BOOK VII

THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF NUMBERS

I

SAINT-MARTIN ON MATHEMATICAL SCIENCE

THE knowledge derived by Saint-Martin from the initiation which took place in his youth was connected with a scheme of numerical mysticism, to which he has recourse very frequently to establish the doctrinal points of his early works; it also occupies an important place in his correspondence, and was the subject of a posthumous treatise. At the same time we do not possess this scheme in its entirety, for the conditions under which he received it made a full presentation impossible, nor do we possess it apparently in quite the same form that he received it himself. It was held by him in very high estimation at all periods of his life, and it was developed by many considerations of his own, considerations which indeed bear all the peculiar signs of his philosophical gift. It would be perhaps too much to say that his entire doctrine is based upon the occult properties of numbers; its arcane portions are more correctly veiled thereby, but as the details are highly technical, they have been so far kept separate in this study, with the intention to deal with them somewhat comprehensively at a later point.

The mystical developments to which numbers have been subjected by the various schools of occultism, Pythagorean, Kabalistic, and so forth, offer in the whole only a slender analogy with the system of Saint-Martin, which, moreover, is connected with

peculiar views concerning mathematical science in general. As there is abundant material scattered through his various works to form on this one subject a volume of substantial dimensions, the minor issues must be passed over of necessity and the chief considerations must be compressed into a small shape. I propose, in the first place, to present in outline the views expressed by Saint-Martin as to the fundamental principles of mathematics; in the second place, to collect and condense the scattered statements as to the philosophy of numbers in particular; and, finally, in a third section to tabulate the mystic properties ascribed to the ten numerals.

That Saint-Martin had a tolerable acquaintance with higher mathematics may, I think, be inferred from the familiar style which characterises his references. When, this accepted, it becomes necessary to add that he was a hostile critic of the exact science *par excellence*, it would seem that in proposing to follow him we are about to abandon altogether the common ground of reason. The criticism is concerned, however, more with the application of the science than with its principles; it is fantastic in the highest degree, but it is well to state at the outset that it does not challenge, for example, the simple calculation that two and two make four. It seems nonsensical enough, in all conscience, but it is refined, not crass in its absurdity. There will be, therefore, no need, as there is indeed no space, to criticise the criticism; its fantasia will be established by its presentation; but I may remind the occult reader how Robert Fludd, the Kentish mystic, more than a century earlier, proved the degeneracy of

music because it could no longer influence stones and rocks as it did in the days of Orpheus.[1] That is a consideration which is entirely parallel to the mathematical strictures of Saint-Martin, who was indeed the Fludd of his period, plus a spiritual illumination which we cannot trace in the English Rosicrucian, and for which Saint-Martin is entitled to a permanent place in philosophy when purged of his scientific absurdities; whereas Fludd leaves nothing, after passing through a similar process, except indeed the historical interest belonging to the chief apologist of the Rosicrucians.[2]

For Saint-Martin mathematical science is only an illusory copy of the true science,[3] as algebra is, in a certain sense, the degradation of numbers.[4] The basis of mathematics is relation, and relation is also its result.[5] Once the postulates of relations are fixed, the results derived from them are exact and appropriate to the object proposed. In a word, mathematics cannot err, because they never depart from their groove; they turn, so to speak, on a pivot, and all their progress takes them back to that point from which they first started. Mathematical principles not being material, but being still the true law of sensible things, so long as mathematicians confine themselves to these

[1] *Apologia Compendiaria Fraternitatem de Rosea Cruce . . . abluens et abstergens.*

[2] I believe that he was a man of considerable personal sanctity, and this reference applies only to his philosophical works. If I remember rightly, Ennemoser ("History of Magic") takes much the same view. On the other hand, the late Mr. Hargrave Jennings would have disagreed probably, but then I do not know that he would have understood.

[3] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 81.

[4] *Correspondance Inédite*, Lettre xc.; Penny, "Theosophic Correspondence," p. 305.

