M. R. James: A Leading Writer of English Supernatural Literature

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摘要

假如我們把宇宙分為三界：天堂、人間、地府，那麼我把文學亦以三類論之：神話、人間文學、靈異文學。

芒泰寇‧詹姆斯（Montague Rhodes James 1862 - 1936）是一位十九世紀末葉到二十世紀初葉的英國著名靈異文學作家，他的盛名，他的影響一直延續到現在二十一世紀。西方世界認爲他是這類文學的頂尖作家，許多作者及讀者公認他是現代靈異文學的創始者及奠基者。

詹姆斯本人覺得他承繼了喬瑟夫‧拉凡紐（Joseph Sheridan LeFanu 1814 - 1873）的傳統文風，但他避免了拉凡紐的歐洲哥德式的氛圍，而代之以簡單的故事敘述來營造靈異文學的驚悚效果。

拉凡紐是一位傑出的維多利亞時代小說家，維多利亞時代對英國文學來說，甚為重要，在那個時代見證了西方文學歷史中，那些偉大作家的升起與發展。

追溯維多利亞時代小說的發展，其中有項重要的影響力，就是十八世紀後期的浪漫主義。再看遠一點，哥德式傳奇小說，為浪漫主義帶來最大的衝擊。

關鍵詞：靈異文學、哥德式傳奇、維多利亞文學、浪漫主義、英國文學。
key words: Super-natural literature, Gothic fiction, Victorian literature, British literature, M. R. James
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PREFACE

If we divide the universe into three levels--heaven, earth and hell, then we also can divide the literature into three genres--mythology, human literature, and supernatural literature. Montague Rhodes James was a leading writer of the supernatural English literature.

M. R. James' literary life begins in the mid-nineteenth century, and ends in the mid-twentieth century, but his popularity extends into the twenty-first century. The western world considers him as an outstanding writer in this field. Many writers and readers recognize him as the creator and foremost craftsman of the modern ghost story.

"James writing in the tradition of Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, whom he thought stood 'in the first rank as a writer of ghost stories,' James avoided the atmospheric Gothicism in his predecessor's work and instead employed a simple narrative style designed to heighten the terrifying effect of his tales." (1)

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu (1814-1873) was an eminent Victorian novelist and short story writer. The Victorian period is important to the English literature, as the period witnessed the rise and development of some of the greatest writer in the history of Western literature.

In tracing the development of the Victorian novel, we know that a virile force in its complex character was the influence of the late eighteenth century romanticism. Looking further, the Gothic romance had played a main impulse to the romanticism. (2)

LeFanu lived during the same time of Charles Dickens (1812-1870), and both had about the same longevity, LeFanu had lived for fifty-eight years, and Dickens lived fifty-seven years. They were the greatest writers in the Victorian period following the pioneer Gothic novelists.

LeFanu was an Irish writer, although well known and widely admired in his own day, but his popularity suffered a strange decline after his death, quite different from the English writer Dickens. LeFanu wrote many superb ghost stories, which demonstrate beyond doubt that LeFanu's influence was considerable. In addition, LeFanu held the position as a transitional writer between the Gothic and the Victorian romance. He bridged the gap between the older type of Gothic tale and the modern short story using psychological terror. (3)

He combined the best qualities of the Gothic romance with his own strange and powerfully subtle blend of gloomy effects, well-delineated characters, foreboding backgrounds, a sure and jagged power, which is the mark of truly gifted writer. (4)

In LeFanu's and other Gothic writers works, terror is generated from both psychological and supernatural sources, however, in James' works, the agency of fear is entirely an objective phenomenon outside character psychology.
Chapter I

The reasons for conducting this research are as follows:

1. Supernatural literature is an important part of literature, attracting huge numbers of readers and the attention of all ages. This continuing appeal of supernatural literature shows the popular demand for it, so it must have some basis in human psychology.

One great American master of horror literature, Howard Philip Lovecraft, wrote:

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tales in the literary form." (5)

2. This research will form a segment of my future study comparing Chinese and English supernatural literature.

3. I will conduct an in-depth research of Gothic novels, which emerged in mid-eighteenth century England. At that time, it was said:

"while the great gods of neo-classicism were still feasting at their tables. This genre, however, was but one phase of the enormously complex Romantic Movement in life and literature. This reaction against the dicta of neo-classicism was inevitable, for the English have always been incurably romantic." (6)

This romanticism expressed in Edith Birkhead's book "The Tale of Terror", he wrote:

"From the earliest times to the present day, writers of fiction have realised the force of supernatural terror. In the Babylonica of Iamblichus, the lovers evade their pursuers by passing as spectres; the scene of the romance is laid in tombs, caverns, and robbers' dens, a setting remarkably like that of Gothic story." (7)

4. M. R. James is a prominent figure among the English supernatural literature writers, he and the other great writers, such as Poe, Hawthorne, Henry James, Dickens, Reade, Collins, Kipling, Stevenson, F. M. Crawford, and the Brontes were all distinguished by their masterly handling of the preternatural.
Chapter II
Introduction

Montague Rhodes James was born in 1862 in Goodnestone parsonage, Kent, England, and died in 1936. He was raised an Evangelical Christian. His father was rector of the Suffold village of Livermere, and James maintained his childhood faith with complete orthodoxy throughout his life. He developed a taste for old books from a precocious age and was fonder of reading dusty volumes in the library than playing with the other children. When he was six years old, he became ill with bronchitis, and, while recovering, wished to see a 17th century Dutch Bible which was owned by a friend of his father’s, Bishop Tyle. The book was sent to him, and he reportedly sat up in his bed, examining it intently. (8)

He studied at Eton College and then at King's College, Cambridge, where he became assistant in classical archaeology at the Fitzwilliam Museum. He was elected a Fellow of King's College after writing his dissertation "The Apocalypse of St. Peter." After that, he lectured in divinity, eventually becoming dean of the college in 1889.

