and Homes of Manuscripts* (1919) and *Abbeys* (1925), also appeared. James’s learning of the Danish language paid dividends when he translated some of Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales into English in 1930. In 1925 he completed the prodigious task—begun informally as early as 1884—of cataloguing all the manuscripts of the Cambridge colleges. Honors were showered upon him in later life: he became a trustee of the British Museum in 1925; he was awarded honorary degrees from Oxford (1927) and Cambridge (1934); and, as a capstone, in 1930 he received the Order of Merit from King George V. James’s later years were plagued with increasing ill health, and he died on June 12, 1936. His headstone bears the words of Ephesians 2:19: “No longer a sojourner, but a fellow citizen with the saints and of the household of God.”

It would be easy to pass off James’s ghost stories as lighthearted amusements; James himself lends some credence to this view in many of his own remarks. Indeed, many scholars on James have unwittingly belittled his work by asserting that “His stories are straightforward tales of terror and the supernatural, utterly devoid of any deeper meaning,”<sup>5</sup> or that “his fiction . . . was simply the bagatelle for an idle hour, the construction of a delicate edifice of suspense with which to entertain the young people whose company he so much enjoyed.”<sup>6</sup> To be sure, a more exhaustive study of James’s life and scholarly work will shed additional light on some of the telling autobiographical elements in the stories—his wide-ranging travels as the source of the authentic local color in such stories as “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book” or “Number 13”; his pathological fear of spiders in “The Ash-Tree”; the extraordinary re-creation of medieval Latin in the opening of “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas” and of a seventeenth-century trial in “Martin’s Close”—but even this does not get us close to the philosophical thrust of the ghost stories.

Richard William Pfaff maintained, correctly, that “Writers on ghost stories . . . fail not so much in praising MRJ’s stories too little—indeed, it might be argued that if anything the tendency is to overpraise them as a whole—but in paying little or no attention to the really remarkable thing about them, the brilliance of the antiquarian background.”<sup>7</sup> But Pfaff himself may not have been quite so precise in this formulation as one might wish; for it is not merely the “antiquarian background” (which, in one sense, is merely utilized to create a patina of verisimilitude) that is remarkable, but the purpose to which James puts it. James was sufficiently well-read in the traditions of supernatural fiction to know that terror is most effective when emerging from the depths of history. Where

differed from his predecessors—especially the Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, who actually set their works in the medieval era in order to enhance the reader's suspension of disbelief in the supernatural manifestations they exhibited—was in suggesting the pervasiveness of the past's influence upon the present: his tales, generally set only a few decades prior to their date of writing, establish a continuity between past and present in which the present is entirely engulfed and rendered fleeting and ineffectual in the face of the heavy cultural burden of prior centuries. Martin Hughes gets close to this idea when he writes: “the premiss of antiquarian stories is that records and relics are very important: when properly studied they are extremely revealing of all aspects of life in the past; moreover what they reveal is still important now.”<sup>8</sup>

In conveying this conception, James's protagonists are of central importance. It is a truism to say that James never engages in any detailed psychological analysis of the antiquarians who are the driving force of his tales: they are, in one sense, merely stand-ins for himself—uniformly male, scholarly, somewhat unworldly, and engaged in investigating the past largely to satisfy curiosity. Jack Sullivan has remarked of these figures:

The characters are antiquaries, not merely because the past enthalls them, but because the present is a near vacuum. They surround themselves with rarefied paraphernalia from the past—engraving rare books, altars, tombs, coins, and even such things as doll's houses and ancient whistles—seemingly because they cannot connect with anything in the present.<sup>9</sup>

There may not be sufficient textual evidence to support this interpretation, but it is provocative nonetheless. What has, however, gone largely unnoticed is that there is a subtle but unmistakable progression between these seemingly “innocent” characters (all of whom bring doom upon themselves by actively seeking to probe into ancient secrets that they know full well may be dangerous) and the avowedly “evil” figures who populate some of James's most memorable tales. The redoubtable Mr. Abney in “Lost Hearts,” who seeks prolonged life by eating the still-beating hearts of little children, is described as “a man wrapped up in his books,” while Karswell, in “Casting the Runes,” is merely a scholar gone wrong—one who is so embittered at his failure to gain recognition as a man of learning that he turns to occultism as an act of revenge. It is worth noting that the motif of supernatural revenge, very common in James's stories, may itself have been a product of his own scholarly interests, specifically his interest in apocalyptic literature. Early in his career he had noted that the literature “operates on the principle that the punishment should fit the crime, with much attention to the often gory details by which this principle is worked out.”<sup>10</sup>

It is here, I believe, that James's ghost stories, his antiquarian scholarship, and his religion become inextricably fused. Shane Leslie, a longtime friend of James, made the seemingly startling remark that “his belief in ghosts marched parallel with his religion,”<sup>11</sup> although he does not elucidate the statement. Another friend, Stephen Gaselee, has portrayed James's religion as follows:

He was a man of simple and deep religious feeling. Learned biblical scholar as he was, he did not think much of the “higher criticism,” at any rate when it was destructive; and I have heard him say that the biblical documents were subjected to criticism not only unfair in itself, but of a kind that no one would ever have dreamed of applying to the secular literary remains of antiquity.<sup>12</sup>

That last phrase is of the highest importance; for although James may not have been a dogmatic fundamentalist Christian, his hostility to the intellectual ferment of his time in matters of religion—the shock-waves following Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859); the “Higher Criticism” that showed the evolution of biblical texts over centuries and made it increasingly unlikely that they were direct revelations from God; the gradual but inexorable shift of intellectual opinion from unquestioned piety to agnosticism and even atheism—is evident. In his ghost stories, James uses such devices as occultism (the perversion of religion into impious magic and sorcery) and the misuse or misconstruction of biblical passages as a warning on the dangers of straying from orthodoxy. The Bible’s own warnings on the dangers of being tempted by Satan are so frequent that it can easily lead the weak and the vicious—such as James Wilson, the redoubtable landowner of “Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance”—into becoming one of the Devil’s party.

