

LOUIS CLAUDE DE SAINT-MARTIN

“THE UNKNOWN PHILOSOPHER”



It has been said that the duties of a mystic are to penetrate to the bottom of mystery, to open to our view and understanding the fundamental laws controlling all things in the universe, and to show the connection of these laws with their directing force, which is God. Truly, has this been said through the centuries the method of expression only has varied as the individual has varied. Sometimes this expression has been in terms of an intricate philosophy, with its most vital truths carefully concealed from any but the most persistent and determined search; sometimes it has been in terms of inner spiritual experience gained through the most complete sacrifice and renunciation, as in the lives of the great Saints. Sometimes, it has come not through any system of philosophy alone, nor restricted by the mold of any one creed or church, but through the fervor of some great spirit, far removed from the seclusion and quiet of the contemplative life, working almost alone in the strife and turmoil of the world; toiling untiringly with the impelling, overmastering purpose that light might shine in the darkness although the darkness comprehended it not; working ceaselessly to bear witness of that Light which is life itself and the light of men; expressing itself in terms of philosophy, but reaching the heart of each one who would give heed through a fire of devotion, through a life of conscious discipleship.

A great mystic, who was consciously a disciple, was Louis Claude de Saint-Martin. He wrote most often under the pseudonym of "The Unknown Philosopher," partly, no doubt, because of restrictions imposed by the occult societies with which he was early affiliated, partly because of the dangers of the time, for he lived in the period of the French Revolution, and belonged, through his high social position, to the proscribed classes. Born at Amboise, in Touraine, in 1743, he was the son of noble parents, and was brought up in the Catholic Church, "devotion to God and the love of men being impressed ineffaceably on his mind." At an early age he was sent to the College of Pontlevoi, where he happened upon a book on *Self-Knowledge* by Abadie, which appears to have made a most profound impression

upon him. From Pontlevoi he went to Orleans for the study of law, which his parents wished him to make his life's work. Later he became King's Advocate at the High Court of Tours. Although, through the friendship for his family of the Due de Choiseul, his prospects were most brilliant, Saint-Martin soon experienced a profound distaste for the technicalities of the law, and was able to obtain through this same powerful protector a commission as lieutenant in a regiment stationed at Bordeaux. The military profession in peace-time afforded him ample opportunity and leisure for the prosecution of his studies in religion and philosophy, for although at that time he was not yet twenty-four years of age, he had read deeply; "he had been dazzled by the brilliance of Voltaire, he had been fascinated by the natural magician of Geneva, but he had been misled by neither."

There came to Bordeaux in the year 1767 Don Martines de Pasqually de la Tour, originally probably a Spaniard, also called Martinez de Pasquales, "an initiate of the Rose Cross, a transfigured disciple of Swedenborg, and the propagator and Grand Sovereign of a rite of Masonic Illuminism which probably was of his own foundation, namely, the Order of the Elect Cohens," or High Priests. The early history of Pasquales has remained shrouded in mystery. At the time when Saint-Martin came under this influence the Order, apparently a sub-sect of a center of Illuminism which Pasquales had established earlier, probably about 1754, in Paris, was engaged in the study of occult science and of the principles of an occult philosophy, the ultimate secrets of which Pasquales does not appear to have divulged. Although destined later on to go far beyond the teachings of the Elect Cohens, Saint-Martin for several years labored unceasingly in the various cities of France in disseminating, within certain definite limits prescribed by Pasquales, the doctrines of the Order, unquestionably even then imbued with that sense of an inspired mission which became more sure and definite in his later life. However, in 1772 Martinez de Pasquales was called to the island of St. Domingo, from which he never returned, and the various branches of this mystic Order sustained by his death, which followed his departure, a very definite check to their further growth and development.

