

**A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY ON  
CREDULITY AND SUPERSTITION:  
AND ALSO ON ANIMAL  
FASCINATION, OR CHARMING**

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A Philosophical Essay on Credulity and Superstition: And Also on Animal Fascination, or Charming by Rufus Blakeman

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CREDULITY AND SUPERSTITION;  
AND ALSO ON  
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BY RUFUS BLAKEMAN, M. D.

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"It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion  
as is unworthy of Him; for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely."  
Lord Bacon.

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## P R E F A C E .

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IT was not the original design of the author to offer the following work to the public. It was undertaken with the view to note his own opinions, and such facts, derived from reading and reflection, as were deemed demonstrative of a general tendency to a more ready belief in the incomprehensible and the marvelous, rather than in phenomena susceptible of explanation by reason, aided by a disciplined exercise of the subordinate senses. Subsequently, however, it occurred to him that their dissemination might possibly have some influence in leading to an analytical examination of various popular errors emanating from this source, which have been most detrimental to human progress, and have essentially retarded mankind in their efforts to acquire the greatest happiness of which their nature is susceptible.

If such should be the result, (though but in a small degree,) it is confidently believed that much will be effected toward the eradication of evils originating from credulity and superstition. There is little doubt that the baleful errors originating from these sources have mainly been perpetuated by traditional authority, or the habitual quiescence in which the mind is too prone to indulge, when the various external phenomena are presented for its con-

templation and reception ; and, therefore, that attention to their deformity is only required for their correction.

The author has not the arrogance to claim, that he is presenting a mass of original views to those who have read or thought extensively on the subjects considered. It has been his principal design to present, in a succinct form, opinions and many important facts dispersed through a variety of volumes, which a majority of society either want the leisure or interest to peruse ; but who, notwithstanding, have a personal interest that errors perpetuated by such inattention, and which are most detrimental to their welfare, should be corrected, and thereby their evils become dissipated.

It has been the author's object to allude to the mental origin of the various popular superstitions that have extensively prevailed among mankind at different periods, and briefly to illustrate the physiological and mental influences by which they have been fostered and strengthened—often to such a degree as to assume the direction of popular belief and the general sentiment of mankind during their usurpations.

Although the several subjects discussed have been ably investigated by various writers, it is not within the author's knowledge, that the different forms of credulity and superstition of which he treats, have been presented in connection, accompanied by a reference to the physiological and pathological principles upon which they are manifestly dependent. It is true that the physical origin of mental delusion has been repeatedly investigated ; but it has, generally, been in a manner too metaphysical to



be readily comprehended by all, and, as before remarked, too formidable from extent to admit of ready access by the public generally. He therefore hopes, by the publication of this manual, to present the outlines of the subject in such accessible form as may invite perusal, and thereby incite some to a further investigation of truths, upon a correct understanding of which, it is conceived, refined civilization can alone be based.

It was the wish of the author so to popularize his treatise, by entirely excluding technical language, as to render it more readily intelligible to every reader. But as it has been his design to trace the errors, originating in the subjects discussed, to their physiological and pathological origin, he has been compelled, occasionally, to resort to the use of the technicalities of science, with the view as well to abridge in diction as to facilitate the object contemplated. He would, therefore, present this as an apology to the non-professional reader for the occasional reference to, and introduction of these. It is, however, hoped that the present liberal dissemination of physiological and other sciences, with the explanations generally given in connection with their use, will in some degree obviate the difficulties which he is aware must arise from their employment.

Without pretensions to literary merit in its structure, the work is respectfully submitted to the public, by the

AUTHOR.

*Granfield Hill, September 4th, 1849.*

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PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
CREDULITY AND SUPERSTITION.

SECTION I.

*Mental Origin of Credulity and Superstition, and its  
Influence on Ancient Society.*

The remark of Lord Bacon, that "it were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such opinion as is unworthy of Him," is most appropriate in its application to the various superstitious beliefs that have, and still, in a degree, sway mankind; for superstition implies such extravagant notions regarding the character of Deity, that its rational contemplation is irreconcilable with such conceptions formed of the Author of the universe, as are derived from a survey of its structure.

On the contrary, such is the influence of these beliefs on the mind, that they not only cause the character of the infinitely wise and rational Intelligence there delineated, to be graduated by a standard derived from ordi-