[5] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 81.

principles, they cannot err; but when they come to the application of the idea derived from them, they are enslaved by the principles.[1] There is nothing demonstrated by mathematics except by reference to some axiom, because axioms alone are true; the ground of their truth is in their independence of the sensible, or of matter; in a word, they are purely intellectual. Did geometricians never lose sight of their axioms they would never go astray in their reasoning, for their axioms are attached to the very essence of intellectual principles, and thus rest on the most complete certitude.[2]

From the confused and confounding criticism which follows this general statement, I have extricated two points which may be accepted as the axioms of Saint-Martin, but there will be no need to say that, whatever their occult value, unlike those of mathematics, they are not self-evidently true. (*a*) Motion is possible without extension.[3] (*b*) Everything in Nature has its number.[4] Now, there was a time when such paradoxes as the first of these axioms used to be discussed seriously, and, having regard to some extraordinary subtleties put forward by the Spanish theologian Balmes, among other philosophers, we have no right to regard Saint-Martin as distracted because he sustained this thesis. The proposition is, of course, unthinkable, and has no claim on us, because the day of subtlety has ended, but at the period which just succeeded Descartes it had not quite finished, and there was, of course, an earlier period when such questions were discussed with enthusiasm, when Saint-Martin would

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part ii. pp. 84–85.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., pp. 101, 102, 130.
[4] Ibid., p. 91.

have delighted the schoolmen, would have founded a new method, like Raymond Lully, and would have been burnt, or perhaps beatified if he had not exceeded the limits of ecclesiastical latitude. As to the second axiom, it has no connections in philosophy, unless it be the signatures of Paracelsus; it is, in fact, the exclusive property of Saint-Martin's school of initiation, and will raise no idea in the modern mind except the statement in the Apocalypse that the number of the beast is "the number of a man."

It is, therefore, on all accounts necessary to see how the two axioms are sustained by their enumerator, and this especially that they are the grounds for his impeachment of mathematics.

"Like all other properties of bodies, extension is a product of the generative principle of matter, according to the laws and the order imposed on this inferior principle by the higher principle which directs it. In this sense extension is a secondary production, and cannot have the same advantages as the beings included in the class of prime products."[1] To elucidate this further, we must understand that "there are only two kinds of beings, sensible and intellectual."[2] According to Saint-Martin, the latter are the true source of motion; "they belong to another order than the immaterial corporeal principles which they rule; they must therefore have an action and effects distinct like themselves from the sensible, that is, in which the sensible counts for nothing. Hence also we must suppose their activity both before and after the existence of sensible things. It is, therefore, incontestable that movement may be conceived without extension,

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part ii. p. 87. [2] Ibid., p. 103.

since the principle of movement, whether sensible or intellectual, is actually outside extension." [1]

Now, the failure of geometricians is that they have not recognised this truth. After establishing their axioms in the real world outside the sensible, they have provided for the measurement of extension "some meter derived from extension, or some arbitrary numbers which require a sensible measure before they can be realised by our bodily eyes.[2] They have fallen into the same mistake as that made by the observers of Nature; they have separated extension from its true principle, or rather it is in extension that they have sought for this principle, confusing distinct things, which, however, are connected inseparably for the constitution of matter." [3] Put shortly, "the measures taken from extension for the measurement of extension are subject to the same drawbacks as the object which it is proposed to measure," [4] and thus the extension of bodies is not determined with more certainty than their other properties. "Extension exists only by motion, which is not, however, to say that motion is from and in that which is extended. It is true that in the sensible order movement cannot be conceived outside of extension, but though the principles which produce motion in the sensible order are immaterial, their action is not necessary and eternal, because they are secondary beings receiving the communication of action for a time only from the Active and Intelligent Cause." [5]

The full measure of extension must be sought outside it, in the principle by which it has been engendered, like all other properties of matter. "It is

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 104. [2] Ibid., p. 86.
[3] Ibid., p. 87. [4] Ibid., p. 88. [5] Ibid., pp. 101–102.