So much attention has been given to the technique of James’s ghost stories that insufficient attention has been paid to their deeper meanings. This is particularly the case with James’s ghosts. P. Lovecraft wrote pungently:

In inventing a new type of ghost, he has departed considerably from the conventional Gothic tradition; for where the older stock ghosts were pale and stately, and apprehended chiefly through the sense of sight, the average James ghost is lean, dwarfish, and hairy—a sluggish, hellish night-abomination midway betwixt beast and man—and usually *touched* before it is *seen*.<sup>13</sup>

All this is very entertaining and, indeed, by no means off the mark; but Lovecraft fails to probe the true symbolism of James’s ghosts. They are “lean, dwarfish, and hairy” because they thus embody the *primitivism* that stands in stark contrast to the learned, rational, skeptical antiquarians who, for James, represented the pinnacle of human achievement. It is not insignificant that Somerton, in “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas,” “screamed out . . . like a beast” when encountering the horror in the well: contact with the primitive reduces even the most civilized to the level of the subhuman.

Related to this whole motif is James’s array of lower-class characters. The fractured and dialectic English in which these characters speak or write is, in one sense, a reflection of James’s well-known penchant for mimicry; but it cannot be denied that there is a certain element of malice in his relentless exhibition of their intellectual failings. The illiteracy of Somerton’s valet in “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas”; the malapropisms of the bailiff, Mr. Cooper, in “Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance”; the ignorance of the hapless librarian in “The Tractate Middoth”—all these and other characters are made figures of fun, the butt of jests from a man whose own learning is unassailable. And yet, they occupy pivotal places in the narrative: by representing a kind of middle ground between the scholarly protagonists and the aggressively savage ghosts, they frequently sense the presence of the supernatural more quickly and more instinctively than their excessively learned betters can bring themselves to do.

Another aspect of James’s characterization is his women characters—or, rather, their virtual absence from his tales. Even in his own lifetime James, the lifelong bachelor, suffered from accusations of misogyny: in 1896 he opposed the granting of degrees to women at Cambridge, and in 1916-17 he attacked with unwonted viciousness a paper on comparative religion by Jane Harrison in the *Classical Review* that he regarded as disrespectful to Scripture. Several women appear to have pursued James for his hand in marriage, but he resisted each time. James’s defenders point to his cordial friendships with any number of women, notably Gwendolen McBryde, the widow of his friend James McBryde; but the world of James’s fiction is as devoid of significant female characters as H.

Lovecraft's. This need not be regarded as a flaw: James was not writing mimetic fiction that claimed to present a well-rounded portrayal of society at large. He was writing of what he knew—the world (male) antiquarian scholarship. And yet, the sardonic view of marriage that we find in such a story as “The Rose Garden,” or the annoying Lady Waldrop in “Mr. Humphreys and His Inheritance,” seems to go a bit beyond mere whimsy. What, then, are we to make of the fact that several of the ghosts in James's tales create fear through a hideous parody of affection? Who can forget the thing in the well in “The Treasure of Abbott Thomas,” which “slipped forward on to my chest, and *put its arms around my neck*” (James's emphasis)?

And yet, it may well be said that for James, as Austin Warren has observed, “It is places, not persons, which are haunt-able.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, “Number 13,” otherwise as far as possible from the standard “antiquarian ghost story” that James initiated, is prototypical in its display of a haunted hotel room. Although the locus of horror in James is chiefly situated in cathedrals, abbeys, and other sites where centuries of religious tradition have engendered an inevitable backlash of unorthodoxy among a select band of heretics, horror can also manifest itself in any locale where the long reach of history has had free play—a rose garden, a hedge maze, even a library. The mundanity of these settings is vital to James's methodology of the ghost story, which (as he wrote in the preface to his second collection) was designed to elicit the reader's awareness that “If I'm not careful, something of this kind may happen to me!”