Here I would like to particular introduce Eton College, since it is such a unique school in the United Kingdom. Eton College was established in 1440 in Windsor, England, just minutes away from Buckingham Palace. It is the former school of many famous British men, and today is the school of Prince William and the future college of Prince Harry. Attendees of Eton College in the past have included King Henry VI, Sir Henry Wolton, Thomas Gray, Horace Walpole, Richard West, Thomas Ashton, Paul Watkins, Dr. Stephen Wolfram, The Duke of Wellington, The Earl of Chatham, Earl Spencer, and S. P. Sumtow are among the few. (9)

When a young man enters Eton, he is usually no older than thirteen. Eton maintains a very rigid timeline for it students. The school timetable depends on which half of the year is taking place. The autumn term starts at 7:30 am for 1st school, or period, as it called in U.S. schools. Then at 8:15 am, the students stop for breakfast. At 9:20 am, there is a brief service in the Chapel. At 9:40 am, 2nd school begins. There is a 10:30 am break; then at 10:55 am, 3rd school commences; 4th school begins at 11:55 am. Lunch is served at 1 pm only at Eton, and it is called dinner. There is time for study after the meal then at 3:30 pm, 5th school begins. In keeping with English tradition, tea is served at 4:15 pm. At 5 pm, 6th school begins. A study period runs from 7:45 pm until 8:20, when supper is served. House prayers are given during the meal at 8:30. After eating, the students return to their rooms for a study period that lasts until 10 pm, "lights out". In winter, spring, and summer, the hours are slightly modified, i.e., teatime for the summer is at 4:45 pm or 5:30 pm, depending on whether or not it is a whole school day.

Young men, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, go through a rather difficult transition, and for some boys, this is a very difficult time in their lives. At Eton, the house master aim is to coax a boy through this difficult phase. At this is the point, he hates to rules and regulations of boarding school life the most.

Young boys at this time have the urge to get out into the world, find out about things, and sample them. These are of course, good, normal, healthy urges. It is at this time that these young men tend to perceive that their lives at Eton have a vestige of the past. They are usually quite bored with the four walls of the rooms and the view from their windows. The housemaster and tutors understand the conflicts during this period; and they are aware of the frustrations of these boys. At fifteen or sixteen, most young men in England are leaving school, starting to earn a living, and enjoying a free social life, in marked contrast to that of the boy confined in a boarding school. (10)

M.R. James was a distinguished medievalist and wrote a large number of reviews, translations, monographs, articles, and works on bibliography, palaeography, antiquarian
issues. He often edited volumes for specialized bibliographical and historical societies.

A brilliant linguist and biblical scholar, M.R. James was exceptionally gifted, which, along with his unusually keen memory and hard work, enabled him to write many pioneering studies. His translation of the "Apocryphal New Testament" in 1924 was one of these studies. (11)

He was made provost of King's College in 1905 and was later the vice-chancellor of the university from 1913 to 1915. His research often took him abroad. He visited Cyprus, Denmark, Bavaria, Austria, and Sweden, where he set his story Count Magnus, which was based on the 17th century Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie.

Although he was a great scholar in his day, he is now most remembered for his ghost stories. Fascinated by the supernatural, he was an admirer of the Irish mystery writer Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, whose ghost stories he edited.

James' stories were usually first published in such magazines, as the "Cambridge Review", but some were written for special occasions. "Wailing Well" is one such story, composed for the gathering of the Eton College Boy Scouts in 1927.

His life was spent studying the past. Among other things, he catalogued the many manuscript collections in Cambridge, a task that took forty years to complete. He never married and never had any children. The university, Eton, and his books were his life.

His supernatural fiction is still quite popular today, and scholars even organized a M. R. Jamesian group to research his masterpieces. His style and ideas have served as inspiration for many modern authors. He never reveals the ghost completely, so the horror is always left up to the reader's imagination.

One of the best reviews of his work was written by Howard Phillips Lovecraft in his book Supernatural Horror in Literature, where he extensively details how and why M. R. James is still one of the greatest masters of supernatural fiction. Lovecraft did a very fine job in analyzing James and his work:

"...and gifted with an almost diablolic power of calling horror by gentle steps from the midst of prosaic daily life, is the scholarly Montague Rhodes James, Provost of Eton, antiquary of note, and recognised authority on medieval manuscripts and cathedral history. Dr. James, long fond of telling spectral tales at Christmastide, has become by slow degrees a literary weird fictionist of the very first rank; and has developed a distinctive style and method likely to serve as models for an enduring line of disciples." (12)

"The art of Dr. James is by no means haphazard, and in the preface to one of his collections he has formulated three very sound rules for macabre composition. A ghost story, he believes, should have a familiar setting in the modern period, in order to approach closely the reader's sphere of experience. Its spectral phenomena, moreover, should be malevolent rather than beneficent; since fear is the emotion primarily to be excited. And finally, the technical patois of 'occultism' or pseudo-science ought carefully to be avoided, lest the charm of casual verisimilitude be smothered in unconvincing pedantry." (13)
Chapter III
Supernatural Stories by M. R. James

Books and year published:

*Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904)
*More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911)
*A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919)
*The Five Jars* (Juvenile, 1922)
*A Warning to the Curious and other Ghost Stories* (1925)
*The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (1931)
*Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (1973)
*Casting the Runes and Other Ghost Stories* (1987)

The titles of individual ghost stories of M. R. James:

*Canon Alberic's Scrapbook*
*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*
*The Residence at Whitminster*
*The Diary of Mr. Poynter*
*An Episode of Cathedral History*
*The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance*
*Two Doctors*
*The Haunted Dolls' House*
*The Uncommon Prayer-book*
*A Neighbour's Landmark*
*A View from a Hill*
*A Warning to the Curious*
*An Evening's Entertainment*
*There Was a Man Dwelt by a Churchyard*
*After Dark in The Playing Fields*
*Wailing Well*
*The Experiment*
*The Malice of Inanimate Objects*
*A Vignette*
*Stories I Have Tried to Write*
Two stories exist in draft only:

* A Night in King's College Chapel  
* The Fenstanton Witch

These two stories were published originally in *Ghosts and Scholars Magazine*.

M. R. James did not only write ghost fiction, he also wrote non-fiction essays. The subjects and year published were:

* The Sculptures in the Lady Chapel at Ely (1895)  
* The Life and Miracles of William of Norwich (1896)  
* Guide to the Windows of King's College Chapel, Cambridge (1899)  
* Notes on the Glass In Ashbridge Chapel (1905)  
* The Sculptured Bosses in the Roof of the Bauchun Chape, Norwich Cathedral (1911)  
* Old Testament Legends, Being Stories Out of Some of the Less-Known Apocryphal Books (1913)  
* The Wanderings of Homes of Manuscripts (1919)  
* Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories (1922)  
* Eton College Chapel: The Wall Paintings (1923)  
* The Apocryphal New Testament (1924)  
* Abbeys (1925)  
* Eton and King's Recollections, Mostly Trivial 1875-1925 (1926)  
* Hans Andersen: Forty Stories (Translation, 1930)  
* Suffolk and Norfold: A Perambulation of the two Counties (1930)  
* St. Georce's Chapel, Windsor: The Woodwork of the Chair (1933)  
* Letters to a Friend (Edited by Gwendolen McBryde, 1956)
Chapter IV  
The Unique Stories of M. R. James

I will first details of some M. R. James' stories, which are quite unique and more interesting to readers.

