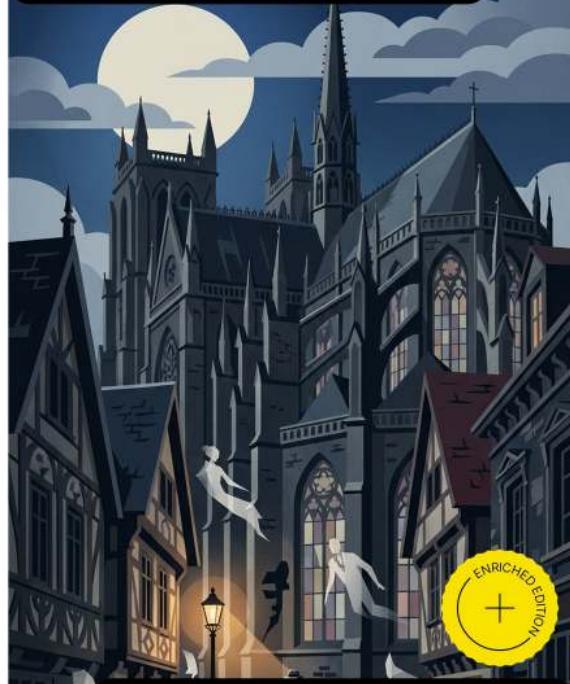


**RALPH ADAMS CRAM**



***BLACK SPIRITS AND  
WHITE: A BOOK  
OF GHOST STORIES***

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# **Black Spirits and White: A Book of Ghost Stories**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Eric Baylor*

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# Introduction

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Black Spirits and White: A Book of Ghost Stories gathers six short tales by American architect and author Ralph Adams Cram, presented here as a single-author collection of supernatural fiction. The aim is neither to compile a complete works nor to present miscellaneous writings, but to assemble a coherent suite of ghost stories that established Cram's reputation in the fin-de-siècle tradition. The volume also preserves contemporary publisher materials that accompanied the work in its original setting. Readers will thus encounter both the narratives themselves and the historical frame in which they first circulated, offering a concentrated introduction to Cram's distinctive approach to the uncanny.

Taken together, the texts represented are primarily short stories: No. 252 Rue M. le Prince, In Kropfsberg Keep, The White Villa, Sister Maddelena, Notre Dame des Eaux, and The Dead Valley. In addition, the collection includes a publisher's postscript, Concerning the Books of Stone & Kimball, and a notice headed The Publications of Stone & Kimball. The latter references The Chap-Book, the firm's periodical, and serves as documentary context rather than narrative. The duplications and variant capitalizations in the contents reflect how titles have appeared in different printings and are preserved to honor the historical record of the book's transmission.

Across these tales, Cram favors a unifying set of concerns: the persistence of place, the moral dimension of fear, and the suggestive power of half-seen forces. Buildings, cloisters, villas, and remote landscapes often function as characters, their lines and shadows bearing memory and intention. The supernatural typically intrudes with restraint, unsettling reason rather than assaulting it. Religious atmospheres, medieval survivals, and the weight of tradition shape many of the settings, yet the stories remain focused on individual perception and ethical choice. By linking the uncanny to architecture, ritual, and memory, Cram crafts ghost stories that probe what endures beyond mere sensation.

Cram's stylistic signature is one of economy and poise. He privileges atmosphere over exposition, trusting cadence, color, and the geometry of rooms and streets to carry dread. Narrators frequently adopt the stance of travelers or observers, recounting encounters with an almost reportorial calm that sharpens the effect. Descriptions of structure and light are precise without pedantry, a reflection of the author's professional eye. Violence remains mostly implied; the prose advances by implication, echo, and the careful placement of detail. This restraint allies the book with classic ghost-story technique while allowing each tale to develop its own lucid, sculptural profile.

Within American and transatlantic supernatural literature, *Black Spirits and White* occupies a distinctive niche: a compact, architecturally attentive sequence that treats fear as both aesthetic and ethical experience. Its original association with the Chicago firm Stone & Kimball,

noted here by the appended notices and their mention of *The Chap-Book*, situates Cram among the cultivated, internationalist currents of the 1890s. The book's ongoing significance lies in its fusion of disciplined craftsmanship with quietly radical premises about place and memory. It invites rereading not for puzzles to be solved but for the balanced tension it sustains between rational surfaces and spiritual depths.

The six narratives begin from clear premises. In *No. 252 Rue M. le Prince*, a residence in a Parisian street exerts a malign fascination on successive visitors. In *Kropfsberg Keep* sends travelers into a mountain stronghold where rumor proves insufficient preparation. The *White Villa* turns to an alluring house whose beauty hides a dangerous allegiance. Sister *Maddelena* follows a religious vocation tested by forces entwined with duty. *Notre Dame des Eaux* contemplates devotion and peril in a village bound to its church. The *Dead Valley* recounts a childhood excursion into a landscape where life and silence seem fatally at odds.

Readers new to Cram will find this arrangement both accessible and revealing. The sequence moves from urban intimacy to alpine isolation, from inhabited rooms to haunted terrain, tracing an arc that highlights how setting governs fate. Variant title forms are retained as they appear here; they do not indicate different stories. The closing publisher materials are included to preserve the book's historical complexion and to signal its original milieu; they are not part of the fiction. Approached as a compact cycle, *Black Spirits and White* offers a disciplined map of terror,

memory, and conscience, achieved with uncommon clarity and grace.