M. R. James would no doubt have been surprised at the literary legacy he fostered. This legacy was exhibited not so much in the work of those friends and colleagues who tended to produce uninspired pastiches of his style and manner—E. G. Swain (*The Stoneground Ghost Tales*, 1912), Arthur Grant (*Tedious Brief Tales of Granta and Gramarye*, 1919), R. H. Malden (*Nine Ghosts*, 1942), A. N. Munnings (*The Alabaster Hand*, 1949)—as in certain other writers who used the antiquarian ghost story as the springboard for imaginative creations of their own. The three Benson brothers—A. C., E. F., and R. H.—all wrote supernatural tales, and E. F. was present at the legendary meeting of the Chitchester Society in 1893 when James read his first tales;<sup>15</sup> but the tales of E. F. Benson, the best of the three, although not written with quite the meticulous precision of James's, tend to be of broader range and theme. It can by no means be claimed that such writers as Walter de la Mare, L. P. Hartley, Olive Onions, L. T. C. Rolt, Russell Kirk, or Robert Aickman are in any sense merely imitators of James; indeed, one suspects that the greater emphasis that many of these writers place upon the psychological analysis of ghostly phenomena, especially as they affect the victim of them, is a direct result of James's apparent lack of interest in this regard. In any event, one would like to think that James—whose views of his predecessors and contemporaries in the realm of supernatural fiction were not always charitable—would have taken some pride in the tradition he instigated, for all his depreciation of his own work as merely an exercise in pleasant shudder-coining. There is much to be said for the scholarly reserve, in-direction, and subtlety of James's tales, so strikingly in contrast to the loud, brash, and frequently vulgar effusions that clutter the supernatural field today. That his stories have survived a century or more while those of his noisier successors seem destined to lapse into merited oblivion should itself be regarded as “a warning to the curious.”



---

## Suggestions for Further Reading

### A. PRIMARY

James's ghost stories were issued in four slim volumes published in the United Kingdom by Edward Arnold: *Ghost-Stories of an Antiquary* (1904); *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911); *A Thirteenth Ghost and Others* (1919); and *A Warning to the Curious* (1925). Only the third volume appeared in the United States during James's lifetime (Longmans, Green, 1919). The complete contents of the four volumes (aside from their prefaces) were included in *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (Edward Arnold, 1931), a volume that has been frequently reprinted under various titles (e.g., *The Penguin Complete Ghost Stories of M. R. James* [Penguin, 1984]). This omnibus also includes five additional stories along with a new preface and the essay "Stories I Have Tried to Write." *The Five Jars* (Edward Arnold, 1922) is a children's fantasy; it was not published in the United States during James's lifetime. James also prepared a notable edition of the stories of Joseph Sheridan LeFanu: *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery* (George Bell & Sons, 1923). His autobiography *Eton and King's*, was published by Williams & Norgate in 1926.

There are numerous selections of James's ghost stories, the most notable being *Casting the Runes and Other Ghost Stories*, edited by Michael Cox (Oxford University Press/World's Classics, 1987) with substantial introduction and notes. Curiously, the 2002 reprint removes Cox's introduction and notes and substitutes an introduction by Michael Chabon. Cox has written another weighty introduction to another collection, *The Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (Oxford University Press, 1986). Peter Haining's *M. R. James: The Book of the Supernatural* (Foul-sham, 1979; published in the United States as *M. R. James: The Book of Ghost Stories* [Stein & Day, 1982]) contains a wealth of obscure writings by James and other ancillary material. Rosemary Pardoe's compilation, *The Fenstanton Witch and Others* (Haunted Library, 1999), is a valuable assemblage of James's ghost-story fragments and other writings.

In a class by itself is *A Pleasing Terror: The Complete Supernatural Writings of M. R. James*, edited by Barbara and Christopher Roden (Ash-Tree Press, 2001). It not only contains the complete contents of all four collections of ghost stories, but also all the uncollected tales (including some fragments from *The Five Jars*, his various writings on the ghost story, and several interesting works of criticism. The works by James are annotated (Michael Cox's annotations from *Casting the Runes* are included for the stories in that volume), although the notes (not excluding Cox's) are not written with quite the scholarly rigor that one might expect; there are also a few errors and omissions. But on the whole, it is an admirable compilation, and it is unfortunate that it was limited to one thousand copies and is now out of print.

It is surprising that little has been done with the abundance of James's surviving letters. Gwendolen McBryde issued a charming if expurgated volume of James's letters to her as *Letters to a Friend* (Edward Arnold, 1956), but little of his other correspondence has seen print.

James's scholarly work divides broadly into several discrete categories. One group in his descriptive catalogues of manuscripts. He catalogued the manuscripts of all the colleges of Cambridge

University, including *Jesus* (1895), *Sidney Sussex* (1895), *Peterhouse* (1899), *Trinity* (1900-04; vols.), *Emmanuel* (1904), *Christ's* (1905), *Clare* (1905), *Pembroke* (1905), *Queen's* (1905), *Gonville and Caius* (1907-08; 2 vols.), *Trinity Hall* (1907), *Corpus Christi* (1909-13; 7 parts), *Magdalen* (1909), *St. John's* (1913), and *St. Catherine's* (1925). Other catalogues include: *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Eton College* (1895); *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (1895); *A Descriptive Catalogue of Fifty Manuscripts from the Collection of Henry Yates Thompson* (1898); *The Manuscripts in the Library at Lambeth Palace* (1900; rev. ed. [with Claude Jenkins] 1930-32, 5 parts); *The Manuscripts of Westminster Abbey* (with J. A. Robinson) (1908); *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Latin Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library at Manchester* (1921; 2 vols.); *Bibliotheca Pepysiana* (1923); *A Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts in the University Library, Aberdeen* (1932); *The Bohun Manuscripts* (with E. G. Millar) (1936).

Another group in his editions of and treatises on Biblical apocrypha and apocalyptic works: *The Gospel According to Peter, and the Revelation of Peter: Two Lectures* (with J. A. Robinson) (1892); *Apocrypha Anecdota* (two series, 1893, 1897); *The Trinity College Apocalypse* (1909); *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude* (1912); *Old Testament Legends* (1913); *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (1920); *The Apocalypse in Latin and French* (1922); *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924); *Latin Infancy Gospels* (1927); *The Apocalypse in Art* (1931); *The Dublin Apocalypse* (1932); *The New Testament* (with Delia Lyttelton) (1934-36; 4 vols.).

