

Saint-Martin

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An excerpt from the Memoirs of Baron von Gleichen. We believe it will be useful for our readers to give them a reproduction of this work, which has become very rare.

Martinez Pasqualis was the founder of the mystical order of Martinists, so named because of the consideration that St. Martin, one of the seven masters, whom their leader had appointed to propagate his doctrine after him, had obtained over his colleagues through his merit and by his famous book *Of Errors & Truth*.

Pasqualis was originally Spanish, perhaps of Jewish race, since his disciples inherited a great number of Jewish manuscripts from him. His knowledge was much less theoretical than that of his apostles; he openly practiced magic, whereas they concealed it and happily defended it. I had a strong connection with a certain La Chevalerie who had been his favorite aid-de-camp, who showed me some of the ground sheets used for their magical operations, and recounted several wonderful stories, if they were true. I will quote only one. The magical work of these gentlemen has the key purpose of fighting demons and their satellites, which were constantly engaged in spreading physical and spiritual ills over all of Nature through their dark magic. The combats particularly took place on both the solstices and equinoxes. They work on drawn ground sheets, on which they established their citadels, which consisted of a large circle in the middle for the Grand Master, and two or three smaller ones for the Assistants. The head, although absent, saw all the operations of his disciples when they worked alone, and supported them.

One day, La Chevalerie told me, when I was not perfectly pure, I was fighting alone in my little circle, and I felt that the superior strength of one of my adversaries was overwhelming me, and that I would be overthrown. An icy cold, rising from my feet to my heart, suffocated me, and ready to be destroyed, I jumped into the great circle, driven by an obscure and irresistible determination. It felt to me, on entering it, that I had plunged in a delicious warm bath, which restored my spirits and repaired my strength in an instant. I emerged victorious, and by a letter from Pasqualis I learned that he had seen me in my failure, and that it was he who had inspired me to think of throwing myself into the great circle of supreme power.

That is what La Chevalerie told me, affected by the most intimate conviction. He may have been wrong, but his intention was certainly not to deceive me. Far from wanting to make me a proselyte, he did his best to dissuade me from this doctrine which, he said, had made him very unlucky. He had been excommunicated forever, for a sin without remission, and he never stopped speaking ill of Pasqualis and his successors. He portrayed the former as a man full of vices and virtues, who allowed himself everything, despite his severity concerning others, who took money from his disciples, defrauded them in games of chance, and then gave their money to the first comer, sometimes to a passer-by whom he did not know. He said to those who expressed astonishment: "I act like Providence, ask me nothing more."

Let's move on to the hero of the present article, to M. de Saint-Martin. Young, kind, with a beautiful face, sweet, modest, simple, affable, placing himself at the level of everyone, and never speaking about the sciences, he didn't look anything like a philosopher, rather a little saint; for his devotion, his extreme reserve and the purity of his manners sometimes seemed extraordinary in a man of his age. He was highly educated, although in his book he spoke of several of the sciences in a very baroque manner. He spoke with great clarity and eloquence, and his conversation was very pleasant; except when he spoke about his business, when he became pedantic, mysterious, talkative or taciturn; fearing he had said too much, denying on the following day the following day what had been agreed the day before.

He had an unbearable reluctance, stopping the very moment one had hoped to draw one of his secrets out of him; for he believed in an inner voice that prevented or allowed him to speak. His great principle was that, on the spiritual path, one was not to disturb the progress of man, that it was enough to prepare him to divine the secrets he was destined to know. Thus, he went to greater pain to distance his disciples from his knowledge than to call them, believing himself responsible for the abuses they might make of it. His father, who was mayor of Amboise, had put him in military service, where by his good conduct, or by the good offices of M. de Choiseul, Lord of Amboise, he had been advanced in a very short time to the rank of captain; but, driven by the doctrine of Pasqualis, and a vocation which seemed irresistible to him, he abruptly left the service despite the exhortations of his parents, friends and protectors, fell out with his father, and devoted himself to the works of mystical science and to poverty. He had determined not to ask his father for anything, and, reduced to bread and water, it was while warming himself at the fire of a working-class kitchen that he composed his treatise *Of Errors & Truth*.