true that geometricians attach numbers to their extended and sensible measure, but these numbers are relative and conventional; with such a scale extension of another kind cannot be measured. To this must be referred the difficulty experienced in the measurement of curves; the measure utilised was made for the straight line, and offers insurmountable difficulties when applied to the circular, or to any curve derived from it."[1] The conception of the circle as an assemblage of infinitely small straight lines is, in the opinion of Saint-Martin, not a true conception, for it contradicts that which Nature gives us concerning a circumference—a line, namely, in which all the points are equidistant from a common centre. "If the circumference be an assemblage of straight lines, however infinitely small, all its points cannot be equidistant from the centre, since such straight lines will themselves be composed of points, among which the extreme and intermediary cannot be at the same distance from the centre, which is therefore no longer common, while the circumference ceases to be a circumference."[2]

The distinction between the straight line and the circle is established fantastically as follows:—"The object of the straight line is to perpetuate to infinity the production of the point from which it emanates, but the circular line limits at all points the production of the straight line, since it tends continually to destroy it, and may be regarded, so to speak, as its enemy. As there is nothing common between these lines, so there is no common measurement of them possible."[3] Following up this distinction,

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 88.
[2] Ibid., pp. 89–90. [3] Ibid., pp. 91–92.

we must be prepared to regard the circle not as the perfect figure, but as inferior and limited: a paradox which leads us to the second axiom of Saint-Martin, that everything in Nature has its number, by which each can be distinguished; for its properties are results conformed to the laws contained in that number. The right and curved lines being different in their natures, have each their particular number. The straight line bears the number 4, and the circular that of 9, their lesser or greater extent making no difference, because "a large and a small line are each equally the result of their law and their number acting diversely, that is, with more or less power and duration in each, since these numbers remain always intact, though their faculties are extended or contracted in the variations of which extension is susceptible."[1] From these considerations Saint-Martin concludes that there are no fractions in Nature, and that they are a mutilation of numbers. "The principles of corporeal beings are simple and therefore indivisible, while the numbers which represent and render them sensible enjoy the same property."[2]

Saint-Martin applies the number 9 to the circle for the following reasons. The circle is equivalent to zero; its centre may be regarded as unity because a circumference can have only one centre; unity joined to zero makes 10, or the centre with the circumference. The circle, however, can be regarded as a corporeal being, the circumference being the body and the centre the immaterial principle. But this principle can always be separated intellectually from the bodily and extended form, which is equiva-

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 93. [2] Ibid., p. 94.

lent to separating the centre from the circumference, or 1 from 10. The subtraction of 1 from 10 leaves 9; the removal of the unit leaves zero as the circular line, and hence 9 is equivalent to the circle. This correspondence between zero, which is nothing by itself, and the number 9 may be held to justify the view that matter is illusory.[1]

The number of extension is, according to Saint-Martin, the same as that of the circular line,[2] whence, in his occult phraseology, it has also the same weight and the same measure. The circle and extension are, in fact, one and the same thing, and hence it is that the circular line alone is corporeal and sensible. "Material nature and extension cannot be formed by means of right lines, or, in other words, there are no right lines in nature."[3] The reason assigned for this bizarre statement is, that although the principle of physical things is from fire, their corporisation is from water, and hence bodies are fluid in their primary state. But fluid is an assemblage of spherical particles, and bodies themselves may be regarded as an assemblage of such particles.[4]

The number 4 is applied to the right line, regarded as a principle and distinct from extension, in accordance with the following reasoning. "There are three principles in all bodies; the circle is a body; the radii of a circle are right lines in the material sense, and by their apparent rectitude and capability of being prolonged to infinity they are the real image of the generative principle. The spaces between the radii are triangles, and thus the action of the generative principle is manifested by

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. pp. 120–121.
[2] Ibid., p. 106. [3] Ibid., p. 107. [4] Ibid., pp. 107–108.