James also prepared editions and translations of works of medieval Latin and other languages: *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth* (with Augustus Jessopp) (1896); *Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium* (edition, 1914; translation, 1923); *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (1917); *Hans Christian Andersen, Forty Stories*, translated from the Danish (1930).

More general discussions of libraries, manuscripts, and associated matters include *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover* (1903); *The Wanderings and Homes of Manuscripts* (1919); *Abbeys* (1925); *Suffolk and Norfolk* (1930).

James prolifically contributed scholarly articles and reviews to many journals, most notably to *The Classical Review*, the *Eton College Chronicle*, the *English Historical Review*, the *Journal of Theological Studies*, and the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*.

The most comprehensive bibliography of James's work can now be found in "A Bibliography of the Published Works of Montague Rhodes James" by Nicholas Rogers, in *The Legacy of M. R. James*, ed. Lynda Dennison (Shaun Tyas, 2001), pp. 239-67. It supersedes the bibliographies by A. F. Scholfield in S. G. Lubbock's memoir (1939) and in Richard William Pfaff's biography (1980), for which see below.

## B. SECONDARY

Of the two biographies of James, Richard William Pfaff's *Montague Rhodes James* (Scolar Press, 1980) exhaustively and meticulously treats James's scholarly writings. Michael Cox's *M. R. James: An Informal Portrait* (Oxford University Press, 1983) is a good complement, providing details of James's personal life (with liberal quotations of unpublished letters) and valuable information on the ghost stories. S. G. Lubbock's *A Memoir of Montague Rhodes James* (Cambridge University Press, 1939) is also a valuable work.

1939) is an affecting tribute. *The Legacy of M. R. James*, ed. Lynda Dennison (Shaun Tyas, 2001) presents papers from the 1995 Cambridge Symposium on James and is exclusively devoted to James's scholarly work.

Critical analysis of James's ghost stories has not been produced in great abundance. H. P. Lovecraft's warmly appreciative pages on James in "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (*Reclus* 1927) were read by James himself and received with mixed impressions. Chapters on James in general studies of supernatural fiction, such as Peter Penzoldt's *The Supernatural in Fiction* (Peter Nevill, 1952), Julia Briggs's *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (Faber & Faber, 1977), Jack Sullivan's *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Ohio University Press, 1978), and Edward Wagenknecht's *Seven Masters of Supernatural Fiction* (Greenwood Press, 1991) are variously informative. My own chapter on James in *The Weird Tale* (University of Texas Press, 1990) now strikes me as a bit uncharitable. Austin Warren's "The Marvel of M. R. James, Antiquary" in *Connections* (University of Michigan Press, 1970) is more descriptive than analytical, but makes some good points regarding James's techniques of ghost-story writing.

The occasional journal *Ghosts & Scholars*, edited by Rosemary Pardoe (thirty-three issues published between 1979 and 2001), although largely devoted to "stories in the tradition of M. R. James," includes a substantial number of interesting articles and notes on James, including some annotations of stories not included in Cox's  *Casting the Runes* (these annotations are now included in *A Pleasing Terror*). It has now been succeeded by the *Ghosts & Scholars M. R. James Newsletter* (2002f.), also edited by Rosemary Pardoe. See also *Formidable Visitants*, edited by Roger Johnson (1999), a tribute to *Ghosts & Scholars* on its twentieth anniversary.

General articles on James include:

Mary Butts, "The Art of Montagu [*sic*] James," *London Mercury* 29 (February 1934): 306-17 (a rather effusive essay that discusses James's economy of means and his "low" characters).

Brian Cowlshaw, "'A Warning to the Curious': Victorian Science and the Awful Unconscious in M. R. James's Ghost Stories," *Victorian Newsletter* No. 94 (Fall 1998): 36-42 (a provocative study of James's use of nineteenth-century science in his depiction of ghosts).

Penny Fielding, "Reading Rooms: M. R. James and the Library of Modernity," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46 (Fall 2000): 749-71 (an unhelpfully pedantic study of the sociological significance of the library in James's work).

Stephen Gaselee, "Montague Rhodes James: 1862-1936," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 2 (1936): 418-33 (a touching memoir by one who had known James for thirty-five years).

Linda J. Holland-Toll, "From Haunted Gardens to Lurking Wendigos: Liminal and Wild Places in M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood," *Studies in Weird Fiction* No. 25 (Summer 2001): 12-17 (a penetrating study of the "bad place" archetype in James and Blackwood).

Shane Leslie, "Montague Rhodes James," *Quarterly Review* 304 (January 1966): 45-56 (a warm but somewhat haphazard memoir, focusing on James's scholarly work).

Simon MacCulloch, "The Toad in the Study: M. R. James, H. P. Lovecraft and Forbidden Knowledge," *Ghosts & Scholars* No. 20 (1995): 38-43; No. 21 (1996): 37-42; No. 22 (1996): 40-46; No. 23 (1997): 54-60. Rpt. in *Studies in Weird Fiction* No. 20 (Winter 1997): 2-12; No. 21 (Summer 1997): 17-28 (a wide-ranging and closely argued discussion of the theme of "forbidden knowledge" in James and



Lovecraft; perhaps the best single article on James).