The profits from this book, the first and best he wrote, helped him to survive until Madame de la Croix, who was pursuing a career similar to his own, received him into her home. But soon they fell out, wanting to indoctrinate each other, and Saint-Martin, having inherited an annual allowance of fifty louis¹ from an aunt, found himself quite wealthy, and he published some new works, which increased his ease; it was then that he opened a small school and I became his disciple.

Everything he has taught me was so unimportant, and I have forgotten it so perfectly that I am not afraid to be indiscreet in speaking about his doctrine. What little I have to say is mine: I owe it to the application with which I have constantly reread his book, to the attention with which I have grasped every word escaped from my Harpocrates², and perhaps to my talent for divining the substance of all the books that deal with occult sciences.

That of *Errors & Truth* is the only one whose style is pleasant, and which can be read without annoyance. Three-quarters of this work are intelligible³, and the pages which are not understandable present objects so new and so bizarre, that they amuse attention and pique curiosity.

Many people have believed that this work was composed only to bring the world back to religious ideas by the lure of the marvelous. It is certain that he produced this effect on several people of my acquaintance and on myself; but I must assure you that this is a very learned and detailed introduction to the science of magic, and that it contains many things, whose author refrained from speaking about in his lessons.

The science of numbers, which he portrayed under the image of a ten-page book was, of all his knowledge, the one to which he attached the greatest value.⁴ He said he had stolen it from his master, and that he would never communicate it to anyone. It is a great pity, for it is under this mysterious veil that he has enveloped the rarest secrets of his work.

All he confessed was, that the numbers give the key of the essence of all material things, provided the real names were known in the original language; and that through numbers one tested the spirits, as well as by words of power, to verify whether they were good or evil; and that all this was avoided by the Kabbalistic analysis of those names and

¹ A gold coin used in France for centuries. The Louis d'Or (or Golden Louis) was clearly named after the King, although its official title was an Écu (which is perhaps why the French were originally so keen to have the Euro named a European Currency Unit...). Given that it was made of gold, its value was significant.

² A cute reference to the Egyptian God of silence, referring to Saint-Martin's reputation for being taciturn.

³ Some may disagree. But it is interesting to note that even contemporaries of Saint-Martin struggled with sections of the book.

⁴ Although it refers to the 'Science of Numbers', a title adopted by Papus in his book, it is clear he is referring to the Book of Nature. However, that is appropriate given the posthumous publication of Saint-Martin's treatise *On Numbers* in later years.

words, whose Hebrew letters produced the ten numbers, which manifested important truths.

He added that the Hebrew alphabet truly only went up to the tenth letter inclusive, that the rest had been confused, but that he knew its true order. This is already a pretty clear confession that these gentlemen were dealing with magic.

Another admission that I have drawn out of him is the description of the hieroglyphic figures written in flashes of fire which appeared to him in his works, and of which he was ordered to keep sketches, which he showed me. These figures are nothing less than what are called the seals of spirits, which one sees on talismans, pentacles and around magic circles.

But it was only while trembling that Saint-Martin spoke of all these things. He assured that magic had led to the fall of spirits and that of man; that a mere thought, analogous to these crimes, could lose us forever; that his conscience was charged with that of his disciples, and that, for all these reasons, he found himself obliged to take all the precautions prescribed by his doctrine to lead them towards the good in small steps, and to keep far from this path those whom Providence had not destined for the great work of the elect, chosen by her to fight evil upon earth.

Besides, I advise all those who want to study the book *Of Errors & Truth*, to read the history of Manichæism by Beaussonnet beforehand, which will increase their understanding on the fundamental subjects in the book by Saint-Martin, and where they will find strong analogies with his doctrine.

