

The School of Martinism

by Arthur Edward Waite

THE Masonic and theurgic mission of Martines de Pasqually, with which the mystic Louis Claude de Saint-Martin was identified by the fact of his initiation in the days of his youth, has created unawares a predisposition to confuse the master of strange occult arts with the disciple of Divine Science who entered later on more fully into the degree of certitude than did ever the most zealous Mason of that period enter into the Grades of innumerable dedications conferred in the various Rites at the end of the eighteenth century. The name of Saint-Martin will be so familiar now to many of those whom I address more especially, and the chief source of information in England is so near to every one's hand in my study of *The Unknown Philosopher*, that I can assume either some knowledge on the part of my readers or a willingness to seek it where it can be obtained most readily. He came out of all the orders and sodalities, but not as one shaking the dust off his feet, as one rather who had found a more excellent way, and had entered into the inward life. He did not scale all heights or sound all deeps therein; but he opened that unknown world and brought back a report concerning it which, in several respects will remain in permanent memory. The records thereof are in his books, and beyond them other record there is none, as it is antecedently unlikely that there should be any. But because of his early Masonic and occult connections, and because it is my fantasy to think that Martines and his Rites were mixed up with Saint-Martin and his Mysticism, there has been a kind of interpenetration in clouded minds between two tolerably distinct worlds of activity, and the mystic emerges first of all as himself the Reformer of a Masonic Rite, originally established by Pasqually, or the founder of one upon his own part. Both notions are rooted in misconception. But in the second place, and outside these intimations, it has been proposed for our acceptance that he at least founded a school - that is to say, an occult school - and it is with this notion and all that has been developed therefrom that I must say a few words first of all in the present section. The memorials of his influence are said to have remained in Russia, as the result of a visit concerning which we have few particulars, and which perhaps - though not indubitably for this reason - may be almost legendary rather than historical in its aspect. The rumour concerning him was certainly conveyed into that country at a period which must be marked as receptive to such influences in such a place. I do not believe in the least that he left one single trace which can be constructed in the sense of a school, even in the most informal manners either there or elsewhere. I doubt above all whether the materials would have come into his hands at that distracted period in the land which he called his own. In the comparative refuge of Switzerland, and in the vicinity of the Baron de Liebistorf, he might have found another entourage, or in that part of Germany which connects with Eckartshausen, but not in France at the Revolution, in the dictatorship, or in the long struggle of the Empire. The confusion has arisen, to my mind, in the persistence of that exotic interest of Masonry which centred at Lyons in the days of Pasqually, which survived the death of this master, which survived the Terror and the Empire, and had not wholly perished at the close of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In other words, therefore, that which remained over was the school with its roots in the theurgic processes of Pasqually's Masonic priesthood, primarily in the care of people like Willermoz and then of their successors. There has been an attempt in recent times to connect this school with an occult hypothesis concerning an Unknown Philosopher whose manifestation was a theurgic product, and I know not what authority can be ascribed by sober criticism to the documents offered in the evidence. But if they belonged to the period, and drew from the origin which is claimed, we can understand more fully how Saint-Martin, the Unknown Philosopher of a mystic literature, came to be connected by imagination with a school not only long after he had ceased to belong thereto, but long after its disintegration.

For that which was perpetuated and brought over into the nineteenth century was not of the incorporated order, but rather the records or memorials of something that once had been. The fact remains that in respect of Saint-Martin that which persisted in connection with his name was and could only be a sporadic disposition towards the inward life during a clouded period in the outer world. Some of the memories were persistent, some of them must have been exceedingly sacred. I set aside now all that concerns the theurgic school of Lyons and Bordeaux. Jean Baptist Willermoz, though not the titular or in any sense the acting successor of Pasqually in the Masonic group, never quitted the path of things phenomenal which had been followed by his master, and he could have remembered Saint-Martin, his early and, for some period, his intimate associate, only as one who had passed into another region which was very far away from his own. One cannot help speculating as to what memories abode in the mind of the Abbe Fournie during some twenty or more years of exile in London, after all those wonderful experiences which rewarded by sensible consolations the hunger and thirst after God and Divine things, about which I have written elsewhere. He also, like Willermoz, was connected with Saint-Martin during a time of active work and under the eyes of their common teacher. Of the most precious, most intimate, most direct memories there are, however, no records; they were those which centred at Strasbourg, the Zion of the Unknown Philosopher's mystic life; they were those which were gathered into the hearts of beloved and elect women, like Madame de Boecklin, the Marquise de Lusignan and the Duchesse de Bourbon; they were those of chosen men like Rudolph Salzman and the Comte d'Hauterive. Among these, and those like them, were the germs which he said in his last moments that he had endeavoured to sow and that he believed would fructify.