1. The Ash-tree

"The Ash-tree" first appeared in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904). In a letter to James McBryde in March 1904, MRJ referred to the story simply as The Spiders. It was once dramatised for television (December 1975) starring Edward Petherbridge, as the finals of the BBC's Christmas series of MRJ plays.

In 1986, it was included in the series of readings with dramatised scenes, which Robert Powell gave of MRJ's tales. The original manuscript was included in Sotheby's sale of November 9, 1936. Some of the other MSS went to Eton, King's, and the British Museum, but the whereabouts of The Ash-tree are not known.

This story starts with the description of an old East Anglia country-house, which had attained its full dimensions in the year 1690. It had stood there ever since Castringham ceased to be a fortified place. The moat was filled in and the Elizabethan dwelling house built -- Italian portico, square block of white house, older inside that out, park with fringe of woods. Then developed a curious series of events, which happened in the house.

Castringham contributed a victim: Mrs. Mothersole was her name, and she differed from the ordinary run of village witches only in being rather better off and in a more influential position. Efforts were made to save her by several reputable farmers of the parish, but what seems to have been fatal to the woman was the evidence of the proprietor of Castringham Hall, Sir Matthew Fell.

He deposed to having watched her on three different occasions from his window, at the full of the moon, gathering sprigs from the ash-tree near his house, and was cutting off small twigs with a peculiarly curved knife. On each occasion Sir Matthew had done his best to capture the woman, but she had always taken alarm at some accidental noise he had made, and all he could see when he got down to the garden was a hare running across the park.

Mrs. Mothersole was found guilty and condemned to die. She was hanged a week after the trial, with five or six more "unhappy creatures," at Bury St. Edmunds, in a damp, drizzly March morning.

"Sir Matthew Fell, then Deputy-Sheriff, was present at the execution. The other victims were apathetic or broken down with misery; but Mrs. Mothersole was, as in life so in death, of a very different temper. Her poisonous rage did so work upon the bystanders, even upon the hangman, that it was constantly affirmed of all that saw her that she presented the living Aspect of a mad Divell."

One full moon night in May, Sir Matthew and his friend, the Vicar, saw a moving creature with more than four legs running up and down the stem of the ash-tree! Next day the servants found Sir Matthew dead and black in his bed room, there were not any marks of
violence at the moment appear; but the window was open. The coroner discovered that the body was very much disordered as it laid in the bed, the corpse was in the great swelling and blackness.

His son, Sir Matthew the second, succeeded to the title and estates. And so ends the first act of the Castringham tragedy. The new Baronet did not occupy the room in which his father died, nor, indeed, was it slept in by anyone.

The second Sir Matthew died in 1735, and was succeeded by his son, Sir Richard. It was in his time that the great family pew was build out on the north side of the parish church. So large were the Squire's ideas that several of the graves on that unhallowed side of the building had to be disturbed to satisfy his requirements. Among them was that of Mrs. Mothersole.

It was found that, though her coffin was fairly sound and unbroken, there was no trace whatever inside it of body, bones, or dust. Indeed, it is a curious phenomenon, for at the time of her burying no such things were dreamt of as resurrection-men, and it is difficult to conceive any rational motive for stealing a body otherwise than for the uses of the dissecting-room.

The incident revived for a time all the stories of witch-trials and of the exploits of the witches, dormant for forty years, and Sir Richard's orders that the coffin should be burnt were thought by a good many to be rather foolhardy, though they were duly carried out.

Sir Richard decided that he would move back to his grandfather's bed room—the West Chamber, since he wanted a window with a western lookout, so that the sun could not wake him early. The housekeeper pointed out that no one has slept there these forty years. The air has hardly been changed since Sir Matthew died there. But Sir Richard insisted to move his bed-furniture in that room.

Out side the window of West Chamber, the noise of the ash-tree made Sir Richard sleepless, he wanted that tree to come down the next day. But in that night of the year of 1754, there was a strange movement in Sir Richard's bedroom. It seems as if Sir Richard were moving his head rapidly to and fro with only the slightest possible sound. And he had several heads, round and brownish, which move back and forward, even as low as his chest. Then something drops off the bed with a soft plump, like a kitten, and is out of the open window in a flash; another four, and after that there is quiet again. As with Sir Matthew, so with Sir Richard dead and black in his bed!

The cause of death, people thought of Italian poisoners, Popish emissaries, infected air, all these and more guesses were hazarded. But Bishop of Kilmore, then a guest at the mansion, looked at the ash-tree, in the fork of whose lower boughs white tomcat was crouching, looking down the hollow which years had gnawed in the trunk. It was watching something inside the tree with great interest.

Suddenly it got up and craned over the hole. Then a bit of the edge on which it stood gave way, and it went slithering in. People know that a cat can cry; but few have heard, such a yell as came out of the trunk of the great ash. Two or three screams there were and then a slight and muffled noise of some commotion or struggling was all that came.

A ladder was brought, and one of the gardeners went up, and looking down the hollow,
could detect nothing but a few dim indications of something moving. The people in the mansion got a lantern, and the gardener let it down the hole by a rope cautiously. They saw the yellow light upon the gardener's face as he bent over, and saw his face struck with an incredulous terror and loathing before he cried out in a dreadful voice and fell back from the ladder, letting the lantern fall inside the tree.

The lantern must have broken at the bottom, and the light in it caught upon dry leaves and rubbish that lay there, for in a few minutes a dense smoke began to come up, and then flame; and the tree was in a blaze. At the fork of the tree, they saw a round body covered with fire—the size of man's head appear very suddenly, seem to collapse and fall back. Then a similar ball leapt into the air and fell on the grass, where after a moment it lay still.

The Bishop went and saw—what but the remains of an enormous spider, veinous and seared! And as the fire burned lower down, more terrible bodies like this began to break out from the trunk, and it was seen that these were covered with grayish hair.

All that day the ash burned, and until it fell to pieces the men stood about it, and from time to time killed the brutes as they darted out. At last, there was a long interval when none appeared, and they cautiously closed in and examined the roots of the tree.

