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Maine de Biran's Philosophy of Will (Classic Reprint)

Nathan E. Truman

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No special account of Maine deB irans philosophy has before appeared in English, and the sources are rendered somewhat difficult by the authors highly involved style. It has seemed, therefore, that a somewhat extended exposition of his work may prove useful. In the composition of this monograph my object has been two-fold :to give a statement of Biran ssystem, and to show his exact position in the history of speculative thought. As a result of careful investigation, I have found it necessary to call attention to the unitary character of the system, which, as a matter of fact, centers around the single idea will. This conclusion is, of course, opposed to the view of Naville, who in his introduction to the (E uvres inedites divides Biran swork into three sharply distinguished periods. I am convinced, however, that this division rests on insufficient grounds. For in the idea of activity is to be found the keynote of the entire philosophy. This idea is clearly evident in the writings assigned by Naville to the earlier and the later periods, as well as in the more important works that were written during the intervening years. On the whole, it may seem surprising that I have not emphasized more strongly the importance of Biran sphilosophy. It is perhaps unusual in a work of this kind to minimize the significance of the subject. However that may be, I have to confess that the motive which led me to begin my study, the expectation of finding elements of permanent value in Biran sphilosophy based on frequent references to him as the French Kant, has scarcely been realized by my subsequent investigation. Even with the most sympathetic interpretation, Biran cannot be placed among philosophers of the first rank. Kant sgreat significance does not consist merely in his emphasis on the activity of mind against the empiricists, but rather in the fact that he shows that the
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