

Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin

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THE little town of Amboise in Touraine is redolent with memories. There, in the fourth century, Saint Martin, patron of Tours, overthrew an ancient pyramidal temple and established Christianity in that part of France. There too Clovis and Alaric held their famous meeting in 496. The Chateau on the hill has housed many notables -- Louis XI, Charles VIII, Francis I and the lovely Marguerite de Valois, Catherine de Medici and Mary Stuart. A short distance from the Chateau is the Gothic edifice where Leonardo da Vinci died.

Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, the "unknown philosopher" of the eighteenth century, was born in Amboise on January 18, 1743. (It is interesting that when the boy was fifteen years old the Count de St. Germain was living in the Chateau of Chambord, only a few miles away.) Out of respect for the wish of his father, who expected him to enter the legal profession, the young Saint-Martin studied law for a while. But after practicing for six months he found himself unable to distinguish between the rights of the plaintiff and the defendant, and asked his father's permission to enter the army, not that he was fond of fighting, but that he might have more time to study philosophy. His father appealed to the Duc de Choiseul, Prime Minister of France, who gave the young man a lieutenancy in the Régiment de Foix, then in garrison in Bordeaux. It was there that he met Martinez Paschalis and became a member of his school.

Paschalis was a Portuguese gentleman who had travelled extensively in the East and was known as a Kabalist and Rosicrucian Initiate. Particularly interested in Masonry, he founded a Masonic Order in Paris. Arriving in Bordeaux in 1767, he established a School of Occultism where theosophical principles were taught and a high code of ethics was maintained. The psychic side of Occultism, however, was emphasized in this school, and the majority of the pupils were concerned with the development of occult powers. Paschalis left Bordeaux in 1773 and Saint-Martin assumed charge of his school. In the following year Saint-Martin went to Lyons, where he established a semi-occult Masonic rite known as the "Rectified Rite of Saint-Martin," through which he endeavored to restore to Masonry its primeval character of Eastern Occultism. From this attempt was born an organization known as the Martinists, composed mainly of Paschalis' pupils. Like their former teacher, the Martinists were chiefly interested in "powers." Although Saint-Martin was fully aware of the elemental forces in nature and the occult powers in man, he told the Martinists that "*moral* development is the true basis of Occultism," warning them that occult powers without an underlying moral background are dangerous weapons. Writing to a friend a few years later he said:

I will not conceal from you that formerly I walked in this external way. Nevertheless I at all times felt so strong an inclination to the intimate secret way, that the external way never further seduced me, even in my youth; for at the age of 23 I had been initiated in all these things.

In 1775 Saint-Martin published his first book, *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité, par un Philosophe Inconnu*. The Masons in France and Germany hailed it as a treasure of Masonic science. J. G. Findel

declares that Saint-Martin gave "the key to all the allegories and mystical fables of the ancients, the source of all religions and political institutions, and a model of the laws which should regulate the universe as well as single persons, and without which no real science could exist." Although the book was immediately attacked by Voltaire and his party, it drew to Saint-Martin many new friends and supporters, who hailed him as the coming apostle of spiritual truth.

After travelling in Italy for three years, Saint-Martin settled in Versailles in 1778, the year that Dr. Mesmer arrived in Paris. In 1782, when Mesmer was the rage of Paris and Cagliostro was busy establishing his Egyptian Rite in Bordeaux and Lyons, Saint-Martin published his second book, in which he traced the correspondences between man and nature, painted a glowing picture of man's divinity, and showed that the whole purpose of the evolutionary scheme is to bring man to a realization of his god-like nature. In 1784 the Philalethians (a branch of the *Loge des Amis Réunis*) invited both Saint-Martin and Cagliostro to membership. Saint-Martin refused because of their interest in psychic phenomena. Cagliostro accepted, hoping to purify the society through his own knowledge. Although the organization of the Philalethians offered no common meeting ground for the Theosophical representatives of the eighteenth century, four of them were members of the *Fratres Lucis* or "Brothers of Light," and with the fifth, Thomas Paine, all were Masons. In 1782 Saint-Martin, St. Germain, Mesmer and Cagliostro met at the great Masonic convention in Wilhelmsbad. In 1785 they met again at the Paris convention.