I've known two colleagues of M. de Saint-Martin, less difficult than him, but who weren't as good as him: one was called Hauterive, who ran a group selling knowledge to all comers⁵, and of which my master was very dissatisfied. The other was Willermoz⁶: he had founded his own circle in Lyon; he had less knowledge than Saint-Martin, but much more impressiveness, affability and openness, at least apparently. He spoke to the heart much more than to the mind; he was held in high esteem by everyone for his qualities, and adored by his disciples for his cordial, friendly and seductive manners. He played a distinguished role in Masonry and eventually devoted himself completely to spiritual magnetism. He perished in the massacres in Lyon, and Saint-Martin died quietly during the Revolution, which had somewhat disturbed the attendance of his school.⁷

To get a complete picture of the doctrine of Saint-Martin, which, of all mystical doctrines, is the most wonderful, interesting and endearing, one should read the following works:

Of Errors & Truth,
Correspondences Between God, Man and Nature,
Ecce Homo,
On the Spirit of Things,
Man of Desire,
The Crocodile,
New Man,
Letter to a Friend on the French Revolution,
Posthumous works,
The Ministry of Spirit-Man.

⁵ *Qui tenait boutique de la sciences à tous venants.*

⁶ Curiously, he calls him 'Villermoz': I can only assume this is a German transcription of his name.

⁷ Of course, neither comment is correct: it was Willermoz' brother, Jacques, who was executed while Jean-Baptiste survived into great old age; and Saint-Martin ended up teaching for a number of years following his arrest.

Various translations of Jacob Boehme and a German book with the title: *Magicon*.

I think I will please my readers by ending this article with a biographical note of St. Martin, written by himself.

“I was cheerful, but the cheerfulness was only a secondary nuance of my character; my real color was pain and sadness, because of the enormity of evil (Boehme, 3, 18) and my profound desire for man’s rebirth.”

“I was given a body only as a project, I was less a friend of God than the enemy of his enemies, and it is this movement of indignation against the enemies of God which made me write my first book.”⁸

“The nature of my soul has been to be extremely sensitive, and perhaps more susceptible to friendship than to love; however, that very love was not foreign to me, but I could not indulge freely like other men, because I was only attracted strongly by great subjects, and because I could not truly enjoy the sweetness of this feeling as much as the sublime appetite which always devoured me would have had permission to be satisfied; and that is a permission which the sacred masters have always refused me.”

“Finally, I would only have wished to indulge in the physical as much would not have seemed crime and madness to my spiritual side.”

“Oh, if this spiritual side had been at ease, what heart would I have had to give! I changed my skin seven times as a nursing child. At the age of eighteen, I sometimes said in the midst of the political avowals what books had taught me: There is a God, I have a soul, I need nothing more to be wise, and it is on this basis that my whole edifice has since been built.”

(He said when he returned to his career: Either I’ll make it big, or I won’t.)

“Since the inexpressible divine mercy has permitted the dawn of the true realms to be discovered for me, I have only been able to look at books as objects of lamentation, for they are only proofs of our ignorance and a kind of defense made against truth as it rises above them. Dead books also prevent us from knowing the Book of Life, and that’s why they bring so much evil to the world, and we recoil, while seeming to move forward.”

“Boehme, dear Boehme, you are the only one I except, for you are the only one who truly leads us to the Book of Life. It’s still true that I can enter without you. The books I have written are only intended to persuade readers to leave all the books behind, including my own.”

“In the initiation I received and to which I afterwards owe all the blessings I have enjoyed, I dropped my shield upon the ground, which made my master sad; it also made me so, in that it did not herald much success for me in the future.”