They found below it a rounded hollow place in the earth, wherein were two or three bodies of these creatures that had plainly been smothered by the smoke; and at the side of this den, against the wall, was crouching the anatomy of a human being, with the skin dried upon the bones, having some remains of black hair, it was the body of a woman, and clearly dead for a period of fifty years. (14)

2. Count Magnus

This story is about an unfortunate protagonist Mr. Wraxall, who is traveling in Sweden, collecting information for a scholarly guidebook to Scandinavia. He visits the manor house, which had been built by Count Magnus De la Gardie in the early seventeenth century. (15)

The local village innkeeper has tales to tell about Count Magnus, and Mr. Wraxall's curiosity is piqued by his suggestion that "the Count had been on the Black Pilgrimage, and had brought something or someone back with him". (16)

Later, while examining the Count's papers, Mr. Wraxall finds a book of alchemical tracts, and is delighted to discover:

"The shelf he had hit upon was occupied mostly by a collection of account-books in the writing of the first Count Magnus. But one among them was not an account-book, but a book of alchemical and other tracts in another sixteenth-century hand. Not being very familiar with alchemical literature, Mr. Wraxall sends much space which he might have spared in setting out the names and beginnings of the various treatises: The Book of the Phoenix, Book of the Thirty Words, Book of the Toad, book of Miriam, Turba philosophorum, and so forth; and then he announces with a good deal of circumstance his delight at finding, on a leaf originally left blank near the middle of the book, some writing of Count Magnus himself headed 'Liber nigrae peregrinationis'. It is true that only a few lines were written, but there was quite enough to show that the landlord had that morning been referring to a belief at least as old as the time of Count Magnus, and probably shared
by him. This is the English of what was written:" (17)

"If any man desires to obtain a long life, if he would obtain a faithful messenger and see the blood of his enemies, it is necessary that he should first go into the city of Chorazin, and there salute the prince...Here there was an erasure of one word, not very thoroughly done, so that Mr. Wraxall felt pretty sure that he was right in reading it as aeris ('of the air'). But there was no more of the text copied, only a line in Latin: 'Quaere reliqua hujus materiei inter secretiora' (See the rest of this matter among the more private things). (18)

In many M. R. James' writings, he had used Latin. Not only he was a scholar, but also he was a religious man, to use Latin in writing was very common in his time.

In the inn parlour that evening, Mr. Wraxall pursues the subject with the deacon (as he would be called in Sweden the clerk) of the parish, Mr. Wraxall, remembering that one function of Scandinavian deacons is to teach candidates for Confirmation, thought he would refresh his own memory on a Biblical point.

"can you tell me,' he said, 'anything about Chorazin?"
The deacon seemed startled, but readily reminded him how that village had once been denounced.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Wraxall, 'it is, I suppoose, quite a ruin now?'
'So I expect,' replied the deacon. 'I have heard some of our old priests say that Antichrist is to be born there; and there are tales-'
'Ah! what tales are those?' Mr. Wraxall put in.
'Tales, I was going to say, which I have forgotten,' said the deacon; and soon after that he said good night." (19)

At one point in the story, M. R. James, as the narrator, observes that, "you will naturally inquire, as Mr. Wraxall did, what the Black Pilgrimage may have been. But your curiosity on the point must remain unsatisfied for the time being, just as his did."

Mr. Wraxall never does discover anything more than hints and clues, and readers of "Count Magnus" continue to share his fate, for no M. R. James researchers to date have succeeded in providing any substantial information on the Black Pilgrimage to Chorazin, let alone answering the obvious question: Did MRJ invent it, or was it an authentic tradition?

The city of Chorazin (Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13) is one of three cities cursed by Jesus for not accepting his teaching.

At this point, I would also like to give some information about the Black Pilgrimage, for the benefit of some readers who may not too familiar with this subject.

The black pilgrimage, as detailed in the Order MS Thernn, is part of the cultivation of skills in Natural Magick and is essential if genuine Adeptship is to be attained. The first stage in acquiring this skill (the final is that of Internal Adept) involves the regular performance of ceremonial Magick in an outdoor location - the location being chosen for its natural beauty, undisturbed by modern development. (20)

The seasonal performance of a rite such, as that of the Nine Angles (qv. The Black Book...
of Satan III), will teach those participating infinitely more about the heel of the Seasons than some pseudo-pagan ritual containing outdated symbolic representations of the forces involved. It is important that the rites are conducted upon the same site throughout the year(s), during the times of the seventh festival (qv. Thernn) (21)

The second task involved undertaking, with the companion, the Natural form of the Nine Angles rite (the site involved may be the same as that used by the Temple, or one specifically chosen for the task). The third task involves undertaking the Black Pilgrimage. Traditionally, this is a walk - undertaken alone - of approximately 50 miles, which passes through sites - associated with the Dark Tradition (located on the Welsh borders). This rite is undertaken around the time of the Autumn Equinox; beginning at dawn, and aiming to end near dusk the following day. (22)

The candidate must possess a quartz crystal (ideally a tetrahedron), and is allowed to take only a sleeping bag (no other form of shelter), and the minimum food required. The candidate is allowed to rest/sleep during the hours of darkness on the first evening, at one of the sites of interest. Throughout the journey, the candidate may opt to stop at the various sites, and perform a Chant (i.e., the Diabolus). Towards the following evening, the candidate must aim to reach a certain site on the Long Mynd (a site near Wild Moor), and there, undertake the solo rite of the Nine Angles. Following the completion of the solo rite, the candidate remains to rest/sleep at the site. The candidate departs from the area at dawn, the Pilgrimage is completed. (23)

Those who have attained the grade of External Adept (qu. Naos) most usually undertake this task, but the Initiate may choose to combine the Pilgrimage with the External Adept rite. This would involve the Grade Ritual being undertaken immediately following the solo Nine Angles rite (this a very effective combination - but is optional). (24)

With regard to Initiates who live in other countries: the candidate must spend some time creating an appropriate route by which the Pilgrimage can be undertaken. The route must include sites which express, for the Candidate - and for subsequent Initiates - a numinosity: they need not be of established historical or magickal interest (indeed it would be far better if they were not). Rather, they must convey isolation and natural beauty/wildness, and the route itself must be fairly arduous, keeping away from conventional footpaths. (25)

The site chosen for the solo Nine Angles rite must be of particular esoteric significance, and this aspect should be created prior to undertaking the Pilgrimage - via the ceremonial opening of an Earth Gate', or the Natural form of the Nine Angles rite, and so on. The creation of a Black Pilgrimage relevant to the respective Land of each Initiate will be a further new and vital expression of the Sinister Tradition. (26)

Michael Cox, in his annotations to "Count Magnus" in Casting the Runes (1987), offers only the possibility of a link with an item in an 1815 volume of the Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature:

"The late King of Sweden has published a very curious address. He says, he has received the Grand Seignior's permission to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land: in consequence, he invites ten persons to accompany him, one from each of the nations of Europe: they are to wear black robes, to let their beards grow, take the style and title of Black Brethren, and
are each to be attended by a servant in black and grey livery...the black brethren are to assemble at Trieste, on the 24th of June." (27)

Rosemary Pardoe and Jane Nicholls in their article "The Black Pilgrimage" pointed out:

"Aside from the Swedish connection, there seems to be no similarity between this innocuous pilgrimage and Count Magnus's. The King of Sweden's was 'black' only in the sense that the 'black Brethren' were to wear the colour as an act of contrition." (28)

They wrote: "Slightly more to the point is a letter published in the Eton College Chronicle in 1937. The writer, Helen Simpson, was responding to a mock-serious series of 'exm' questions about MRJ's stories in a previous issue, one of which was: 'Describe the experiences of Count Magnus on the Black Pilgrimage. What arrangement did he enter into with the Prince of the Power of the Air?'" (29) The Prince of the Power of the Air, of course, is Satan, as referred to in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians 2:2: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

Her lengthy reply offers a possible local destination for the Pilgrimage:

"...we need not suppose that the Black Pilgrimage took Count Magnus all the way to Palestine. The city of Chorazin may, I think, be identified with the town of Mohra in Sweden, which had a particularly evil reputation before and after the Count's time.