Immediately afterward Saint-Martin departed for England to [study the teachings of] Jane Lead, in whose mystical writings he had become interested. In London he associated with a colony of Russians who were members of Cagliostro's "Northern School." After a short trip to Rome with Prince Galatzin, Saint-Martin went to Strasbourg, where Cagliostro had become famous as a magnetic healer a few years before. There he studied the writings of Swedenborg and wrote his *Nouvel Homme* in collaboration with Swedenborg's nephew. This was followed by his *Ecce Homo*, in which he warned the world against the dangers of spiritualism. In Strasbourg he also became acquainted with the writings of Jacob Boehme, and from that time spoke of himself as a humble disciple of the great German mystic.

At the beginning of the French Revolution Saint-Martin was living as an honored guest in the *hôtel* of the Duchesse de Bourbon, who was herself a Mason, the Grand Mistress of the Adoptive Rite in France. In letters written to the Baron von Liebstorf during that period Saint-Martin frequently refers to the battles which took place in the very street in which he lived, even to the execution of Marie Antoinette. Although Saint-Martin took no active part in the uprising other than serving in the *Garde Nationale* and becoming one of the guards of the unhappy little Dauphin, it was the sacred Ternary of the Martinists -- Liberty, Equality, Fraternity -- which was adopted as the special motto of the Revolution.¹

In 1794 Saint-Martin was banished from Paris with the other aristocrats and returned to his native city of Amboise. Shortly afterward he returned to Paris as the Amboise representative to the newly formed *Ecole Normale*. He welcomed this appointment as an opportunity to work for educational reform, and installed himself in the *Maison de la Fraternité* in the *Rue de Tournon*. But his hopes were soon dashed to pieces against the impenetrable materialism of the Encyclopaedists. He then turned his attention to the subject of Numbers. "Numbers," he said, "are the only sensible expression of the

¹ Saint-Martin was actively involved in the preparation of the French revolution, as a necessary change of form of government. With other members of the French nobility, he tried to install the Synarchy, or government by a certain number of individuals, elected for their moral integrity and ability to manage a specific area of government. History proved the Synarchical method of government to be an utopia, but Saint-Martin remains known as the creator of the famous principle of democratic government: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. (From <http://kingsgarden.org/english/organizations/OM.GB/StMartin/@StMartinTeachings.html>)

different properties of beings, which all proceed from the one and only essence." He declared that the number *seven* is the ruling number of the manifested universe, and that "it is by multiplying this number that we find its fruits." One of his last statements was an expression of regret that he had to die leaving the mystery of Numbers still unsolved.

When Saint-Martin was fifty-five years old, one of his books was condemned by the Inquisition. Realizing that his incarnation was drawing to a close, he determined to give mankind -- for which he had labored from his early youth -- a final summary of those fundamental principles which he considered the true basis of philosophy. It was just one year before his death, in 1802, that he published his last work, *Le Ministère de l'Homme-Esprit*. This book is the final cry of a noble soul who lived with but one thought -- to benefit mankind. "A zeal for the repose of the whole human family masters and consumes me," he confessed in the introduction. "I can neither evade nor resist it. It torments me continually."

"How can I make men listen to me?" he sighed.

Principles are all I have to offer them. I would animate them with a glorious desire to renew their alliance with Universal Unity. But they are in arms against that Unity, and seem as if they wished to efface its very existence!

Saint-Martin predicted that the time was not far off when the people of Europe would eagerly search for things they had formerly treated with contempt. "The literary wealth of Asia will come to their aid," he prophesied. "When they see the treasures which Indian literature begins to open, when they have studied the *Mahabharata* and the *Vedas*, they will be struck with the similarity between the thought of the East and the West." His prophecy had already come true, for in 1785 Wilkins published the first English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and scholars were pondering over the soul-inspiring dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. But Saint-Martin warned his readers that not even the "theosophic wealth of India" would give them the peace they were seeking, since "the radical development of our intimate essence *alone* can lead us to active spirituality."

Saint-Martin's philosophy was founded upon the time-honored propositions of the ancient Wisdom-Religion. "How could any order of things subsist if there were not a Substance of Life disseminated everywhere?" he inquired. There *must* be a living Essence behind the manifested universe, a Life-Substance which is the ground-work of existence, One Actuality which every man perceives as *himself*.