Michael A. Mason, "On Not Letting Them Lie: Moral Significance in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James," *Studies in Short Fiction* 19 (1982): 253-60 (on the moral overtones of James's protagonists and ghosts).

Robert Michalski, "The Malice of Inanimate Objects: Exchange in M. R. James's Ghost Stories," *Extrapolation* 37 (Spring 1996): 46-62 (a strained and implausible sociological interpretation of James's tales).

Samuel D. Russell, "Irony and Horror: The Art of M. R. James," *Haunted* No. 2 (December 1964): 45-52; No. 3 (June 1968): 96-106 (rpt. in *PT* 609-30) (a sound general overview of James's ghost stories).

Norman Scarfe, "The Strangeness Present: M. R. James's Suffolk," *Country Life* No. 4655 (November 1986): 1416-19 (a discussion of the use of Suffolk topography in James's tales).

Jacqueline Simpson, "'The Rules of Folklore' in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James," *Folklore* 108 (1997): 9-18 (an exhaustive study of the use of folklore in James's work).

Devendra P. Varma, "The Ghost Stories of M. R. James: Artistic Exponent of the Victorian Macabre," *Indian Journal of English Studies* NS 4 (1983): 73-81 (a sensitive essay on James's technique of writing ghost stories).

Ron Weighell, "Dark Devotions: M. R. James and the Magical Tradition," *Ghosts & Scholars* No. 1 (1984): 20-30 (profound study of James's use of magic and occultism).

Other articles on specific stories are cited in the notes.

---

## A Note on the Text

The texts of the fifteen stories by James in the body of this book are taken from *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (1931), which appear to represent James's final wishes for these tales. In the Appendix, the prefaces to his first two ghost story collections are taken from those volumes; "Ghost Stories" is taken from the reprint in the *Ghosts & Scholars M. R. James Newsletter* No. 3 (January 2003); "A Night in King's College Chapel" is taken from its first appearance in *Ghosts & Scholars* No. 7 (1985).

I trust that my introduction and commentary testify sufficiently to my indebtedness to the work of some of the leading James scholars, including Richard William Pfaff, Michael Cox, Rosemary Pardo, and several others. I am particularly grateful to Henrik Harksen for assistance in writing some of the notes, and to Keith B. Johnston and Stefan Dziemianowicz for supplying some necessary source materials.

---

## CANON ALBERIC'S SCRAP-BOOK

---

St. Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagnères-de-Luchon.<sup>1</sup> It was the site of a bishopric until the Revolution and has a cathedral which is visited by a certain number of tourists. In the spring of 1883 an Englishman arrived at this old-world place—I can hardly dignify it with the name of city, for there are not a thousand inhabitants. He was a Cambridge man, who had come specially from Toulouse to see St. Bertrand's Church,<sup>2</sup> and had left two friends, who were less keen archæologists than himself, at their hotel at Toulouse, under promise to join him on the following morning. Half an hour at the church would satisfy *them*, and all three could then pursue their journey in the direction of Auch. But our Englishman had come early on the day in question, and proposed to himself to fill a notebook and to use several dozens of plates in the process of describing and photographing every corner of the wonderful church that dominates the little hill of Comminges. In order to carry out this design satisfactorily, it was necessary to monopolize the verger of the church for the day. The verger and sacristan (I prefer the latter appellation, inaccurate as it may be)<sup>3</sup> was accordingly sent for by the somewhat brusque lady who keeps the inn of the Chapeau Rouge; and when he came, the Englishman found him an unexpectedly interesting object of study. It was not in the personal appearance of the little, dry, wizened old man that the interest lay, for he was precisely like dozens of other church guardians in France, but in a curious furtive, or rather hunted and oppressed, air which he had. He was perpetually half glancing behind him; the muscles of his back and shoulders seemed to be hunched in a continual nervous contraction, as if he were expecting every moment to find himself in the clutch of an enemy. The Englishman hardly knew whether to put him down as a man haunted by a fixed delusion, or as one oppressed by a guilty conscience, or as an unbearably henpecked husband. The probabilities, when reckoned up, certainly pointed to the last idea; but, still, the impression conveyed was that of a more formidable persecutor even than a termagant wife.

However, the Englishman (let us call him Dennistoun) was soon too deep in his notebook and too busy with his camera to give more than an occasional glance to the sacristan. Whenever he did look at him, he found him at no great distance, either huddling himself back against the wall or crouching in one of the gorgeous stalls. Dennistoun became rather fidgety after a time. Mingled suspicions that he was keeping the old man from his *déjeuner*, that he was regarded as likely to make away with St. Bertrand's ivory crozier, or with the dusty stuffed crocodile that hangs over the font, began to torment him.

"Won't you go home?" he said at last; "I'm quite well able to finish my notes alone; you can look me in if you like. I shall want at least two hours more here, and it must be cold for you, isn't it?"

"Good heavens!" said the little man, whom the suggestion seemed to throw into a state of unaccountable terror, "such a thing cannot be thought of for a moment. Leave monsieur alone in the church? No, no; two hours, three hours, all will be the same to me. I have breakfasted, I am not at all cold, with many thanks to monsieur."

"Very well, my little man," quoth Dennistoun to himself: "you have been warned, and you must take the consequences."

