

Count St. Germain

H. P. Blavatsky

At long intervals have appeared in Europe certain men whose rare intellectual endowments, brilliant conversation, and mysterious modes of life have astounded and dazzled the public mind. The article now copied from *All the Year Round* relates to one of these men – the Count St. Germain. In Hargrave Jennings' curious work, *The Rosicrucians*, is described another, a certain Signor Gualdi, who was once the talk of Venetian society. A third was the historical personage known as Alessandro di Cagliostro, whose name has been made the synonym of infamy by a forged Catholic biography. It is not now intended to compare these three individuals with each other or with the common run of men. We copy the article of our London contemporary for quite another object. We wish to show how basely personal character is traduced without the slightest provocation – unless the fact of one's being brighter in mind, and more versed in the secrets of natural law can be construed as a sufficient provocation to set the slanderer's pen and the gossip's tongue in motion. Let the reader attentively note what follows. The writer in *All the Year Round* says:

This famous adventurer [the Count St. Germain is supposed to have been a Hungarian by birth, but the early part of his life was by himself carefully wrapped in mystery. His person and his title alike stimulated curiosity. His age was unknown and his parentage equally obscure. We catch the first glimpse of him in Paris, a century and a quarter ago, filling the court and the town with his renown. Amazed Paris saw a man – apparently of middle age – a man who lived in magnificent style, who went to dinner parties where he ate nothing, but talked incessantly and with exceeding brilliancy on every imaginable topic. His tone was perhaps over trenchant – the tone of a man who knows perfectly what he is talking about. Learned, speaking every civilized language admirably, a great musician, an excellent chemist, he played the part of a prodigy, and played it to perfection. Endowed with extraordinary confidence or consummate impudence, he not only laid down the law magisterially concerning the present, but spoke without hesitation of events 200 years old. His anecdotes of remote occurrences were related with extraordinary minuteness. He spoke of scenes at the court of Francis I. as if he had seen them, describing exactly the appearance of the king, imitating his voice, manner and language, affecting throughout the character of an eye-witness. In like style he edified his audience with pleasant stories of Louis XIV., and regaled them with vivid descriptions of places and persons. Hardly saying in so many words that he was actually present when the events happened, he yet contrived, by his great graphic power, to convey that impression . . . intending to astonish, he succeeded completely. Wild stories were current concerning him. He was reported to be 300 years old, and to have prolonged his life by the use of a famous elixir. Paris went mad about him. He was questioned constantly about his secret of longevity, and was marvellously adroit in his replies, denying all power to make old folks young again, but quietly asserting his possession of the secret of *arresting decay in the human frame*. Diet, he protested, was, with his marvellous elixir, the true secret of long life, and he resolutely refused to eat any food but such as had been specially prepared for him – oatmeal, groats and the white meat of chickens. On great occasions he drank a little wine, sat up as late as anyone would listen to him, but took extraordinary precautions against the cold. To ladies he gave mysterious cosmetics to preserve their beauty unimpaired; to men, he talked openly of his method of transmuting metals, and of a certain process for melting down a dozen little diamonds into one large stone. These astounding assertions were

backed by the possession of apparently boundless wealth, and a collection of jewels of rare size and beauty.

From time to time this strange being appeared in various European capitals, under various names, as Marquis de Montferrat, Count Bellamare, at Venice; Chevalier Schoening, at Pisa; Chevalier Weldon, Milan; Count Soltikoff, at Genoa; Count Tzarogy at Schwalbach, and, finally, as Count St. Germain at Paris; but, after his disaster at the Hague, no longer seems so wealthy as before, and has at times the appearance of seeking his fortune. At Tournay, he is "interviewed" by the renowned Chevalier de Seingalt, who finds him in an Armenian robe and pointed cap, with a long beard descending to his waist, and ivory wand in hand – the complete make-up of a necromancer. St. Germain is surrounded by a legion of bottles, and is occupied in developing the manufacture of hats upon chemical principles. Seingalt being indisposed, the Count offers to physic him gratis and offers to dose him with an elixir, which appears to have been æther; but the other refuses, with many polite speeches. It is the scene of the two augurs. Not being allowed to act as physician, St. Germain determines to show his power as an alchemist, takes a twelve-sous piece from the other augur, puts it on red-hot charcoal, and works with a blow-pipe, the piece of money is fused and allowed to cool. "Now," says St. Germain, "take your money again." "But it is gold." "Of the purest." Augur No. 2 does not believe in the transmutation and looks on the whole operation as a trick; but he pockets the piece, nevertheless, and finally presents it to the celebrated Marshal Keith, then governor of Neuchatel.