# Historical Context

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Black Spirits and White, A Book of Ghost Stories first appeared in 1895 through the Chicago firm Stone & Kimball, amid the American fin-de-siècle's fascination with the macabre and the beautiful. Its author, Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), was then an emerging architect steeped in medievalism, whose travels in France, Italy, and Central Europe supplied atmospheres for Parisian streets, Alpine castles, and convents. The collection entered a small-press milieu shaped by *The Chap-Book* (1894-1898), a little magazine allied with Stone & Kimball that promoted aestheticist taste and refined book design. Readers encountered Cram's European settings as both travel-memory and vehicle for spiritual unease.

Cram's stories draw heavily on the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival, an artistic and intellectual movement linking architecture, morality, and history. Influences from A. W. N. Pugin, John Ruskin, and William Morris—champions of sincerity in craft and medieval forms—colored Cram's sense that buildings and landscapes retain moral presence. Keeps, parish churches, and villas in the tales function as repositories of time, echoing the Revival's belief that structure and ornament could carry spiritual truth. This aesthetic background helps explain the narratives' careful attention to stonework, liturgy, and ritual space, and why decayed fabric or altered plans so often precipitate dread or haunting.

Religious conflict under the French Third Republic and post-Unification Italy created a charged backdrop for convents, parish shrines, and processions. Anti-clerical legislation in France during the 1880s and, later, the 1905 separation of Church and State, as well as Italy's 1870 seizure of Rome, sharpened contemporary debates about the sacred in public life. An Anglo-Catholic sympathizer, Cram translated these tensions into narratives where vows, sacraments, and relics confront modern skepticism. He treats ritual not as superstition but as a binding force with consequences, aligning his fiction with late nineteenth-century Catholic revivals in Britain and America while acknowledging secular pressure.

The Paris of Rue Monsieur-le-Prince—near the Sorbonne in the Latin Quarter—evoked bohemian student life within a capital transformed by Haussmann's boulevards and Belle Époque technologies. Gaslight and the new electric illumination altered perceptions of night, just as photography, telephones, and railways compressed space and time. Fin-de-siècle literature often explored how such modern stimuli unsettled nerves and blurred thresholds between waking and dream. In Cram's Parisian episodes, rationalist scholarship abuts uncanny occurrences, mirroring the city's status as a laboratory of positivism and, simultaneously, a magnet for occult societies, salons, and symbolist circles that prized suggestion over empirical proof.

Across Europe and America, organized psychical research supplied a quasi-scientific frame for ghostly speculation. The Society for Psychical Research, founded in London in 1882, and the American branch (1885) drew figures like Frederic

W. H. Myers and William James into studies of apparitions, trance, and telepathy. Such inquiries legitimized the ghost tale as a testing ground for hypotheses about mind and environment. Cram's restrained, report-like narrators reflect this climate, presenting extraordinary events with procedural calm and geographical specificity. Readers in the 1890s could entertain both the naturalistic and the supernatural explanation, a balanced ambiguity cultivated by serious investigators and novelists alike.

Central European settings, notably the Tyrolean keep, resonated with Anglophone readers already primed by romantic travel and Germanic Gothic. The Austro-Hungarian Tyrol, accessible by railway and guidebook, offered crags, castles like Kropfsberg, and folk Catholicism—picturesque survivals within a modern empire. These sites carried memories of feudal obligation, dynastic wars, and Counter-Reformation piety, all fertile ground for revenants. They also echoed earlier German Romantic and Gothic writers—from Ludwig Tieck to E. T. A. Hoffmann—whose haunted architectures linked psyche and place. Cram leverages that tradition, treating masonry and mountain weather as agents, not mere backdrop, in the mechanics of haunting.

The book's physical production and advertising matter align it with Stone & Kimball's program of elegant, limited-run volumes. Influenced by William Morris's Kelmscott Press and the international Arts and Crafts movement, the firm emphasized typography, paper, and cover design, while The Chap-Book cultivated an audience attuned to symbolist art and impressionistic prose. Catalog lists and the postscript embedded Cram's work in a network of little magazines,

salons, and bookshops spanning Chicago, Boston, London, and Paris. This aesthetic framing shaped reception: reviewers approached the stories as refined experiments in mood and style rather than sensational shockers, consistent with fin-de-siècle taste.

Within the ghost-story canon, Cram's volume stands between earlier masters like J. Sheridan Le Fanu and later antiquarian stylists such as M. R. James, whose first tales circulated in the 1890s and appeared in book form in 1904. Published the same decade as Henry James's spectral experiments and Robert W. Chambers's weird fictions, it shares a cosmopolitan itinerary but retains a distinctly medievalist conscience. In an America debating the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition's classicism and the role of tradition, Cram's stories argue—quietly—that the past endures in stones and rites. Contemporary readers recognized both a travelogue's relish and a moral architect's warning.

# **Synopsis (Selection)**

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## **No. 252 Rue M. le Prince / No. 252 RUE M. LE PRINCE**

A traveler takes rooms in a modest Paris address whose ordinary façade conceals a mounting, suffocating unease.

Cram uses tight, urbane observation and architectural detail to let hints of malign history seep in, exploring themes of urban anonymity, unseen evil, and the limits of rational comfort.

## **In Kropfsberg Keep / IN KROPFSBERG KEEP**

In a crumbling Tyrolean fortress, visitors discover that the weight of feudal past and legend still inhabits its stones.

The tale pairs antiquarian texture with slowly escalating dread, probing how place, lineage, and architecture can fix human fate.

## **The White Villa / THE WHITE VILLA**

A gleaming Mediterranean villa promises beauty and repose but radiates a subtle moral chill.

Sunlit surfaces contrast with a current of seduction and peril, as Cram tests the line between aesthetic allure and spiritual corruption.

## **Sister Maddelena / SISTER MADDELENA**