Before the expiration of the two hours, the stalls, the enormous dilapidated organ, the choir-screen of Bishop John de Mauléon,<sup>4</sup> the remnants of glass and tapestry, and the objects in the treasury

chamber, had been well and truly examined; the sacristan still keeping at Dennistoun's heels, and every now and then whipping round as if he had been stung, when one or other of the strange noises that trouble a large empty building fell on his ear. Curious noises they were sometimes.

"Once," Dennistoun said to me, "I could have sworn I heard a thin metallic voice laughing high up in the tower. I darted an inquiring glance at my sacristan. He was white to the lips. 'It is he—that is—it is no one; the door is locked,' was all he said, and we looked at each other for a full minute."

Another little incident puzzled Dennistoun a good deal. He was examining a large dark picture that hangs behind the altar, one of a series illustrating the miracles of St. Bertrand. The composition of the picture is well-nigh indecipherable, but there is a Latin legend below, which runs thus:

"Qualiter S. Bertrandus liberavit hominem quem diabolus diu volebat strangulare." (How St. Bertrand delivered a man whom the Devil long sought to strangle.)

Dennistoun was turning to the sacristan with a smile and a jocular remark of some sort on his lips, but he was confounded to see the old man on his knees, gazing at the picture with the eye of a suppliant in agony, his hands tightly clasped, and a rain of tears on his cheeks. Dennistoun naturally pretended to have noticed nothing, but the question would not away from him, "Why should a daub of this kind affect anyone so strongly?" He seemed to himself to be getting some sort of clue to the reason of the strange look that had been puzzling him all the day: the man must be a monomaniac; but what was his monomania?

It was nearly five o'clock; the short day was drawing in, and the church began to fill with shadow while the curious noises—the muffled footfalls and distant talking voices that had been perceptible all day—seemed, no doubt because of the fading light and the consequently quickened sense of hearing, to become more frequent and insistent.

The sacristan began for the first time to show signs of hurry and impatience. He heaved a sigh of relief when camera and notebook were finally packed up and stowed away, and hurriedly beckoned Dennistoun to the western door of the church, under the tower. It was time to ring the Angelus.<sup>5</sup> A few pulls at the reluctant rope, and the great bell Bertrande, high in the tower, began to speak, and swung her voice up among the pines and down to the valleys, loud with mountain-streams, calling the dwellers on those lonely hills to remember and repeat the salutation of the angel to her whom he called Blessed among women. With that a profound quiet seemed to fall for the first time that day upon the little town, and Dennistoun and the sacristan went out of the church.

On the doorstep they fell into conversation.

"Monsieur seemed to interest himself in the old choir-books in the sacristy."

"Undoubtedly. I was going to ask you if there were a library in the town."

"No, monsieur; perhaps there used to be one belonging to the Chapter, but it is now such a small place——" Here came a strange pause of irresolution, as it seemed; then, with a sort of plunge, he went on: "But if monsieur is *amateur des vieux livres*,<sup>6</sup> I have at home something that might interest him. It is not a hundred yards."

At once all Dennistoun's cherished dreams of finding priceless manuscripts in untrodden corners of France flashed up, to die down again the next moment. It was probably a stupid missal<sup>7</sup> of Plantin

printing, about 1580.<sup>8</sup> Where was the likelihood that a place so near Toulouse would not have been ransacked long ago by collectors? However, it would be foolish not to go; he would reproach himself for ever after if he refused. So they set off. On the way the curious irresolution and sudden determination of the sacristan recurred to Dennistoun, and he wondered in a shamefaced way whether he was being decoyed into some purlieu to be made away with as a supposed rich Englishman. He contrived, therefore, to begin talking with his guide, and to drag in, in a rather clumsy fashion, the fact that he expected two friends to join him early the next morning. To his surprise, the announcement seemed to relieve the sacristan at once of some of the anxiety that oppressed him.

“That is well,” he said quite brightly—“that is very well. Monsieur will travel in company with his friends; they will be always near him. It is a good thing to travel thus in company—sometimes.”

The last word appeared to be added as an afterthought, and to bring with it a relapse into gloom for the poor little man.

They were soon at the house, which was one rather larger than its neighbours, stone-built, with a shield carved over the door, the shield of Alberic de Mauléon, a collateral descendant, Dennistoun tells me, of Bishop John de Mauléon. This Alberic was a Canon of Comminges from 1680 to 1700. The upper windows of the mansion were boarded up, and the whole place bore, as does the rest of Comminges, the aspect of decaying age.

Arrived on his doorstep, the sacristan paused a moment.

“Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps, after all, monsieur has not the time?”

“Not at all—lots of time—nothing to do till to-morrow. Let us see what it is you have got.”

The door was opened at this point, and a face looked out, a face far younger than the sacristan’s, but bearing something of the same distressing look: only here it seemed to be the mark, not so much of fear for personal safety as of acute anxiety on behalf of another. Plainly, the owner of the face was the sacristan’s daughter; and, but for the expression I have described, she was a handsome girl enough. She brightened up considerably on seeing her father accompanied by an able-bodied stranger. A few remarks passed between father and daughter, of which Dennistoun only caught these words, said by the sacristan. “He was laughing in the church,” words which were answered only by a look of terror from the girl.