The manifested universe, he affirmed, rests upon two fundamental bases which express themselves as light and darkness, cause and effect, and "we can follow this principle through the whole chain of beings." Observing the action of this law on the moral plane, he declared that "there must be a perfect analogy between the punishment and the fault, for the punishment and the crime must be founded the one upon the other."

He warned his readers not to regard their sufferings as misfortunes, but as blessings. "If we confess that nothing can happen to us but what are our dues, we will find that, instead of complaining, we ought to be thankful." He advised men to observe carefully the nature of their own particular form of suffering, as containing the clue to the original offence. "The next step must be to walk backward along the line of the offence, to arrive at the principle." Man's first duty, Saint-Martin affirmed, is to *cease complaining*. His second duty is to go straight ahead, without turning to the left or the right, as "this alone will bring us back to that life from which the offence, or lapse, separated us."

Although the doctrine of Karma runs like a golden thread throughout this book, the word "reincarnation" does not appear. Saint-Martin, however, was acquainted with the doctrine, as it was

taught in Cagliostro's "Northern School" and commonly accepted by the occult students in Versailles. Furthermore his letters to the Baron von Liebstorf show that he accepted it as a fundamental truth.

The one thought around which the life of Saint-Martin revolved was *Man*: compassion for his suffering, faith in his ultimate destiny, and a burning desire to lead his fellows back to their spiritual source and restore the peace which they had forfeited. He cautioned his readers to *look within themselves* in their search for God, for "man is the only true witness and positive sign by which the Supreme Universal Source may be known." Man should sound the depths of his *own* being, and affirm the sublimity of his *own* essence, if he would demonstrate the Divine Essence, "for there is nothing else in the world that can do it, directly."

Why does man suffer? Because he has identified himself with the external universe. "If man would only for a moment take a more correct view of the matter, he would recognize the dignity of his being and his superiority over the external order." The lower kingdoms express the laws of nature. The animal can *use* those laws. "But the Spirit-Man has at once the effect, the use and the free direction of those laws." The lower Mysteries deal with the laws of the physical universe, but the higher Mysteries are concerned with man's *real* being and its relation to its Divine Principle. The final intent of the higher Mysteries is to arouse Compassion and show man his responsibility to the lower kingdoms.

Saint-Martin was a devotee of the Heart-Doctrine. He pictured the universe as lying upon a bed of anguish, all due to man's inhumanity. He visioned the earth as a suffering beast, imploring man for a balm to heal its wounds. "The universe would not have passed its days in agony if *you* had yourself remained in that throne of glory in which you were originally seated!" "Come, then," he implored, "and ask its forgiveness, for *you* are the cause of its pain. Inject quickly the elixir of life into all its channels, for it is for *you* to bring it to life again!"

Man, therefore, has a threefold task. First he must regenerate himself; next he must regenerate nature, which he has polluted; finally he must rise and become a steward of eternal riches. Man's self-regeneration begins by undergoing pain. If we lose an arm or a leg by amputation, we still feel pain in the member lost. The first evidence of our spiritual regeneration is to feel pain in the spiritual members we have lost. This requires the cultivation of the spiritual will. "Beware of departing, even for an instant, from the radical central fire on which you rest. Remain constantly in this central spiritual fire as an infant remains in its mother's womb."

When man begins to regenerate himself, he becomes aware of his great responsibility to the rest of nature. "Man cannot produce a thought, a word, an act, which is not imprinted on the eternal mirror on which everything is engraved, and from which nothing is ever effaced."

Every physical action has its everlasting moral effect, being transmitted upward through the intermediary sheaths to the Soul itself. What a power, therefore, resides in speech! By indulging in harmful or unnecessary speech, we fritter away our soul forces. But on the other hand, as Mr. Judge says, "Meditation on tone, as expressed in the Sanscrit word OM, will lead us to a knowledge of the Secret Doctrine." Saint-Martin says the same:

When we penetrate to the very ground of our being, we find that we can unite ourselves by our word with the ineffable source of truth; but that we can also, by its criminal use, unite ourselves with the awful abyss of lies and darkness.