triadic production. Join the number, or unity, of the centre to the triad of its production, and we have an index of the quaternary. So also the conception of an intimate bond between the centre or generative principle and the secondary principle, which is proved to be 3 by the three sides of the triangle and the three dimensions, gives us the most perfect idea of our immaterial quaternary. Furthermore, as this quaternary manifestation takes place only by the emanation of the radius from the centre; as this radius always prolonged in a straight line is the organ and action of the central principle; as the curved line, on the contrary, produces nothing, but limits the action and production of the radius, we apply fearlessly the number 4 to the straight line and radius which represents it. As a fact, it is to the number 4 and to the square that geometry refers everything it measures, considering all triangles as a division of the square. Now this square is composed of four lines regarded as right lines, similar to the radius, and quaternary, consequently, like that."[1] From these considerations Saint-Martin concludes that the number which produces beings is that also which measures them, and that the true measure of beings is found in their principle, not in their envelope and extension. Hence also he acknowledges only one square and one square root.[2]

But 4 is not only the number of the straight line, but also that of motion or movement.[3] "There is, therefore, great analogy between the principle of movement and the straight line." It is not, however, only the analogy of their identical number, but

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. pp. 126–128.
[2] Ibid., p. 132. [3] Ibid., pp. 105–106.

also because "the source of the action of sensible things resides in movement, and the straight line is the emblem of infinity, and the continuity of the production of the point from which it emanates."[1] The identity of number gives also the identity of law and property, "and hence the straight line directs corporeal and extended things, but never combines with them, never becomes sensible; for a principle cannot be confounded with its production."[2] Collecting the observations on the right line, and referring thence to the question of the circle, Saint-Martin adds: "But if there are no right lines in Nature, the circle cannot be an assemblage of right lines."[3]

If we seek now to discover the purpose of this extraordinary criticism, and to learn how we can attain to the true measurement of things by their principles, I must confess that we glean scant light from the mystic. It is perfectly useless to say that the just valuation of the properties of beings is by means of their principles, unless we can reach their principles. Saint-Martin admits that it may be "difficult to read therein," but that no certitude can be found outside that which "rules and measures all."[4] Where is the key by which we can unlock the doors of the phenomenal world and communicate with the realities behind it? I do not need to say that Saint-Martin does not surrender it; reason may lead us to the recognition of the noumenal world, but it cannot impart it. The last words of the mystic are either an admission of his impotence and a stultification of his inquiry or a veiled appeal to the

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 110. [2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 111. [4] Ibid., p. 97.

fields commanded by a faculty higher than the rational. "Though it is possible by recourse to this principle to judge surely the measure of extension, it would be profanation to employ it in material combinations, for it can lead to the discovery of more important truths than those which are connected with matter, while the senses suffice for the direction of man in things sensible."[1] Hence, even on the showing of Saint-Martin, the geometricians are not so wrong after all!

Before taking leave of this surprising criticism, the curious may like to be possessed of an argument against the quadrature of the circle which De Morgan would have surely included in his "Budget of Paradoxes," had he been acquainted with the French mystic. "Since the Fall, man has sought to conciliate the right line with the circle; in other words, he has endeavoured to discover what is called the quadrature of the circle. Before his Fall he did not seek the accomplishment of an evident impossibility, the reduction of 9 to 4 or the extension of 4 to 9. The true means of arriving at the knowledge of things is to begin by not confounding them, but by pursuing the examination of each according to its proper number and laws."[2]

There are many inquiries, all leading to more or less amazing conclusions, but all excessively curious, undertaken by Saint-Martin in connection with mathematical science, but into which it is impossible here to follow him. He regarded mathematics as representing the universal law of energy and resist-

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 97.
[2] Ibid., pp. 111–112.

