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Un Réveillon chez Cambacérés.

Xmas Eve at Cambacérés. It was Xmas Eve! A group of men were assembled around the fire place at the house of Cambacérés who had been Arch-Chancellor of France.

One of them said who would believe in sorcerers?

I, replied Cambacérés.

You believe in sorcerers? you? - - -

I knew one.

Goodness me, Prince, exclaimed Roederer, please tell us, it is a long time that I haven't heard a fairytale.

Cambacérés got up and leaned against the chimney, which was his habit when within an intimate circle, and let himself go to his memories. As a matter of fact he talked easily, being a good storyteller to whom one listened.

Well, Gentlemen, this is not a fairytale, you have probably all heard of a strange person who came around 1760 from Germany to the court of Louis XVth. where he was introduced through the Maréchal de Richelieu who had met him on one of his journeys. This stranger who seemed to be barely 40 years old, boasted of being a contemporary of Sésostris, he said that he had lived consecutively in close contact with Clovis de Barberousse, of Mahomet and François I and could give such precise details about them which showed up the errors of the most learned historians. Shortly, instead of making himself younger, as we all have the weakness of doing, he said he was 2000 years old and assured us that he knew the secret of not aging.

That was the Count St. Germain, a charlatan, interrupted Favre.

So it is, continued Cambacérés, he knew -- and this is certain-- the secret to make diamonds. Louis XV asked him to make this experiment before him and he succeeded perfectly; St. Germain was fabulously rich and his luxuries and fantastic mannerisms, the mystery which surrounded his existence were the big talk of the Paris Society at the time of Madame de Pompadour.

He was a vulgar joker, retorted Roederer. This, so-called immortal man was a simple spy engaged by the King of Prussia, he died very un-interestingly in the Duchy of Hesse in 1780. This has been proven.

Well, I have seen him with my own eyes, continued the Ex-Chancellor without answering this interruption.

In which year?

In 1796. At that moment I was without a job, ruined through the Revolution, I had decided not to leave Paris. I joined the Barristers and opened an office. More and more clients consulted me on legal matters. One day, I heard someone ring, my maid went to the door. A personage presented itself, a personage you understand, I can't bring myself to call him a man, his expression was so imposing. His clothes were of fine taste, he wore marvelous diamonds on his fingers, on his collar of his shirt and on the cuffs. This personage introduced himself as a Svede. He said that one had tried in Paris to take advantage of his lack of business experience. He wanted to consult me on the subject of a process he wanted to start with a purveyor. We talked he talked well, a sort of intimacy was created between us, if one can give this name to visits which multiplied under the pretext of business, but which I have never been able to execute, since he never told me where he lived.

One evening, it was just Xmas Eve, and it is this coincidence which awakes in me this memory, the conversation of my strange friends had taken a very mystic turn. He spoke to me about Paracelsus and d'Averrhoës who knew much about magic and cabalism. As I joked about this: --- "Don't laugh Master Cambacérés, he said to me, a little time longer and you shall arrive through your own merits to a position to which in France no private citizen has ever risen. The old Royal Chancelors, under certain conditions, presided a council of Princes,

you without being a monarch will preside a council of Kings, and that not only once, but during several years. You won't die while in that brilliant position." What he added was of little importance said Cambacérès after a moment of silence and passing his hand over his forehead. When I was appointed Second Consul and later Arch-Chancellor the words of the stranger made real sense to me, I made every effort to find him, I put the police of all Europe in motion - - - but, to no avail.

I would have certainly forgotten this if in 1807, entering the salon of the old Madame de Coigny, my eyes had not been attracted to a portrait of a man who had made an unspeakable impression on me ... It was he, it was his clear expression, his mocking smile, his inspired forehead, his pale complexion. Madame de Coigny, who I asked, told me that she possessed this portrait for more than 40 years. --- And he represents? I asked --- A lunatic she answered, a lunatic who was the amusement of our youth and who called himself the Count of St. Germain.

Bravo, called out Lamothe-Langon when Cambacérès had finished his story, this is truly a Xmas story where nothing is missing, not even the little shudder of terror which is indispensable.... Prince, I am certain that if you had addressed yourself to the Duke of Otrante, to find your man, you would have had better success.

To me? what makes you think so? said Fouché lifting his head which he had kept leaning on his hand for a while.

Hell, aren't you Sir, the great scout of all intrigues, the most clear-seeing and least deceived of all men? But what is the matter, has the story of the Count of St. Germain made such an impression on you?

All eyes turned to Fouché, he was indeed white as marble, his looks wandered a moment towards his assistant, then he shook his shoulders and took again his meditative position.

Let me alone, he said, Réal will speak if he thinks advisable.

Réal another policeman of genius felt also not comfortable. He made a sign that he had nothing to say.

Your Honor, said Cambacérès, I have never as much regretted not to be the second person in the Empire anymore; formerly I could have ordered you to speak about what you seem to know, today I can only ask you, and I ask you with insistence.

In as much as your Royal Highness desires so, said Réal, I cannot be obstinate in my refusal, but first of all be not mislaid: The Duke of Otrante and I have passed 10 years and put the teeth of 20 policeman in vain on the track of the man you spoke about, and have not been able to find him.

In other words he appeared once before you?

No, not to me ----but to another person.

And that person was?

None other than the Emperor.

The Emperor had seen the Count St. GERmain? --- In the Tuileries?

No, in Egypt when he was only General Bonaparte. You know that when he arrived at the pyramids he ordered to unseal the stone which closed the gigantic tomb of the Pharaohs, and he wished to go alone into the interior of the monument. At the end of a dark hall, behind a stone coffin a man appeared before him.

I waited for that, interrupted Roederer, that was St. Germain.

Oh, do not joke about this, retorted seriously Réal. It was indeed St. Germain and what he predicted to Bonaparte then, made still tremble after 10 years the man who did not tremble easily.

What unusual passed between those two men? I do not know the details of their intervue. I only know because the emperor has repeated it to me many times, that St. Germain prophethised a superhuman destiny, the conquest of Europe, the throne of the Occident, all things which have happened. "But, the miracle worker added, "Keep away from Moscow. "

From Moscow? will I go there?

Yes.

As Master?

St. Germain hesitated and answered, "As Master"

Then, retorted the conqueror, the world will be mine?

Yes, but you belong to God. The incredible fortune which awaits you would be an intolerable torture if the issue of your epic would be revealed to you. Go and accomplish your task ... but keep away from Moscow! "

These fateful words had been so clearly impressed upon the memory of Napoleon, that he repeated them often to me, and even in the words I have been telling you.

As soon as he was in power, he neglected nothing to find out who could be the man who had revealed his future. All was unnecessary. We couldn't find out anything. But who knows what an influence such an interview could have on the fate of France? Who knows if this prediction did not give Bonaparte the daringness and confidence in himself? No one was as superstitious as he was, his belief in his star, this fatalism, this contempt of death. - - - All this, does it not seem that he walked assuredly, on a straight way, towards an unveiled future?---- until the fatal Moscow, which fascinated and attracted him, which he wanted to conquer and tame, as if he desired to escape the oracle!

What to think of it? murmured Cambacères in a tone of a dreamer.

Yes, what to think of it? repeated Réal.

There was silence in the room; everyone dreamed of great problems, ---and in the distance, the Churchbells answered joyously, but were not understood by these egotistical and ambitious men which had dried up hearts and a warped intelligence.

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