Socinians have not been accuſed of ſuperſtition, nor can this French philoſopher be ſuſpected of it. We do not call every falſe opinion concerning the unity or moral attributes of God by the name of ſuperſtition, as, for inſtance, the opinion which ſome ſceptics have ſupported, that God is not good ; for, as was mentioned before, ſuperſtition always involves the idea of credulity. It does not conſiſt in falſely denying that God posseſſes any particular moral attributes, but in believing more than what is true concerning them ; in forming mean, un­worthy ideas of them ; in ſuppoſing that he is guided by blind paſſion like mankind, and enjoins upon his creatures commandments which are irrational and abſurd.

As ſuperſtition ariſes from ignorance and credulity in the underſtanding, ſo it has alſo a ſeat in the paſſions. Fear has been commonly conſidered as the paſſion of the hu­man mind from which it chiefly derives its origin; and there **is** no doubt that more ſuperſtition has ariſen from fear united with ignorance and credulity than from any other paſſion. Yet it would certainly be improper to exclude all other paſ­ſions. We cannot account for the ſuperſtition of the Egyp­tians, without ſuppoſing that much of it aroſe from gratitude. They worſhipped the Nile, becauſe it diſtributed fertility and abundance over the land of Egypt ; and they worſhipped ſome animals, merely becauſe they prevented the increaſe of other animals which were noxious. Thus they adored the ibis, becauſe it deſtroyed the eggs of the crocodile.

Having thus endeavoured to analyze the ideas compre­hended under the word ſuperſtition, we may ſum them up in a few words. It reſpects God and beings ſuperior to man, and extends to our religious opinions, worſhip, and practices ; and may be defined *abſurd opinions and actions arising from mean and defective ideas of the moral attributes of God.* Let us apply this definition to the different ſpecies of ſuperstition already mentioned.

But before entering upon this application, it may be pro­per to obſerve, that ſuperſtition involves the idea of a blame­able inattention to reaſon, or a credulity ariſing from an in­dolence of underſtanding. We generally make a diſtinction between the imperfect opinions which a ſavage, from the neceſſary effects of his ſituation, forms of the attributes of God, and thoſe which civilized nations entertain. We ſay the ſavage is ignorant, and we aſcribe his ignorance to his ſituation ; but we call the Roman Catholic ſuperſtitious, and we blame him for not having thoſe juſt ideas of God which he might have obtained by opening his Bi­ble, or by the exerciſe of his underſtanding in the favour­able ſituation in which he is placed. Superſtition then does not originate ſo much from the natural weakneſs of the hu­man underſtanding, as from a miſapplication or a neglect of it @@(a).

We cannot therefore with any propriety apply the name sup*erstition* to polytheiſm in general ; for what all the ancient philoſophers, after much ſtudy and reflection, concluded to be true, could never proceed from credulity and inattention, but from their ſituation. We ſpeak very properly, however, when we call idolatry by the name of ſuperſtition ; becauſe there is no man ſo devoid of underſtanding as not to be ca­pable of diſcovering, that a piece of 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 the road, he will not advance a step till he has thrown three ſtones over the road. If he finds **a** ſerpent in his house, he rears a place of devotion on the ſpot. He purifies his houſe often, will not sit upon a grave, nor 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 their boſom. Such was the character of ſuperſtition in the days of Theophraſtus. All theſe whimſical ceremonies were done 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 **Ro­**man Catholics 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, to pomp, and ſhow, as essential to the worſhip of God : this is treating God as a vainglorious Being. 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 worſhiped in ſpirit and in truth, as a pure moral benevolent Being ; and hence ariſes all the ſuperſtitious practices which prevail among us.

Beſides thoſe ſuperſtitious opinions and practices which entirely reſpect our duty to God, there are others which may be termed *vulgar ſuperstitions.* Theſe alſo ariſe from imper­fect and mean ideas oſ the moral attributes oſ 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. To ſuppoſe that God would communicate the power of doing miſchief, and of controuling his laws, to any being merely for gratifying their own paſſions, is unworthy of God. The belief of apparitions is equally inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God (ſee Spectre). The ſame objection riſes againſt the ſecond ſight as againſt the belief of vulgar prophecies, and may also be extended to omens, to aſtrology, to things lucky and unlucky, to fortune-telling, &c. As to the different devices and charms for preventing and curing diſorders, they reſemble in every reſpect falſe miracles.

@@@(a) We do not pretend to ſay that this is the ſenſe in which ſuperſtition is always uſed, becauſe it is often uſed improperly.