Again, in pursuit of dyeing and other manufacturing schemes, St. Germain turned up at St. Petersburg, Dresden and Milan. Once he got into trouble, and was arrested in a petty town of Piedmont on a protested bill of exchange; but he pulled out a hundred thousand crowns' worth of jewels, paid on the spot, bullied the governor of the town like a pickpocket, and was released with the most respectful excuses.

Very little doubt exists that during one of his residences in Russia, he played an important part in the revolution which placed Catherine II. on the throne. In support of this view, Baron Gleichen cites the extraordinary attention bestowed on St. Germain at Leghorn, 1770, by Count Alexis Orloff, and a remark made by Prince Gregory Orloff to the Margrave of Onspach during his stay at Nuremberg.

After all, who was he? – the son of a Portuguese king or of a Portuguese Jew? Or did he in his old age tell the truth to his protector and enthusiastic admirer, Prince Charles of Hesse Cassel? According to the story told by his last friend, he was the son of a Prince Rakoczy of Transylvania, and his first wife a Tekely. He was placed, when an infant, under the protection of the last of the Medici. When he grew up and heard that his two brothers, sons of the Princess Hesse Rheinfels, of Rothenburg, had received the names of St. Charles and St. Elizabeth, he determined to take the name of their holy brother St. Germanus. What was the truth? One thing alone is certain, that he was a *protégé* of the last Medici. Prince Charles, who appears to have regretted his death, which happened in 1783, very sincerely tells us that he fell sick, while pursuing his experiments in colours at Ekrenforde, and *died* shortly after, despite the innumerable medicaments prepared by his own private apothecary. Frederick the Great, who, despite his scepticism, took a queer interest in astrologers, said of him, "This is a man who does not die." Mirabeau adds epigrammatically, "He was always a careless fellow, and at last, like his predecessors, forgot not to die."

And now we ask what shadow of proof is herein afforded either that St. Germain was an "adventurer," that he meant to "play the part of a prodigy," or that he sought to make money out of dupes. Not one single sign is there of his being other than what he seemed, viz., a possessor of ample means to support

honestly his standing in society. He claimed to know how to fuse small diamonds into large ones, and to transmute metals, and backed his "assertions" by the possession of apparently boundless wealth and a collection of jewels of rare size and beauty. Are "adventurers" like this? Do charlatans enjoy the confidence and admiration of the cleverest statesmen and nobles of Europe for long years, and not even at their deaths show in one thing that they were undeserving? Some encyclopædists (see *New American Cyclopædia* xiv. 266) say: "He is supposed *to have been employed during the greater part of his life as a spy* at the courts at which he resided." But upon what evidence is this *supposition* based? Has anyone found it in any of the state papers in the secret archives of either of those courts? Not one word, not one shred of fact to build this base calumny upon, has ever been found. It is simply a malicious lie. The treatment this great man, this pupil of Indian and Egyptian hierophants, this proficient in the secret wisdom of the East, has had from Western writers, is a stigma upon human nature. And so has the stupid world behaved towards every other person who, like St. Germain, has revisited it after long seclusion devoted to study, with his stores of accumulated esoteric wisdom, in the hope of bettering it, and making it wiser and happier.

One other point should be noticed. The above account gives no particulars of the last hours of the mysterious Count or of his funeral. Is it not absurd to suppose that if he really died at the time and place mentioned, he would have been laid in the ground without the pomp and ceremony, the official supervision, the police registration which attend the funerals of men of his rank and notoriety? Where are these data? He passed out of public sight more than a century ago, yet no memoir contains them. A man who so lived in the full blaze of publicity could not have vanished, if *he really died then and there*, and left no trace behind. Moreover, to this negative we have the alleged positive proof that he was living several years after 1784. He is said to have had a most important private conference with the Empress of Russia in 1785 or 1786, and to have appeared to the Princess de Lamballe when she stood before the tribunal, a few moments before she was struck down with a billet, and a butcher-boy cut off her head; and to Jeanne Dubarry, the mistress of Louis XV. as she waited on her scaffold at Paris the stroke of the guillotine in the Days of Terror of 1793.

A respected member of our Society, residing in Russia, possesses some highly important documents about Count St. Germain, and for the vindication of the memory of one of the grandest characters of modern times, it is hoped that the long-needed but missing links in the chain of his history may speedily be given to the world through these columns.

[Vol. II. No. 8, May, 1881.]