In 1774, the year of the death of Pasquales, Saint-Martin was writing at Lyons his first book, *Des Erreurs et de la Verite*. He spent much time in Paris where, by virtue of his birth and education and of his distinction and polished manners, he mingled in the highest circles of aristocratic French society; "he loved mankind, as being better than they seemed to be, and the charm of good society led him to think what social meetings might become, in a more perfect intimacy with our Principle." Always there was the thought of his purpose, his mission, that it was for him to give to others of this fervent religion which was his real life; "he had nothing of his own while he had anything to give, and he was overpaid in happiness for all that he gave. He did not seek to make proselytes; he wanted only friends for disciples. Friends, not of his books only, but of each other." He gave, then, by this personal contact and intercourse, and by his books; but gradually he came to realize that his mission was to be accomplished by his writings rather than by his influence, in a society that was already rocking on its very foundations. "There is no need to say that it was a time of disillusion and unbelief, of expectancy which had at least a touch of awe, for the Revolution was already at hand, and so also it was a time of wonder-seeking, of portents, and prophets, and marvels. It was the worst of all times for the message of true mysticism to be heard with much effect, but there were yet many persons, anxious, willing, and sincere

up to a certain point, if not wholly capable, who turned readily enough towards Louis Claude de Saint-Martin."

In 1778, he published his *Natural Table of the Correspondences between God, Man, and the Universe*, which was written at Paris and Luxembourg. After the publication of this work, a period in his life ensues about which little is definitely known; it is probable that during this period he lived in Paris and Lyons, and that he made a journey to Russia. In 1787, he was in London, where his intimate relations with the French Embassy insured his reception in the highest circles. It was during this visit that he came to know William Law. The following year finds him travelling in Italy, always with the same mission and motive, "where again the most distinguished names, cardinals, princes, bishops, figure in his memorial notes." From 1788 to 1791, he resided at Strasbourg, mingling always in the same aristocratic circles, and it was there that he, for the first time, made acquaintance with the writings of Jacob Boehme, whose influence was so profound upon all his subsequent thought and feeling, and to whom he himself stated he owed his most important progress. During this period, he completed *L'Homme de Desir*, as well as *L'Homme No'Ufleau*, the latter having been written at the suggestion of the Chevalier de Silferhielm, a nephew of Swedenborg. In 1791, owing to the ill health of his father, he returned to Amboise, "and from that time till the death of the latter in February, 1793" (the King was executed in January, 1793), "he was either there or at Paris, where he witnessed the terror of the 10th of August, 1792. "The streets near the house I was in were a field of battle; the house itself (probably the palace of the Duchesse de Bourbon) was a hospital where the wounded were brought, and moreover, was every moment threatened with invasion and pillage. In the midst of all this I had to go, at the risk of my life, to take care of my sister, half a league from my dwelling." So he writes in the most memorable, the most beautiful, the most fascinating of all theosophical correspondences, which was begun on the 22nd of May, 1792, and continued for five years, between himself and the Swiss Baron Kirchberger de Liebistorf."

From the end of the Revolution until his death in 1803, Saint-Martin spent his time between Paris and Amboise. He was chosen a member of the electoral assembly from the latter place, and it is probable that his duties in this connection turned his mind to the political aspects of his philosophical system, and were the inspiration of those later and lesser-known writings of his along political lines. In 1798, the Spanish Inquisition placed on the Index his first work, and this, because of the strong ties, which had bound him to the Church in his early life, appears to have affected him deeply. It has been said that he was conscious considerably in advance that the end of his life was near, and this fact inspired him to fresh effort, for he published in the three years preceding his death, *L'Esprit des Choses*, and that work which was the crown of his life and of all his literary effort, *Le Ministre de l'Homme-Esprit*. His work was then done, and the end came soon after. "I feel that I am going," he said. Providence calls me; I am ready. The germs which I have endeavored to sow will fructify." One of Saint-Martin's commentators says truly, "When Saint-Martin was led into the true light of theosophy and the Gospel; he then perceived the dim twilight or practical blindness of all his former conceptions of the means or media of spiritual renovation." This vision first took the form of revulsion from the psychic practices of the school of Pasquales; "what can I learn from them (spirits)," said Saint-Martin, "which the scriptures have not already told me, and mysteries which I ought not to know?" And in

regard to communications with the souls of the departed, he says, in a letter to Baron Kirchberger from Amboise, written much later on from a greater wealth of spiritual experience, "I think you will find all you want, about intercourse...add to this what I told you of the relations of the living; add again this remark, that while we look for them in the sensible (psychic) principles in which they no longer are; they seek us in the spiritual and divine principle in which we are not yet. Finally add to all this what Jesus Christ said: "Who are my brothers, my mother, etc.? It is they who do the will of my Father, etc." And we shall here learn where to seek for those we love." His final emancipation from all his earlier psychic trammels, his complete surrender to the devotional side of true religion, finds its expression in the following words, which might well serve as a concentrated statement of a devotion to the doctrine of the Sacred Heart: "The only initiation which I preach and seek with all the ardor of my soul, is that by which we may enter into the heart of God, and make God's heart enter into us, there to form an indissoluble marriage, which will make us the friend, brother, and spouse of our divine Redeemer."