There is no opportunity here to trace how this purely mystical influence, which must have passed more and more into that which Saint-Martin bequeathed in his books to the world, has grown up into the hypothetical and semi-instituted warrants of the modern ORDER OF MARTINISM, with a Supreme Council located at Paris, an almost vast membership and sporadic branches - I was about to say everywhere, but certainly in several countries, including the United States. It has certain titles to consideration and has already produced its dissidents, being branches which have segregated of their own accord from the parent tree. It is, however, essentially anti-Masonic in character, because it is a kind of voile levi pour ges curieux, which publishes to its members the so-called secrets of Masonry, and though, as English Masons, it is impossible for us to recognise the Grand Orient of France and the Lodges which depend therefrom, it is obvious that this proceeding is a blow struck at Masonry of all denominations, even under the legitimate obediences. The fact that it is of no effect, and that those who possess nothing but a few elements which have long been public property can communicate nothing, makes no difference to the nature of the policy or to its intention. The ORDER OF MARTINISM is an axe which has been ground, and ground well enough for that matter, in the interests of those who established it, and it is mentioned here more especially to affirm (a) that it is anti-Masonic, in the sense which I have just defined; (b) that it has no part in any tradition whatsoever; (c) that the name which it has assumed should and can deceive no one who is properly informed, as (d) it has no connection with Martines de Pasqually and the RITE OF THE ELECT COHENS, or (e) with the philosophe inconnu, Saint-Martin, except a literary and philosophical interest in the work of both, but perhaps especially that of the former; and (f) that Saint-Martin, for his own part, would indubitably have denounced all its ways, had it arisen at his own period.

There is one more task to perform in the present section, and that is to make an end more definitely of the old mendacious myth which represents Saint-Martin (a) as the reformer of the Masonic Rite of Pasqually, or (b) alternatively as the inventor of an Ecosisme Reforme. According to the first story, he established two Temples, one of which conferred the Grades

of (a) Apprentice, (b) Companion or Craftsman, (c) Master, (d) Ancient Master, (e) Elect, (f) Grand Architect, (g) Mason of the Secret - possibly Secret Master; and the other, (h) Prince of Jerusalem, (i) Knight of Palestine and (k) Kadosh, or sanctified man. The alternative story usually represents the Ecossais Rite as a reduction of the first into seven grades, as follows: (a) Apprentice, (b) Companion, (c) Master, (d) Perfect Master, (e) Elect, (f) Ecossais, and (g) Sage. It will be seen that, over and above the Craft Degrees, both nomenclatures represent ingarnerings from several sources. The first account originated possibly with Clavel and the second with Ragon, but there might be earlier sources discoverable, if the question were worth the pains. Ragon says that the Grades were full of ridiculous superstitions and absurd beliefs, which is probable enough; but as regards the first foundation he stultifies himself in a later work by attributing precisely the same series to Baron Tschoudy.

There is abundant evidence in the correspondence of Saint-Martin to disprove that he ever went in search of a Masonic reformation, whether of his own device or another's, but it is only of recent years that the true nature of the misattribution has transpired. Among the materials laid before the Convention of Lyons in 1778, it is said that there were (a) the Ecossais Rectifie Suisse, the production of a certain De Glayre, and (b) the Ecossais Rectifie de Saint-Martin. The first does not especially concern us, but the second is affirmed to have been practised since 1770 by the Chapter of St. Theodore at Metz. The name, however, had reference to that canonised Archbishop of Tours who divided his mantle with a beggar and not to the theosophist and mystic. If the date which I have named is reliable, it is certain that in 1770 Saint-Martin, the Unknown Philosopher, was then unknown to fame. THE RITE OF SAINT-MARTIN and its particular Ecossais system passes therefore into the same category as the RITE OF RAMSAY. It is said that the Metz compilation was used by the Convention of Lyons to assist in the fabrication of Novice and Knight Beneficent of the Holy City, but those who have the opportunity of comparing these Grades with their direct correspondences in the RITE OF THE STRICT OBSERVANCE will be aware that the statement has no foundation, except in the sense that both systems laid the usual stress upon the Masonic virtue of beneficence.