metal, or wood, or stone, can neither hear nor answer peti­tions. Superstition was a name which the ancient philoso­phers gave to those who entertained mean opinions of the gods, or did foolish things to obtain their favour. According to Theophrastus, the superstitious man is one who, having washed his hands, and sprinkled himself all round, leaves the temple with a laurel leaf in his mouth, with which he walks about the whole day. Or, if a weasel should cross his path, he will not advance a step till he has thrown three stones over the road. If he find a serpent in his house, he rears a place of devotion on the spot. He often puri­fies his house, will not sit upon a grave, or touch a dead person. He is anxious about the interpretation of his dreams, will not offer a sacrifice unless his wife go along with him, or, if she is engaged, he takes the nurse and the little children. He purifies himself with onions ; and when he sees a mad or an epileptic person, he spits in his bo­som. Such was the character of superstition in the days of Theophrastus. All these whimsical ceremonies were performed in order to prevent mischief, and to avert the wrath of the gods ; and therefore perfectly correspond with the definition given above.

It is only necessary to consider a little the superstitious opinions and practices among Jews and Christians, to be sensible that they have all arisen from mean and absurd ideas of the moral attributes of God ; for they have gene­rally entertained noble opinions of his natural attributes. The Jews considered God as a partial being, who had a predilection for their nation in preference to all others, and preferred external homage and ceremony to moral purity. If the Romanists think consistently, they must esteem God as a being who can be prevailed upon by the importunity of one dead man to assist another, or as a being whose pa­tience would be fatigued with hearing prayers constantly. Hence their practice of praying to saints. They in effect believe, however they may deceive themselves, that God is unjust, or they could not believe transubstantiation ; for it supposes that God can give commands directly contrary to those principles of belief with which he has endued the hu­man mind. They consider a strict adherence to a variety of ceremonies, to forms, pomp, and show', as essential to the worship of God ; and thus they evidently betray most inadequate conceptions of the creator and governor of the universe. They thought it their duty to extirpate heretics : this was supposing God a cruel and revengeful being. Even among Protestants, we are sorry to say, a great deal of su­perstition remains: we have not yet learned to consider God as a spirit, who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, as a pure, moral, benevolent being; and hence arise all the superstitious practices which prevail in some Protes­tant churches.

Besides those superstitious opinions and practices which entirely respect our duty to God, there arc others which may be termed vulgar superstitions. These also arise from imperfect and mean ideas of the moral attributes of God. To believe vulgar prophecies, which are always the effu­sions of madness or knavery, is to suppose that God, who has drawn a veil over futurity, and only delivers prophecies to accomplish some great moral purpose, sometimes gives them for no purpose at all, or to gratify idle curiosity, or to disclose such a knowledge of what is to happen as is incon­sistent with the free agency of man and the moral admini­stration of the world. Nor is it less superstitious to believe in vulgar miracles. To believe in them, is to believe that God suspends the laws of nature for the most trivial pur­poses, or to countenance fraud and worldly ambition : it is to receive the most extraordinary facts upon the most un­satisfactory evidence. The belief of witchcraft, of appari­tions, and the second sight, may be resolved into the same principle. 'Γo suppose that God would communicate the power of doing mischief, and of controlling his laws, to crea­

tures, merely for gratifying their own passions, is unworthy of God. The belief of apparitions is equally inconsistent with the goodness of God. The same objection rises against the second sight as against the belief of vulgar pro- phecics, and may also be extended to omens, to astrology, to things lucky and unlucky, and to fortune-telling. As to the different devices and charms for preventing and curing disorders, they resemble in every respect false miracles.

A judicious history of superstition would be a curious and entertaining work, and would exhibit the human character in a remarkable point of view. Superstition is most preva­lent among men of weak and uncultivated minds ; it is more frequent in the female sex than among men, and abounds more in the rude than in the refined stages of so­ciety. The general features of it have been the same in all ages ; but it assumes certain peculiarities, according to the diversity of character in different nations. It gained admission into the science of medicine at an early period. He who was endowed with superior genius and knowledge was reckoned a magician. Dr Bartolo was seized by the in­quisition at Rome in the seventeenth century, because he un­expectedly cured a nobleman of the gout. Diseases were im­puted to fascination, and hundreds of poor wretches were dragged to the stake for being accessory to them. Mer­catus, physician to Philip II. of Spain, a writer of uncom­mon accuracy and information, appears strongly inclined to deny the existence of fascinatory diseases ; but he is con­strained to acknowledge them for two reasons; 1st, be­cause the inquisition had decided in favour of their reality ; 2dly, because he had seen a very beautiful woman break a steel-mirror to pieces, and blast some trees by a single glance of her eyes.

As the opinions concerning the cause of diseases were superstitious, those concerning the method of curing them were not less so. In the Odyssey we read of a cure per­formed by a song. Josephus relates, that he saw a certain Jew, named Eleazar, draw the devil out of an old woman’s nostrils by the application of Solomon's seal to her nose, in presence of the Emperor Vespasian. Many different kinds of applications were used for expelling the devil. Flagel­lation sometimes succeeded admirably : purgatives and an­tispasmodics were other modes of discharging him. Dr Mynsight cured several bewitched persons with a plaster of assafœtida. How the assafoetida was so efficacious, was much disputed. Some thought the devil might consider so vile an application as an insult, and run off in a passion ; but others very sagely observed, that as devils are supposed to have eyes and ears, they might likewise have noses.

Nor was it only in medicine that these superstitious opi­nions were entertained, they also prevailed in natural phi­losophy. The pernicious effects in mines, which we now know are occasioned by noxious air, were confidently im­puted to the demons of the mine. Even Van Hehnont, Bodin, Strozza, and Luther, attributed thunder and me­teors to the devil. Chemists were employed for centuries in search of the philosopher’s stone, with which they were to perform miracles. It was a common question among philosophers in the seventeenth century, whether the ima­gination could move external objects ; a question generally decided in the affirmative.

Though superstition be generally the mark of a weak mind, such is the infirmity of human nature, that we find many instances of it among men of the most sublime ge­nius and most enlightened minds. Socrates believed that he was guided by a demon. Lord Bacon believed in witch­craft ; and relates that he was cured of warts by rubbing them with a piece of lard with the skin on, and then nail­ing it with the fat towards the sun on the post of a cham­ber window facing the sun. Henry IV., one of the most illustrious of monarchs, was very uneasy before his assassi­nation, on account of some prophecies. Sully declares,