ance, because it is occupied in discovering and expressing the relations of dimensions, quantities, and weights, relations which, each in its class, are the expression of resistance and energy acting on all that exists.[1] In this connection he has some curious remarks on the binomial theorem, and especially on what was then the recent discovery of Descartes, namely, in equations the curve to which they belong, and in curves the equation which expresses their nature.[2] He regarded corporeal existences, general and particular, as a universal and continual quadrature, because the energy or power of co-ordinates cannot yield at any point or leave any opening to the resistance of the curve, and hence this curve or resistance is always combined with and modelled upon the energy in question, and never occupies any spaces but that which it yields to it.[3] Remarking on the old maxim that metaphysics are the mathematics of God, mathematics the metaphysics of Nature, and transcendental or higher geometry the metaphysics of mathematics, he concludes that the right line is the principle and end of all geometry; and that although the general theory of curves, of the figures which they terminate and their properties, constitutes what is called higher geometry, the truly transcendental geometry is that of right lines; for it has generated the geometry of curves, and is more central, more concealed from our knowledge, because it acts within the circle or behind the envelope of things, whilst the geometry of curves acts only at their surface, and is thus their circumference and perimeter.[4] The application of mathematics to

[1] *De l'Esprit des Choses*, ii. 203 *et seq.* [2] Ibid., p. 305.
[3] Ibid., p. 310. [4] Ibid., p. 313 *et seq.*

the physical sciences, and the attempt to extend them into the domains of medicine, the calculus of probabilities, and the investigation of the law of chances,[1] leads Saint-Martin to the hypothesis of a universal mathematics and arithmetic, accompanying all laws and operations of beings;[2] but he adds that, in order to attain it, we must be able to number the integral values of things instead of computing only their dimensions and external properties. The mathematician does not in reality possess the fundamental principles of mathematics and the calculus.[3] He observes external laws written on the surface of bodies, on the ostensible effects of motion, on the outward progress of numeration; he has collected all these facts, which, though true, are only resultants, and has erected them into principles. They are principles, but only of a secondary kind, as compared with the fundamental and active laws of things. In attempting to penetrate the sanctuary of Nature equipped only with secondary principles, man has fulfilled his object imperfectly, because his means have been inferior and insufficient. He has the keys of the surface, and he can open the treasures of the surface, but he has not the active and central keys, and the treasures of the centre are interdicted to him.[4]

[1] *De l'Esprit des Choses*, ii. p. 315. [2] Ibid., p. 316.
[3] Ibid., p. 317. [4] Ibid., p. 318.

II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NUMBERS

THE mathematical paradoxes propounded by Saint-Martin may be regarded almost incontestably as subtleties developed by himself from the occult doctrine of numbers received by him at his initiation. The doctrine itself was probably simple enough in its system and had no thought of impeaching mathematics. We have every reason to suppose that it was confined to attaching certain mystical ideas to certain numbers, and in this respect it is certainly of very high interest to the occult student, because its numerical mysticism is quite opposed to that of any other known school, especially in its treatment of the quinary as an evil number, after all that we have heard in occultism as to the magnificent revelations of the pentogram. It seems also to establish in a fairly conclusive manner that the Martinistic school, in spite of a contrary statement by Eliphas Lévi, had no knowledge of the Tarot system. At the same time I have been unable to avoid concluding, and am therefore bound to state, that Saint-Martin's doctrine of numbers is only a few fragments chipped, so to speak, from an edifice of occult knowledge. It is necessary also to add that he did not, in spite of his devotion, exaggerate the importance of the science which he thus acquired. He states that from his first entrance into his first school, he never thought that numbers gave more than the ticket of the package,

and not commonly the substance of the matter itself.[1] I understand this to signify that they are a method of classification which might in itself be conventional, or that they are agreed symbols which must not be understood literally; so that when we hear of the number of matter, the number of man, and so forth, we must understand an occult essential character or "virtue," more or less arbitrarily labelled or ticketed for readiness of reference. This is, I think, shown very clearly by other words of his own. "Numbers are the sensible expression, whether visible or intellectual, of the different properties of beings, which all proceed from the one only source. Though we may derive by tradition and theoretical teaching a part of this science, regeneration alone shows us the true ground, and therein, each in his own degree, we obtain the true key without masters.[2] Furthermore, numbers express truths, but do not give them; men did not choose numbers, but discerned them in the natural properties of things."[3]

Having said this by way of introduction, with the design of indicating the most tolerable mode of regarding an exceedingly obscure subject not overluminously treated, I propose now to present, collected from a variety of treatises, but substantially in the words of Saint-Martin, his general doctrine concerning the philosophy of numbers.