But in another minute they were in the sitting-room of the house, a small, high chamber with a stone floor, full of moving shadows cast by a wood-fire that flickered on a great hearth. Something of the character of an oratory was imparted to it by a tall crucifix, which reached almost to the ceiling on one side; the figure was painted of the natural colours, the cross was black. Under this stood a chest of some age and solidity, and when a lamp had been brought, and chairs set, the sacristan went to the chest, and produced therefrom, with growing excitement and nervousness, as Dennistoun thought, a large book, wrapped in a white cloth, on which cloth a cross was rudely embroidered in red thread. Even before the wrapping had been removed, Dennistoun began to be interested by the size and shape of the volume. “Too large for a missal,” he thought, “and not the shape of an antiphoner; perhaps it may be something good, after all.” The next moment the book was open, and Dennistoun felt that he had at last lit upon something better than good. Before him lay a large folio, bound, perhaps, late in the seventeenth century, with the arms of Canon Alberic de Mauléon stamped in gold on the sides. There may have been a hundred and fifty leaves of paper in the book, and on almost every one of the leaves was fastened a leaf from an illuminated manuscript. Such a collection Dennistoun had hardly dreamed of in his wildest moments. Here were ten leaves from a copy of Genesis, illustrated with pictures

which could not be later than A.D. 700. Further on was a complete set of pictures from a Psalter, of English execution, of the very finest kind that the thirteenth century could produce; and, perhaps be of all, there were twenty leaves of uncial writing in Latin, which, as a few words seen here and there told him at once, must belong to some very early unknown patristic treatise. Could it possibly be a fragment of the copy of Papias "On the Words of Our Lord,"<sup>9</sup> which was known to have existed as late as the twelfth century at Nîmes?<sup>a</sup> In any case, his mind was made up; that book must return to Cambridge with him, even if he had to draw the whole of his balance from the bank and stay at St. Bertrand till the money came. He glanced up at the sacristan to see if his face yielded any hint that the book was for sale. The sacristan was pale, and his lips were working.

"If monsieur will turn on to the end," he said.

So monsieur turned on, meeting new treasures at every rise of a leaf; and at the end of the book he came upon two sheets of paper, of much more recent date than anything he had yet seen, which puzzled him considerably. They must be contemporary, he decided, with the unprincipled Canon Alberic, who had doubtless plundered the Chapter library of St. Bertrand to form this priceless scrapbook. On the first of the paper sheets was a plan, carefully drawn and instantly recognizable by any person who knew the ground, of the south aisle and cloisters of St. Bertrand's. There were curious signs looking like planetary symbols, and a few Hebrew words, in the corners; and in the north-west angle of the cloister was a cross drawn in gold paint. Below the plan were some lines of writing in Latin, which ran thus:

"Responsa 12<sup>mi</sup> Dec. 1694. Interrogatum est: Inveniamne? Responsum est: Invenies. Fiamne dives? Fies. Vivamne invidendus? Vives. Moriarne in lecto meo? Ita." (Answers of the 12th of December 1694. It was asked: Shall I find it? Answer: Thou shalt. Shall I become rich? Thou wilt. Shall I live a subject of envy? Thou wilt. Shall I die in my bed? Thou wilt.)

"A good specimen of the treasure-hunter's record—quite reminds one of Mr. Minor-Canon Quatremain in *Old St. Paul's*,"<sup>10</sup> was Dennistoun's comment, and he turned the leaf.

What he then saw impressed him, as he has often told me, more than he could have conceived any drawing or picture capable of impressing him. And, though the drawing he saw is no longer in existence, there is a photograph of it (which I possess) which fully bears out that statement. The picture in question was a sepia drawing at the end of the seventeenth century, representing, one would say at first sight, a Biblical scene;<sup>11</sup> for the architecture (the picture represented an interior) and the figures had that semi-classical flavour about them which the artists of two hundred years ago thought appropriate to illustrations of the Bible. On the right was a King on his throne, the throne elevated on twelve steps, a canopy overhead, lions on either side—evidently King Solomon. He was bending forward with outstretched sceptre, in attitude of command; his face expressed horror and disgust, yet there was in it also the mark of imperious will and confident power. The left half of the picture was the strangest, however. The interest plainly centred there. On the pavement before the throne were grouped four soldiers, surrounding a crouching figure which must be described in a moment. A fifth soldier lay dead on the pavement, his neck distorted, and his eyeballs starting from his head. The four surrounding guards were looking at the King. In their faces the sentiment of horror was intensified; they seemed, in fact, only restrained from flight by their implicit trust in their master. All this terror

was plainly excited by the being that crouched in their midst. I entirely despair of conveying by any words the impression which this figure makes upon anyone who looks at it. I recollect once showing the photograph of the drawing to a lecturer on morphology—a person of, I was going to say, abnormally sane and unimaginative habits of mind. He absolutely refused to be alone for the rest of that evening, and he told me afterwards that for many nights he had not dared to put out his light before going to sleep. However, the main traits of the figure I can at least indicate. At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long, coarse hairs, and hideously taloned. The eyes, touched with a burning yellow, had intensely black pupils, and were fixed upon the throned King with a look of beast-like hate. Imagine one of the awful bird-catching spiders of South America translated into human form, and endowed with intelligence just less than human, and you will have some faint conception of the terror inspired by this appalling effigy. One remark is universally made by those to whom I have shown the picture: “It was drawn from the life.”

As soon as the first shock of his irresistible fright had subsided, Dennistoun stole a look at his host. The sacristan’s hands were pressed upon his eyes; his daughter, looking up at the cross on the wall, was telling her beads feverishly.

At last the question was asked, “Is this book for sale?”