“I recognized that it was an honorable thing for a man, during his time here on earth, to be a little scavenger on the earth. Of all the states of temporal life, the only two that I would have liked to exercise would have been that of bishop and doctor, because, either for the soul or for the body, these are the only ones where one can do pure good and without harming anyone, which is not possible in the military order, in the judicial order, in the order of tax-farmers; and I would only have liked to be a priest, not out of pride, but because a priest is not as free in his instruction as a bishop can be. The Duc de Choiseul was unknowingly the instrument of my happiness, when, wishing to enter the service, not out of taste, corn to hide my studious inclinations from a dear person, he placed me in the only regiment where I could find the treasure that was intended for me. The hope of death is the consolation of my days; so that I would like to be never told: I have another life, for there is only one.”

“The city of Strasbourg is the second after Bordeaux to which I have unappreciable obligations, because that is where I learned precious truths of which Bordeaux had already given me the seeds. And the precious truths were through the offices of my close friend, since she made me know my dear Boehme. My first stay in Lyon, in 1773,

⁸ Saint-Martin says his impetus for writing it was his dissatisfaction with a prevailing scientific desire to explain the ‘mythology’ of a need for God as being influenced by primitive man’s fear of lightning, earthquakes and natural phenomena. He saw the Age of Enlightenment rejecting God, and replacing Him with science, and he wrote his book to redress what he saw as that imbalance.

1774, and 1175 was not much more truly profitable for me than that of 1785. There I experienced a very marked regrowth in the spiritual order. My father, having been unable to extinguish my taste for deep subjects, tried in my thirtieth year to make me doubt myself concerning the search for religious truths, all of which should be acts of faith. He urged me to read a sermon by Fr. Bourdaloue, in which the preacher proved it was not necessary to reason; I read the sermon, and then I said to my father: ‘It was through reasoning that Fr. Bourdaloue wanted to prove that we should not reason.’”

“My father remained silent; he has not returned to the charge since. It was in Lyon that I wrote the book entitled *Of Errors & Truth*; I wrote it out of want of occupation and due to anger against the philosophers. I first wrote around thirty pages, which I showed to the circle that I taught at M. de Willermoz’, and was encouraged to continue.⁹

“It was composed towards the end of 1772 and the beginning of 1774, over four months, and near the kitchen fire, having no room where I could warm myself. One day even the soup pot fell on my foot and burned it quite deeply. It was in Paris, partly while staying with Madame de la Croix, that I wrote *Natural Table*, at the instigation of a few friends.”

“It was in London and Strasbourg that I wrote *Man of Desire*, at Tieman’s encouragement. It was in Paris that I wrote *Ecce Homo*, based on a strong idea I had in Strasbourg. It was in Strasbourg that I wrote *New Man*, at the instigation of a Swedish gentleman.”

“In 1768, being garrisoned in Lorient, I had a dream which affected me, I was in the early years of my great purpose, and it was in Lorient itself that I had the first personal proofs, while reading a book on mathematics. At night, I saw a large animal thrown to the ground from the air by a great whip; I then saw an altar, which I took to be Christian, and on which I saw many people pass hastily back and forth as if wanting to trample on it. I awoke with great sorrow from what I had just seen.”

“My works, and especially the last ones, were the fruit of my tender attachment to man, but at the same time of the little knowledge I had of his manner of being, and of the little impression that these truths make on him in this state of darkness and heedlessness in which he languishes. It’s not my own books that make me moan the most about this heedlessness, it’s those of a man, the laces of whose shoes I am not worthy to untie, my most beloved Boehme.”

“Man must have become completely foolish or demonic for not taking more advantage than he makes of this treasure sent to the world a hundred and eighty years ago.¹⁰ The apostles, who did not know as much as him, advanced the work infinitely more than he has.”

“It is that, for encrusted men, such as they are, facts are more effective than books.”¹¹

Trans. Piers A. Vaughan
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⁹ Note that these are the source of the *Lessons of Lyons* on the Élus Cohen, a course in which Willermoz’ students were taught by several Réaux Croix for around three years, lessons from that period have since been published by Robert Amadou and Gilbert Tappa.

¹⁰ This would have been around 1600. The event referred to is difficult to determine.

¹¹ That is, men covered with a crust of skin, or mortal, as opposed to primitive man, clothed in a glorious body.