More and more, as Saint-Martin turned away from the illusions of the psychic world, did he become acutely conscious of that unseen world of the real, of the spirit, that lies within and all around us, visible to the eyes that have the power of vision. He says: "It is much easier to attain to the light and certainty which shine in the world in which we are not, than to naturalize ourselves with the shadows and darkness which envelop the world we are in; in short, since it must be said, we are much nearer to what we call the other world than we are to this. It will not even be very difficult to acknowledge that, to call the other world the world in which we are not, is an abuse, and that this world is the other world to us." In the light of this seeing, and of this spirit of devotion, the circumstances and surroundings of every day, the duties and responsibilities and cares of the station in life in which Spiritual Law has placed us, their spiritual interrelation and significance, are thrown into clear perspective. "Even the obstacles and dangers we meet with in our work, and which become our crosses when we recede from them, are steps and means of rising when we surmount them; Wisdom, in exposing us to them, meant that we should triumph." Moreover, "The man who is called to the Work has no need to remove from his place; the disease and the remedy are everywhere, and he has nothing to do but cry 'Abba!' It is not an earthly, but a spiritual change of place, that can serve us."

A spiritual transfer of consciousness, then, a change of polarity from this world of shadows and illusions to the world of the real, in order that the Work may be accomplished, and by this Work Saint-Martin means, as all mystics and alchemists through the ages have meant, the birth and development of that Spiritual Man of which St. Paul so often speaks. How is this transfer of consciousness to be consciously effected, for, as he says, "the only difference between men is, that some are in the other world, knowing it, and the others are there without knowing it"? Very like the words in *Light on the Path*, that before the ear can hear it must have lost its sensitiveness, are the words which Saint-Martin uses to point out the Way. "Listen very attentively to this word sorrow when it speaks within you; listen to it as the first helping voice that can make itself heard in the wilderness. In fact, the Word is learned only in the silence of everything in this world; there only is it to be heard. But we must "kill out" desire as well, in order that aspiration and accomplishment may reign supreme; the lower nature must be met and conquered, in order that the divine power may

work in and through us to overcome the forces of darkness. "O man of aspiration, whatever you have allowed to coagulate and darken within you, must be dissolved and revealed to the eyes of your spirit. As long as you can see a stain there, or the smallest thing remains to obstruct your view, take no rest until you have dispersed it. The more you penetrate to the depths of your being, the better you will know the ground on which the work rests. It is not surprising that it should be necessary for this living, active power to come into us to fit us to do its work. Those who know the real state of things are sensible that we must be alive and strong to do this work, or for it to be done in us, for evil is no mere fable, it is a power."

Saint-Martin saw this as a continuing task, not necessarily to be completed in one lifetime. He does not write of this continuity of spiritual effort and of spiritual existence in terms of Theosophy, in terms of Reincarnation and of Karma, but the theosophical truth is there. Of death he says, "Death should be regarded only as a relay in our journey; we reach it with exhausted horses, and we pause to get fresh ones to carry us farther. But we must also pay what is due for the stage already travelled, and until the account is settled, we are not allowed to go forward." And again, "Death is the target at which all men strike; but the angle of incidence being equal to the angle of reflection, they find themselves after death in their former degree, whether above or below."

When the Spiritual Man is thus awakened, when aspiration has grown and crystallized into intention and effort, what are the means by which the Work is furthered and by which the Divine power is enabled to work in and through us, how do we know the steps that we must take along the way? "Ask, and ye shall receive. Seek, and ye shall find." Saint-Martin says: "I can vouch that our uncertainty as to the Will of God, in regard to ourselves, vanishes gradually, in proportion as we seek that will, and desire it with all our faculties, and regulate all our acts and conduct to that end. Our own wills accomplish nothing without their being, as it were, injected by the Divine Will, which is the only will to good, with power to produce it." We know this Divine will for us in all simplicity, through faith, through prayer and communion: "Every formula is detrimental to faith, whilst faith, on the contrary, would wish to take the place of all formulas. This kind of faith is the ultimate end of all law; and, consequently, the only thing which our divine Master labored to preach and inculcate in the heart of man, because He well knew that, by inculcating this virtue, He inculcated all others. Prayer ought to be a continual spiritual partnership; for we ought to pray only with God, and our prayer does not deserve even the name, but in so far as God prays in us, for only thus do they pray in God's Kingdom."