'At the end of this year (1601) the Archbishop sent Canon Matthew Carelius, a man knowledgeable in such matters, to investigate rumours of witchcraft and a prophecy in the town of Mohra in Elfdal. This prophecy concerned the end of the world, which was said to be close at hand, the day after Christmas being named.

And it was alleged that on this account Satan was building a strong tower, in which his servants might take refuge from the Wrath. It was said that certain dead men left their sepulchres to labour on this tower by night, but there was no sign, only that some graves were found disturbed, which might well have been done by starving beasts, this being a hard winter.

The Canon was told also that the Enemy has established churches at other places in Elfdal, to which those who put their trust in him resorted, and that it was counted a great mark of devotion, and a man might be sure of entry to the tower, when he had faithfully accomplished this diabolical pilgrimage, offering sacrifice at each place. But nothing could be proved.

That day appointed by the false prophet for the Judgment passing without any event save a great and remarkable wind, the Canon preached to the people from Matthew xi, 21, and rebuked them, and told them they might expect the fate of the wicked cities if they would not amend. It was observed that the great wind dropped about this time, and the people made much of the omen. Oh, credulous of generation, etc." (30)

The Canon was likening Mohra to Chorazin by quoting Matthew xi, 21, but although Simpson thereby manages to link the latter city with the idea of a pilgrimage, there are two major drawbacks to this theory. The first is that, whilst MRJ may have known in general of the evil reputation of Mohra from Joseph Glanville, there is absolutely no evidence that
he was familiar with the specific details as presented in A History of the Archdiocese of Upsala, including the tenuous Mohra/Chorazin connection. Also, in "Count Magnus", it is clear that Mr. Wraxall believes the destination of the Pilgrimage to be the real Chorazin in Palestine, and the reader is given no cause to disagree with him.

In Matthew xi, 21-24, and also in Luke x, 13-15, Jesus condemns three cities, whose residents had been given the chance to hear his teachings, but had failed to repent:

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

These 'woes' came to be perceived in later centuries as a curse on the cities, and the idea arose that they would be somehow linked with the birth of the Antichrist as prophesied in the Book of Revelation. The earliest version of this tradition is to be found in the Revelations (or Letter) of the Pseudo-Methodius, which, although attributed to the fourth-century bishop Methodius, was probably written in Syria around 690. It has been described as "...arguably the most important Christian apocalyptic text after the Apocalypse of John in terms of its wide diffusion and subsequent influence." (31)

Of the Antichrist's origins, the Pseudo-Methodius says:

"...the Son of Perdition will appear. He will be born in Chorazaim, nourished in Bethsaida, and reign in Capharnaum. Chorazaim will rejoice because he was born in her, and Capharnaum because he will have reigned in her. For this reason in the third Gospel the Lord gave the following statement: 'Woe to you Chorazaim, woe to you Bethsaida, and to you Capharnaum - if you have risen up to heaven, you will descend even to hell'." (32)

A certain amount of confusion arose from a parallel tradition maintaining that the Antichrist would be born in Babylon, so some medieval writers such as Adso, the tenth-century Abbot of Montier-en-Der in France, stated that he would be raised and educated in Chorazin and Bethsaida, after being taken there from Babylon. John de Mandeville, in his famous fourteenth-century Travels, also contented himself with this compromise. (33)

Nevertheless, the "old priests" quoted by the deacon in "Count Magnus" had good authority for their statement. And although the Antichrist has not yet been born, Chorazin would thus be a suitable place to find his father, the "prince of the powers of the (lower) air", a title which also appears in MRJ's favourite Sheridan Le Fanu story, "The Familiar", and which was originally given to Satan by St. Paul in Ephesians 2:2: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience...'. In the Latin of the Vulgate Bible, the relevant phrase is "principem potestatis aeris".

"Count Magnus" was first published in Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (1904), but was probably written in the second half of 1901 or early 1902, while MRJ had a holiday in Sweden during the summer of 1901, it was still fresh in his mind. (34) Significantly, three
or four years earlier, he compiled the lengthy entry of "Man of Sin and Antichrist" for the Dictionary of the Bible. (35)

Here he makes no mention of Chorazin as such, but he does include the Pseude-Methodius among his sources, and also draws "copiously" on W. Bousett's Der Antichrist (1895), a work, which notes the Antichrist/Chorazin connection. MRJ further comments on the omission from Bousett of an Armenian document, a Life of St. Nerses dating from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. When Bousett's monograph was published in English in 1896, a new Appendix was added, giving a translation of this Armenian saga, including the following account of the Antichrist's origins:

"Think ye not however that he is Satan, or a devil from among his hosts. No, but a man lost in mind and soul of the tribe of Dan, and he is born in Chorazin, a village of the people of Israel;..." (36)

Some would suggest that the tribe of Dan's association with Satan (also referred to as the serpent or the dragon) comes from Genesis 49:

[1] And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

[2] Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.

[16] Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

[17] Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

MRJ's then-recent research for his overview of the Antichrist legend probably meant that it was still quite fresh in his mind when he came to write "Count Magnus". For that reason, if he needed to invent a logical destination for the Count's Black Pilgrimage, Chorazin would have been the obvious choice. Although he did not actually write the entry for Chorazin itself in the Dictionary of the Bible, he would doubtless have read it at this time, and noted the description of the town, which is identified with Kerazeh, a couple of miles north of the northern end of the Sea of Galilee:

"The ruins are of some importance, the entire stonework, columns and ornamentation being composed of black basalt rock" (37) Perhaps it is far-fetched to suggest that the Pilgrimage might have acquired its colourful adjective from this word-picture, but it may well have provoked Mr. Wraxall's question to the deacon: "it is, I suppose, quite a ruin now?"