There was the same hesitation, the same plunge of determination that he had noticed before, and then came the welcome answer, “If monsieur pleases.”

“How much do you ask for it?”

“I will take two hundred and fifty francs.”

This was confounding. Even a collector’s conscience is sometimes stirred, and Dennistoun’s conscience was tenderer than a collector’s.

“My good man!” he said again and again, “your book is worth far more than two hundred and fifty francs, I assure you—far more.”

But the answer did not vary: “I will take two hundred and fifty francs, not more.”

There was really no possibility of refusing such a chance. The money was paid, the receipt signed, a glass of wine drunk over the transaction, and then the sacristan seemed to become a new man. He stood upright, he ceased to throw those suspicious glances behind him, he actually laughed or tried to laugh. Dennistoun rose to go.

“I shall have the honor of accompanying monsieur to his hotel?” said the sacristan.

“Oh no, thanks! it isn’t a hundred yards. I know the way perfectly, and there is a moon.”

The offer was pressed three or four times, and refused as often.

“Then, monsieur will summon me if—if he finds occasion; he will keep the middle of the road, the sides are so rough.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Dennistoun, who was impatient to examine his prize by himself; and he stepped out into the passage with his book under his arm.

Here he was met by the daughter; she, it appeared, was anxious to do a little business on her own account; perhaps, like Gehazi, to “take somewhat” from the foreigner whom her father had spared.<sup>12</sup>

“A silver crucifix and chain for the neck; monsieur would perhaps be good enough to accept it?”



Well, really, Dennistoun hadn't much use for these things. What did mademoiselle want for it?

“Nothing—nothing in the world. Monsieur is more than welcome to it.”

The tone in which this and much more was said was unmistakably genuine, so that Dennistoun was reduced to profuse thanks, and submitted to have the chain put round his neck. It really seemed as if he had rendered the father and daughter some service which they hardly knew how to repay. As he set off with his book they stood at the door looking after him, and they were still looking when he waved them a last good night from the steps of the Chapeau Rouge.

Dinner was over, and Dennistoun was in his bedroom, shut up alone with his acquisition. The landlady had manifested a particular interest in him since he had told her that he had paid a visit to the sacristan and bought an old book from him. He thought, too, that he had heard a hurried dialogue between her and the said sacristan in the passage outside the *salle à manger*; some words to the effect that “Pierre and Bertrand would be sleeping in the house” had closed the conversation.

All this time a growing feeling of discomfort had been creeping over him—nervous reaction, perhaps, after the delight of his discovery. Whatever it was, it resulted in a conviction that there was someone behind him, and that he was far more comfortable with his back to the wall. All this, of course, weighed light in the balance as against the obvious value of the collection he had acquired. And now, as I said, he was alone in his bedroom, taking stock of Canon Alberic's treasures, in which every moment revealed something more charming.

“Bless Canon Alberic!” said Dennistoun, who had an inveterate habit of talking to himself. “I wonder where he is now? Dear me! I wish that landlady would learn to laugh in a more cheery manner; it makes one feel as if there was someone dead in the house. Half a pipe more, did you say? I think perhaps you are right. I wonder what that crucifix is that the young woman insisted on giving me? Last century, I suppose. Yes, probably. It is rather a nuisance of a thing to have round one's neck—just too heavy. Most likely her father has been wearing it for years. I think I might give it a clean up before I put it away.”

He had taken the crucifix off, and laid it on the table, when his attention was caught by an object lying on the red cloth just by his left elbow. Two or three ideas of what it might be flitted through his brain with their own incalculable quickness.

“A penwiper? No, no such thing in the house. A rat? No, too black. A large spider? I trust to goodness not—no. Good God! a hand like the hand in that picture!”

In another infinitesimal flash he had taken it in. Pale, dusky skin, covering nothing but bones and tendons of appalling strength; coarse black hairs, longer than ever grew on a human hand; nails rising from the ends of the fingers and curving sharply down and forward, grey, horny and wrinkled.

He flew out of his chair with deadly, inconceivable terror clutching at his heart. The shape, whose left hand rested on the table, was rising to a standing posture behind his seat, its right hand crooked above his scalp. There was black and tattered drapery about it; the coarse hair covered it as in the drawing. The lower jaw was thin—what can I call it?—shallow, like a beast's; teeth showed behind the black lips; there was no nose; the eyes, of a fiery yellow, against which the pupils showed black and intense, and the exulting hate and thirst to destroy life which shone there, were the most horrifying features in the whole vision. There was intelligence of a kind in them—intelligence beyond that of a beast, below that of a man.

The feelings which this horror stirred in Dennistoun were the intensest physical fear and the mo



---

sample content of Count Magnus and Other Ghost Stories (The Complete Ghost Stories of M. R. James, Vol. 1)

- [Read and Think Italian \(Read & Think\) pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [download How To Write A Book In Less Than 24 Hours pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [download online Against Epistemology: A Metacritique pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [The Mayflower and the Pilgrims' New World pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
  
- <http://cavaldecartro.highlandagency.es/library/The-Stoics--A-Guide-for-the-Perplexed--Guides-For-The-Perplexed-.pdf>
- <http://flog.co.id/library/African-Struggles-Today--Social-Movements-Since-Independence.pdf>
- <http://flog.co.id/library/Against-Epistemology--A-Metacritique.pdf>
- <http://www.netc-bd.com/ebooks/Love---War-in-the-Apennines.pdf>