Again, we find in Saint-Martin's words a parallel with St. Paul, in the expressed conviction that there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body; that the first man is of the earth, earthy; that the second man is the Lord from heaven. He says, in speaking of comparative anatomy: "They would do better to compare our superior body, which is not animal, with our own animal body, if they would have our veritable comparative anatomy; because it is not enough to observe things in their similitudes, it is essential to observe them also in their differences." With this deeper conviction of the nature of the Spiritual Man, of ever greater and greater things to be spiritually discerned, there came the conviction as well of a greater Work following, in the nature of things, upon this inner awakening and

development, a consciousness of a still more glorious ministration of the Spiritual Man; the vision of a hierarchy of Workmen consciously serving the higher powers, of a spiritual brotherhood drawn closely together in ways unseen, serving all mankind as a living, vital force, rendering obedience and devotion to the Master who is their leader. He says, "If Man has the power to be the workman and handicraftsman of earthly productions, why should he not be the same of a superior order? But if good, pious, and even enlightened men, cause joy to the Father of the family, by seeking to be admitted amongst his children, they would cause him still more, by seeking to be admitted amongst his workmen, or servants: for these may render real service to him; the others render it only to themselves. Moreover, when God admits a man to the first rank in the Spiritual Ministry of Man, it is to transform him into a living, penetrating agent, whose action shall be universal and permanent; God's ways are not thus made manifest for trifling or transient objects. Therefore, the whole universe should be as nothing in value in our eyes, compared with such an election, if we were happy enough for it to be offered to us; since we then might work successfully for the relief of the human Soul. Why should not I aspire to the honor of serving in thy Army, and devote every member of my Soul to the fortune of battle, that I may participate in the life which is in thee, the First and the Prince of the Warriors of the Spirit?"

We thrill at the splendor of this vision, at this militant cry of the soul; our hearts bum within us in the realization of the underlying purpose and motive. Here was no laying hold of the Kingdom of Heaven for growth in personal stature and personal holiness; the purpose was, to give. Through this cry there rings the consciousness of an instant and pressing necessity; of the world's great burden of sin; of the infinite need of mankind, ceaselessly existing, for the wisdom of God and the power and love of God. For Saint-Martin time and place were transcended and transmuted, and there came to him a vision of the continuity of spiritual life and of spiritual effort in the universe, of the brotherhood of man and of our mutual interdependence. His heart went out in pity and in love to all those in darkness and in shadow, unknown and unknowing; to all mankind, past, present and to come; he asks incessantly for those things of the real and infinite world in which we have been born, that he might the more truly give, that through him these things might in some measure descend upon all.

A great Christian mystic, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, on fire with love and devotion to his Master and Lord, laboring ceaselessly that not only his own day and generation, but also that souls in years to come, might know that those things which come to pass in the Kingdom of God may come to pass also in us. But something more than a great Christian mystic, for although he wrote so often in terms of the religion of Christ and in words that the great Saints of the Church might themselves have used, there shines through and between and behind the words themselves the light of a higher vision, of a deeper and wider understanding -nay, of a surer knowledge than is often vouchsafed to those who are hemmed in by the restrictions, by the dogma of any one religion or creed. It is the Light of Divine Wisdom, kindled in the heart of a true disciple by the great Elder Brothers; the light of Truth itself, ever the same and unchanging, than which no religion is higher, that irradiates his thought and its expression. Unquestionably conscious of this Light, consciously using it as a representative of the Lodge in furthering their Work, of which he so constantly speaks, it is difficult to doubt that Saint-Martin was, too, in conscious relationship with those

great Companions, under their guidance and direction; it were difficult otherwise to account for some of the things which he says, still more difficult to explain some of the things which he does not say. A great Theosophist as well as a great mystic, but, above all, a great soul, who labored for the Masters of Light in the holy land of France, where mighty works have been done in their name; who had worked for them before, perhaps; who will work for them again.

STUART DUDLEY
1922

Note, the quotes used in this by Dudley were sourced either directly from where he mentions, or many times from A.E. Waite's book on LCdSM.