The remains at Chorazin/Kerazeh were visited and measured by Sir Charles William Wilson in the 1860s, when he noted a synagogue with "Corinthian capitals", various domestic buildings and one "with remnants of Ionic capitals", all in the black basalt which made them "barely to be distinguished at one hundred yards distance from the rocks which surround (the town) (38)

Sixty years later, Gustaf Dalman also recorded Chorazin's location in this "desolate basalt wilderness", and described the synagogue, with its decoration of sculptures of "animal
motifs (among them a sucking ass, of apotropaic significance), representations especially of grape-gathering and grape-pressing, and of centaurs fighting with lions."

The town was deserted as early as the fourth century when it was referred to by St. Jerome, and later legend had it that the synagogue was never completed: "... pilgrims were told that the Jews could not finish building the synagogue, because the workers, when asked by Jesus what they were doing, replied: 'Nothing,' and our Lord then said: 'If what ye do is nothing, nothing will it remain for ever'." (39)

Today, the Ancient Synagogue of Chorazin, standing in the Talmudic era synagogue of Chorazin and looking down at the light blue waters of the Sea of Galilee, 900 feet below, one can't help but be inspired. Chorazin was one of numerous towns that thrived in the Galilee, after the destruction of the Second Temple.

It is probably one of the most beautiful lesser-known ancient synagogues in Israel and one that clearly attests to a mastery of stonework, by those who built it. Built of black basalt, in the form of a basilica, the imposing structure stands in an area known in ancient times for the quality of wheat grown there.

The builders used ingenuity in getting around some of the limitations presented by their primary building material. Basalt can become brittle and break easily - this limited the length of the beams that could be used - which averaged about six feet in length, restricting the size of the rooms that could be built. Internal walls were built to support these beams while in other instances a beam was placed between arched openings (six feet from the wall) and the outer wall.

With two rows of columns along its length and one row along its width, the synagogue features lovely carvings; an assortment of Jewish symbols and has inscriptions in both Aramaic and Hebrew. It had three entrances with the front facing south, toward Jerusalem, as was the custom. One of the interesting finds located on site, is a stone seat, where the Torah reader sat. It is inscribed in Aramaic was dubbed the Chair of Moses.

The town of Chorazin was apparently first occupied in the first or second century CE. Various dates have been ascribed to the synagogue at Chorazin. It was apparently built initially in the late third or early fourth centuries CE. The town and the synagogue appear to have been destroyed in the latter part of the fourth century and were rebuilt in the fifth century.

Most of the ruins visible today are from the third-fourth centuries CE. The site spans 25 acres and in addition to the synagogue features a ritual bath (milveh), various dwelling, and an olive press. The ancient synagogue is located in the middle of Chorazin National Park. (40)

According to the article "The Black Pilgrimage" by Rosemary Pardoe and Jane Nicholls, leaving aside the distinctive hue of the basalt, and the obvious sinister implications of the color, there would also seem to be a link between the use of the word black and alchemy, the alchemist, who has just begun to gain power, has to descend into an abyss of putrefaction in order to ascend any further.

A related area of MRJ's researches must have provided the inspiration for the title of the Liber nigrae peregrinationis (Book of the Black Pilgrimage). Dr. John Dee (1527-1608),
magician and bibliophile, was a constant source of interest to MRJ, and in 1921 he edited the Lists of MSS formerly owned by Dr. John Dee.

Here MRJ reprinted, annotated and expanded upon a 1583 autograph catalogue of Dee's library: a manuscript in Trinity College, Cambridge, which he had previously described for his Western MSS at Trinity College (1900-1902). MRJ's introduction to the 1921 Lists of MSS makes frequent mention of James Orchard Halliwell's The Diary of Dr. John Dee (1842), where the Trinity holograph had earlier been printed in an appendix. To compile his own version, MRJ collated Halliwell's with the original, and also added material from other sources.

He states that, "I have not attempted to collect here notices of MSS. of Dee's own writing", and concerning another section in Halliwell's appendix he writes, "There follows...Ilias Ashmole's list...of such of Dee's MSS. as had come to his hands. They are all records of his intercourse with spirits, and have no bearing on our present subject". (41)

Nevertheless, MRJ can hardly have avoided reading Ashmole's list. Possibly his first encounter with Halliwell was around 1900, when he may have read the book as background research for the Trinity catalogue. He will have noted Ashmole's entry numbers: Dee's Liber Peregrinationis Primae (Book of the First Pilgrimage). (42)

The close similarity of the two titles cannot be coincidence, although Dee's word bears no other resemblance to Count Magnus's, and deals with magical conversations during a 1583 voyage to Krakow in Poland.

But whether or not MRJ needed to invent the Black Pilgrimage to Chorazin, it is intriguing to discover that, in the 1940s, a Californian Jack Parsons actually went on just such a journey, and with disturbing consequences. Early in 1946, Parsons (1914-1952), scientist and sometime leading light of the Californian Lodge of Aleister Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis, invoked the Thelemic goddess Babalon in the Mojave Desert, utilising the "Enochian Tablet of Air".

He had devised the magical operation in order to "obtain the assistance of an elemental mate" (reminiscent of Count Magnus's "faithful messenger"), an object he claimed to have achieved by following Babalon's instructions, which he later wrote down as The Book of Babalon or the Liber 49. One of the goddess's demands was that: "Thou shalt make the Black Pilgrimage". Babalon did not specify in so many words where the Pilgrimage should be to, but Parsons' Foreword to the Book says:

"I have taken the Oath of the Abyss, and entered my rightful city of Chorazin, and seen therein the past lives whereby I came to this, the grossest of all my Workings. Now it would seem that the further matters of the prophecy are at work; events press on tumultuously, and 'Time is' is writ large across the sky." (43)

Any lingering doubts concerning the destination of Parsons' Pilgrimage are removed by his The Book of Antichrist (1949), where he explains how, during a later invocation in 1948-1949:

"...I reconstructed the temple, and began the Black Pilgrimage, as She (Babalon) instructed. And I went into the sunset with Her sign, and into the night past accursed and desolate places and cyclopean ruins, and so came at last to the City of Chorazin. And there a great
tower of Black Basalt was raised, that was part of a castle whose further battlements reeled over the gulf of stars. And upon the tower was this sign (an inverted triangle in a circle)." (44)

Just like Count Magnus, Parsons "was taken within and saluted the Prince of that place", after which:

"...things were done to me of which I may not write, and they told me, 'It is not certain that you will survive, but if you survive you will attain your true will, and manifest the Antichrist.' And thereafter I returned and swore the Oath of the Abyss, having only the choice between madness, suicide and that oath." (45)

Of course, Jack Parsons' pilgrimage was magico-spiritual rather than geographical, but so might Count Magnus's have been. At no point in the story does MRJ specify that his journey was a physical one. It would be interesting, too, to know how Count Magnus died. Parsons was killed when he accidentally dropped some unstable fulminate of mercury, thus fulfilling Babalon's prophecy that he would "become living flame".