Then, in a few simple rules, Saint-Martin lays down the essential laws of speech. We should regard human intelligence so highly that nothing unworthy should be presented to it. We should approach our listeners as certain high personages in the East are approached -- by offering them an intellectual gift through our words. We should strive to add to the light and virtue of those with whom we converse. We

should make our conversation center around spiritual truths, and should distribute our words with moderation and discrimination. Above all we should remember that "speech, or the *Word*, is the light of infinity, which should constantly increase."

The control of speech is one of the prime requisites of the spiritual life. As our speech becomes deliberate, instigated and controlled by the God within, an inner alchemy is worked whereby passion is transmuted into compassion, lust into love, antipathy into sympathy. Saint-Martin gives us a simple standard of life which, if faithfully followed, will bring about our regeneration and restore to us the *human* dignity we have lost.

Not a desire, but in obedience.

Not an idea which is not a sacred communication.

Not a word which is not a sovereign decree.

Not an act which is not a development and extension of the vivifying power of the Word.

"Lose not a moment," he warns us, "in reviving within you all these measures, if you have allowed them to die. Make these powers, each in its class, always advance. For this is the way of Justice!"

Saint-Martin's Theosophy

<http://kingsgarden.org/english/organizations/OM.GB/StMartin/@StMartinTeachings.html>

1. Cosmogony

St-Martin's cosmos consists of four distinct worlds: the divine, the sub-celestial, the celestial, and finally the terrestrial. Each pair is separated by an axle of Fire. The upper two being reflected into the two lower, as by a mirror. Each of those worlds is inhabited by four categories of spirits respectively called: Superiors, Majors, Inferiors, and Minors. From the two upper worlds, little is known. The Celestial world is subdivided in three planes: the rational (mental), the Visual (astral), and the sensible (etheric). The Terrestrial world is divided in four kingdoms: Mineral, Vegetal, Animal, and Human. The Celestial World is to be looked at as "the envelope of the material or terrestrial world.

The axel of fire is essential in this cosmology, as it is the mirror of the divine world, but also contains both the ideas from which the creation is formed and the Life that animates all creatures. St Martin describes this central Fire as follows: "The axis of fire is the principle of the life of each created body, a fire that holds all forms in balance; without which no being can have life or movement. It is by the action and the operation of this fire that all forms of apparent matter are maintained during the duration of their existence, fixed by the will of the Creator."

Saint Martin also defines all created forms, as "a vehicle" of Life; and as such is very close to the teachings of the East.

2- The Universal Brotherhood and the return to Unity.

St. Martin calls the aspect of Theosophy: the universal Reintegration. All creatures of this earth have their origin in God and none is separated, in essence, from the Original Unity. "In God nothing or none is superior, nothing or none is inferior: all beings are one and indivisible, all are alike, all are equal in the Unity". (*Tableau Naturel*) Man participates both to the material and non-material created nature, and therefore manifests the three faculties of its creator: Action, Will, and Thought; but he also participates to Freedom. Therefore he is, in his current position, separated from the original unity. This process is part of the Divine Plan, of the general economy and purpose of creation. When returning in this Unity, man will have gained the faculty to reintegrate himself, but also the capacity to help other creature into this process. "Most humans are involved only with their own Reintegration, some of the men on earth are called to a more positive determination of this Work of Reintegration and will obtain vast and considerable results. Their purpose is to manifest the Life of God, in the form of the Divine Wisdom (Theosophia) and to distribute its participation among all men. As man was emanated directly from God, without the participation of any other power, he can only have received the same virtues as God himself, and there is nothing between God and himself. Such a power shall help man to restore his likeness and his relationship with the Primordial Unity." (*Tableau Naturel*).

3- Latent Powers in Man.

From his days as a disciple of Martinez de Pasqually, St Martin kept the experience of direct contact with the invisible, by the use of theurgy. Later in his life, he also recognized and practiced mysticism and meditation, preferring the later method over Martinez's practices. He never denied the effectiveness of ceremonies, as a method of spiritual development, but declared to prefer the inner voice, the way of the heart. At the end of his life, he declared that:

The only initiation which I advocate and which I look for with all the ardor of my Soul, is that by which we are able to enter into the Heart of God within us, and there make an Indissoluble Marriage, which makes us the Friend, the Brother and Spouse of the Repairer . . . there is no other way to arrive at this Holy Initiation than for us to delve more and more into the depth of our Soul and to not let go of the prize until we have succeeded in liberating its lively and vivifying origin.