Numbers are the abridged translation or concise language of those truths and those laws of which the text and conceptions are in God, man, and Nature.[4]

[1] *Correspondance*, Lettre lxxiv.; Penny, "Theosophic Correspondence," p. 239.

[2] Ibid., Letter xc. p. 305. [3] Ibid., Letter xcii. p. 317.

[4] "Numbers are the invisible enveloper of beings, as bodies are their sensible envelopes."—*Tableau Naturel*, ii. 131.

We must beware of separating numbers from the idea represented by each, for they then lose all their virtue, and are like the syntax of a language the words of which are unknown.[1] The character of every number in the decade may be discovered by the particular operation to which it is united and the object on which it reposes. It follows from this that the virtue of beings is not in numbers, but that number is in the virtue of those beings which derive from it. Immense advantages may be derived by the intelligence of man from the proper use of numbers. The development of the properties of beings is active, and these properties have innumerable increasing and decreasing correspondences between them; hence the combination of numbers, taken in the regularity of the sense discovered in them by reasonable observation, will direct us in uncertain speculations, and will rectify what is false therein, seeing that this true and spiritual calculus or algebra of realities, like the conventional calculus or algebra of appearances, when its values are once known, will conduct us to precise and positive results.[2] But in the former, numbers receive their value from the nature of things, and not from the will of man; they lead us to truths of the first rank essentially connected with our being. Without the key of numbers, the correspondence between the three regions of true philosophy, divine, spiritual, and natural, cannot be fixed or appreciated correctly.[3]

Among the marvels offered to those who walk with circumspection in the career of numbers, we are not only taught to admire the magnificence of God, but to distinguish that which we are permitted to know from that which is permanently concealed from our pene-

[1] *Les Nombres*, p. 18. [2] Ibid., p. 20. [3] Ibid., p. 21.

tration and outside our lights.[1] The mode of our emanation and generation in the divine unity is an interdicted knowledge, because the work of an emanation is reserved for the Supreme Principle, and the knowledge of the mode of that generation is also reserved for Him. By its possession we should be independent of Him, we could perform His work, and, in a word, would be God like Him. Owing to this veil, our Sovereign Principle is the eternal object of our homage and has real claim on our veneration. But while the law of numbers interdicts this knowledge,[2] it does offer us the proof that our generation is divine, and it does demonstrate that we come forth directly from God.[3] In the true calculus there are essential roots and roots which are not essential, and it is the same with some of the powers; whilst in arithmetical calculus all the roots are contingent and all the powers variable. In the true calculus, the name of essential power belongs especially to man, but not that of essential root; and it is in the consideration of these two titles that we find at once the proof that we have come forth from God and the impossibility of knowing after what mode we have come forth.[4]

At the same time Saint-Martin observes in another place that among the things which man lost at his Fall was the knowledge of the roots of numbers. This knowledge is now impossible to him, as he is unacquainted with the first of all roots. Hence the world does not know what conception to form of numbers. To attain such conception we must reflect on what should be the principle of things; it exists

[1] *Les Nombres*, p. 25. [2] Ibid., p. 28. [3] Ibid., p. 27.
[4] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité*, Part i. p. 61.

in its weight, its number, and its measure. Number is that which brings forth action, measure that which rules it, and weight that which operates it.[1] These are in the bosom of the Wisdom which accompanies all beings; in their production it imparts to them an emanation of its own essence, and at the same time of its wisdom, that the production may be in its own likeness. Thus all beings have within them a ray of its weight, its number, and its measure.[2]

[1] *Des Erreurs et de la Vérite*, Part i. p. 149.
[2] *Œuvres Posthumes*, i. pp. 244–245.