Rosemary Pardoe and Jane Nicholls believe that the one obvious link between Parsons and MRJ is their mutual fascination with John Dee (for Enochian and bibliographical reasons, respectively). They therefore had great hopes of discovering the Black Pilgrimage to Chorazin as an existing concept in Dee's works, but to date they have found only one reference to Chorazin (ro Gorsim), listed as number seventy-six in the ninety-one parts of the earth named by man, in the Liber Scientiae Auxili and victoriae Terrestris.

Both of the ladies think that their lack of success does not necessarily prove that it is not there, but unless and until they discover it, the most likely explanation for Parson's Black Pilgrimage has to be that he somehow got the idea via "Count Magnus". There is no actual evidence that he ever read the story, but perhaps it is significant that Aleister Crowley once criticised Parsons' tendency to get "a kick from some magazine trash, or an 'occult' novel...and (dash) off in wild pursuit". (46)

Parsons sometimes attended the meetings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LaSFS): Jack Williamson, author of the supernatural novel "Darker Than You Think", encountered him there in 1941, and found him quite well read in the genre. (47)

Another active member of LASFS was Samuel D. Russell, whose major essay on "Irony and Horror: The Art of M. R. James" was published in the Fall 1945 issue of Francis Towner Laney's fanzine The Acolyte, just a months before Parsons received his first instruction to go on the Black Pilgrimage. (48)

Clearly MRJ was discussed at LASFS meetings and Parsons may have been introduced to his tales there. Possibly he was then encouraged to take the Black Pilgrimage seriously by his scryer or "magical partner", the notorious L. Ron Hubbard, who went on to found the Church of Scientology. Described by Aleister Crowley as a "confidence man," when Hubbard started working with Parsons his greatest claim to fame was as a pulp fiction writer who had contributed several science fiction and supernatural fantasy stories to Unknown magazine.

Crowley himself appears to have had his doubts about the authenticity of the conjurations undertaken by the two men. In April 1946, he wrote: "Apparently, Parsons or Hubbard or
somebody is producing a Moonchild. I get fairly frantic when I contemplate the idiocy of these louts." (49) It would certainly seem to be in character for Parsons to have adopted a fictional concept into his practice.

3. A School Story

At the beginning of "A School Story", M. R. James has two characters in a smoking room, discussing the ghostly tales, which were current during their private school days. One mentions: "the house with a room in which a series of people insisted on passing a night; and each of them in the morning was found kneeling in a corner and had just time to say "I've seen it," and died.

"Wasn't that the house in Berkeley Square?"

"I dare say it was. Then there was the man who heard a noise in the passage at night, opened his door, and saw someone crawling towards him on all fours with his eye hanging out on his check. There was besides, let me think--Yes! the room where a man was found dead in bed with a horseshoe mark on his forehead, and the floor under the bed was covered with marks of horseshoes also; I don't know why. Also there was the lady who, on locking her bedroom door in a strange house, heard a thin voice among the bed-curtains say, 'Now we're shut in for the night.' None of those had any explanation or sequel. I wonder if they go on still, those stories." (50)

M. R. James was thinking of the authentic haunting of Number 50, Berkeley Square, in the West End of London, when he wrote this story, yet in one particular his description is at odds with the standard accounts.

The true story of Berkeley Square London, according to ghost lore, a girl screams in Berkeley Square - a phantom girl who hangs from a top-floor window ledge of the most famous haunted house in London. Her story is just one of many associated with 50 Berkeley Square. For more than 100 years, it is said, no one sensitive to the supernatural has walked comfortably past the building at night. The screaming girl is said to be trying to escape the attentions of a depraved and villainous uncle. But most of the reports are more elusive in character, suggesting some formless but malign presence.

In 1872, Lord Lyttelton spent a night alone in the haunted room at the top. A shapeless mass sprang at him from the shadows and he fired a blunderbuss at it. Though he sensed that some grim weight fell to the floor, he never found any trace of it.

For long periods the house was left unoccupied. Once, it is said, two down-and-out sailors named Stephens and Carey broke in to find shelter for the night. Inexplicable threatening shuffling sounds terrified the seamen. The eerie noises seemed to be approaching the room where they cowered. At the climactic moment, the door creaked open - and something indescribably horrible slithered into the room. Stephens must have jumped from the window, for he was later found dead, impaled on the railings outside. Carey was discovered in Berkeley Square, a gibbering wreck barely able to say what had transpired. (51)

The other version of Berkeley Square involves the ghost of a woman, who hurled herself out of one of the upstairs' window to her death. Something so evil occupies one of the rooms, that people have been driven insane and even died of fear. Captain Kenfield in 1880 stayed in one of the rooms against the advice of the owner's who knew of the unearthly terror's that were in that room. Just after midnight everyone heard a scream of terror from Kenfield, whom they later found convulsing with fear on the floor. Even
though he recovered, he was never the same man, and he never told anyone what he saw. (52)

An article "A School Story and the House in Berkeley Square" by Rosemary Pardoe, pointed out that as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, the house in Berkeley Square had a reputation for being seriously haunted, although, contrary to popular opinion, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton did not base "The Haunted and the Haunters" (1859) upon it. Even MRJ thought Lord Lytton might have been inspired by the veridical history of the haunted mill at Willington, inhabited by the Procter family. (53)

It was not until 1870s that the subject really took off in print, with discussions and eyewitness accounts in Notes and Queries and Mayfair. Since then, everyone who is or was anyone in the English ghost-hunting world seems to have written his own versions, from Harry Price through Elliott O'Donnell to R. Thurston Hopkins. The common theme is of a room haunted by a terrifying "something" which causes anyone who witnesses it to drop dead or go mad.

Exactly what the so-called Nameless Horror of 50 Berkeley Square was, no one seemed sure, as so few saw it and lived in a fit state to tell the tale, although Lord Lytton claimed to have fired a blunderbuss at something which leapt at him in that terrible room. R. Thurston Hopkins, whose descriptions of true ghost stories often seem to owe a lot to the Jamesian tradition, clearly showed signs of having read "Oh, Whistle, and I'll come to You, My Lad" once too often when he recounted the sailors' experiences:

"They were out of the bed in a split second and dashed towards the window where they had left the only weapon they possessed, a rifle with which one of the sailors had propped open the window.... the intruder took up a position, with large outspread claws, between the bed and the door, thus obstructing the sailors' way out down the stairs...They were of the tough bully-beef bread, but the idea of rushing into the thing and escaping through the door was not very welcome to them.

They felt they could not endure the touch of the horrible intruder. It stood for a moment in a dark corner near the door, and the sailors could not see what manner of face the thing possessed-animal or human. But soon it began to move towards them...it crept, panted, shuffled across the room, making scratchy sounds on the bare boards, which might have been the scraping of horny claws.

As if it had marked down its victim, with formidable speed it leapt towards the sailor who had grasped the rifle by its barrel ready to use it as a club. The next moment the sailor had staggered backwards into the window and had broken part of the frame-work and glass away, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice..." (54)

MRJ, a keen reader of "veridical" ghostly tales, will have been very aware of the various pre-1906 accounts of the happenings in 50 Berkeley Square. Yet when he wrote "A School Story" in that year, he mentioned one feature which Rosemary Pardoe has been unable to discover in any of them. Sometimes, before dying or being removed to the lunatic asylum, the victims will say a few words, but these are invariably along the lines of "Don't let it touch me." (55)

Rhoda Broughton's "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth", first published in 1873 in Tales for Christmas Eve and reprinted in Twilight Stories, 1879, is a beautifully written, fictional tale based quite closely on the facts in the case of 50 Berkeley Square. Told in a sequence of letters between two deliciously gossipy ladies, one of whom has just obtained a house in Mayfair at a remarkably cheap rent, it includes all the
essential ingredients except for the sailors' adventure. (56)

At first everything about the house seems perfect, but then the staff report that it has a haunted room, and then the housemaid sees "something" and goes mad. Finally, a handsome young Hussar friend of the family, Ralph Gordon, vows to spend a night in the dreaded room. As usual, he tells everyone to come to his aid only if he rings the bell twice, and, as usual, by then it is too late. He speaks just seven words had previously been the last coherent sentence spoken by the maid. They are: "Oh, my God! I have seen it!"

Also, in MRJ's 1929 Bookman essay, "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", he lists Broughton amongst those having "some sufficiently absorbing stories to their credit". (57) Therefore, Rosemary Pardoe thinks that it seems very possible MRJ had Rhoda Broughton's "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth" in mind when he wrote the introductory section of "A School Story".

4. Martin's Close

In 1987, Oxford World's Classics published Casting the Runes and Other Ghost Stories, a collection of twenty-one tales by M.R. James with excellent notes by Michael Cox. Twelve stories were excluded from the volume, so twelve stories remained un-annotated including "Martin's Close".

"Martin's Close" first appeared in M. R. James' second volume of ghost stories "More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary", published by Edward Arnold in 1911. Like most of his tales, it was originally written for Christmas reading. The manuscript was one of those sold in Sotheby's sale of November 9, 1936, but its present whereabouts are not known.

In his Introduction to the Collected Ghost Stories, MRJ reveals that the "parish in the West" is Sampford Courtenay in Devon. This little village lies about four miles north of the northern edge of Dartmoor, the nearest town being Okehampton. MRJ had occasion to visit Sampford Courtenay on College business in 1893, for King's owned the living there. (58)

This story does not concentrate so much on the horror or the supernatural, but emphasizes M. R. James historical knowledge. Much of the story is a court transcript of a murder trial. James' master of history is quite evident, as he captures the procedure, style, and language nuances of earlier times. He familiarizes the reader with obsolete words and phrases that are both quaint and odd.
Chapter V.

The Weird Works of M. R. James

Clark Ashton Smith, an outstanding supernatural literature critic, in his article "The Weird Works of M. R. James" points out that M. R. James is perhaps unsurpassed in originality by any other supernatural literature writers, and he has made a salient contribution to the technique of the genre as well as to the enriching of its treasury of permanent masterpieces. His work is marked by rare intellectual skill and ingenuity, by power rising at times above the reaches of pure intellection, and by a sheer finesse of writing that will bear almost endless study. (59)

It has a peculiar savor, wholly different from the diabolic grimness of Bierce, or the accumulative atmospheric terror and rounded classicism of Machen. Here there is nothing of the feverish but logical hallucinations, the macabre and exotic beauty achieved by Poe; nor is there any kinship to the fine poetic weavings and character nuances of Walter de la Mare, or the far-searching, penetrative psychosis of Blackwood, or the frightful antiquities and ultra-terrene menaces of Lovecraft. (60)

The style of these stories is rather casual and succinct. The rhythms of the prose are brisk and pedestrian, and the phrasing is notable for clearness and incisiveness rather than for those vague, reverberative overtones, which beguile one's inner ear in the prose of fiction-writers who are also poets. Usually there is a more or less homely setting, often with a background of folklore and long-past happenings whose dim archaism provides a depth of shadow from which, as from a recessed cavern, the central horror emerges into the noontide of the present. Things and occurrences, sometimes with obvious off-hand relationship, are grouped cunningly, forcing the reader unaware to some frightful deduction; or there is an artful linkage of events seemingly harmless in themselves, that leave him confronted at a sudden turn with some ghoulish specter or night-demon. (61)

The minuita of modern life, humor, character drawing, scenic and archaeological description, are used as a foil to heighten the abnormal, but are never allowed to usurp a disproportionate interest. Always there is an element of supernatural menace, whose value is never impaired by scientific or spiritualistic explanation. Sometimes it is brought forth at the climax into full light; and sometimes, even then, it is merely half-revealed, is left undefined but perhaps all the more alarming. In any case, the presence of some unnatural but objective reality is assumed and established. (62)

The goblins and phantoms devised by James are truly creative and are presented through images often so keen and vivid as to evoke an actual physical shock. Sight, smell, hearing, feeling, all are played upon with well-nigh surgical sureness, by impressions calculated to touch the shuddering quick of horror. (63)

Some of the images or similes employed are most extraordinary, and spring surely from the olonionmic inspiration of the highest genius. In M. R. James' supernatural fiction, one notes a predilection for certain milieus and motifs. Backgrounds of scholastic or ecclesiastic life are frequent and some of the best tales are laid in cathedral towns. (64)

The peculiar genius of M. R. James, and his greatest power, lies in the convincing evocation of weird, malignant and preternatural phenomena. There is a saying in the English supernatural literature world that few writers, dead or living, have equaled M. R. James in this formidable necromancy and perhaps no one has excelled him. (65)
FOOTNOTES
1. Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism Vol. 6 p. 205.
2. A Study of the Preternatural Fiction of Sheridan LeFanu and its Impact Upon the Tales of Dr. Montague Rhodes James.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
6. A Study of the Preternatural Fiction of Sheridan Le Fanu and Its Impact upon the Tales of Dr. Montague Rhodes James, p. 1.
8. Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism Vol. 6, p. 205.
10. Ibid.
11. Michael Cox, "M. R. James, An Informal Portrait".
14. M. R. James, "A Warning to the Curious".
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
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