

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - *Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances*

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

Books of enduring scholarly value

Spiritualism and Esoteric Knowledge

Magic, superstition, the occult sciences and esoteric knowledge appear regularly in the history of ideas alongside more established academic disciplines such as philosophy, natural history and theology. Particularly fascinating are periods of rapid scientific advances such as the Renaissance or the nineteenth century which also see a burgeoning of interest in the paranormal among the educated elite. This series provides primary texts and secondary sources for social historians and cultural anthropologists working in these areas, and all who wish for a wider understanding of the diverse intellectual and spiritual movements that formed a backdrop to the academic and political achievements of their day. It ranges from works on Babylonian and Jewish magic in the ancient world, through studies of sixteenth-century topics such as Cornelius Agrippa and the rapid spread of Rosicrucianism, to nineteenth-century publications by Sir Walter Scott and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Subjects include astrology, mesmerism, spiritualism, theosophy, clairvoyance, and ghost-seeing, as described both by their adherents and by sceptics.

Essay on Superstition

William Newnham (1790–1865) was a general medical practitioner, also qualified as an apothecary, who played a prominent role in his profession and was widely recognised for his skill. His particular medical interest lay within the fields of gynaecology and obstetrics, although he also published several papers on topics including phrenology and human magnetism. This 1830 publication contains a series of essays he had recently written for *The Christian Observer*. In them, Newnham argues that dreams, visions, apparitions and other apparently spiritual manifestations, whether good or bad, arise from physiological rather than supernatural causes. He provides evidence that the effects on the brain from disease, medications (including nitrous oxide and opium) and trauma, causing ‘disturbance of brainular function’, can produce such experiences. Anticipating criticism, he insists that the light of science benefits true religion rather than undermining it, contrasting ‘real Christianity’ with ‘superstitious’ creeds including Catholicism, Islam and Hinduism.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library and other partner libraries, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection brings back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - *Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances*

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Essay on Superstition

*Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical
Influence on the Mind in the Production
of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances*

WILLIAM NEWNHAM



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108044233

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2012

This edition first published 1830

This digitally printed version 2012

ISBN 978-1-108-04423-3 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ESSAY ON SUPERSTITION.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LONDON:

IBOTSON AND PALMER, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ESSAY ON SUPERSTITION;

BEING AN INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS

OF

PHYSICAL INFLUENCE ON THE MIND,

IN THE PRODUCTION OF DREAMS, VISIONS, GHOSTS, AND

OTHER SUPERNATURAL APPEARANCES.

BY W. NEWNHAM, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF A TRIBUTE OF SYMPATHY, THE PRINCIPLES OF PHYSICAL,
INTELLECTUAL, MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, &c. &c.

“ And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards, that peep, and that mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living, to the dead?—To the law and to the testimony:—If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”—*Isaiah*, viii. 19, 50.

LONDON:

J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY.

SOLD ALSO BY J. NICHOLS, FARNHAM.

1830.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER,

&c. &c. &c.

MY LORD,

Allow me to express my gratitude for your Lordship's permission to place the following pages under your protection; and for the kind interest with which you have noticed and facilitated their progress. Possessing the privilege of near access to your Lordship, and bound by far other ties than those which subsist between an Author and his Patron, a labour under

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

DEDICATION.

the insuperable difficulty of employing language which may wear the appearance of adulation; or of not expressing half the feelings of a heart deeply penetrated with a sense of your Lordship's friendship. I prefer the latter alternative; at the hazard of being charged by others with not duly appreciating the uniform kindness which I have ever received from your Lordship.

Permit me then, my Lord, simply to inscribe to you this volume, as a small testimony of affectionate esteem and regard; and with the expression of a hope, that your Lordship's simplicity of purpose may be as fully appreciated by the world, as it must be by those who have the happiness of knowing you most intimately; and that God, in his infinite mercy, would graciously long spare your

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

DEDICATION.

vii

valuable life as a nursing father to his
Church,

I remain,

My Lord,

With great respect,

Your Lordship's

Affectionate and devoted Servant,

W. NEWNHAM.

Farnham, February 10, 1830.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

THE *subject* of the following pages was originally suggested to the Author, by a highly-valued friend, as one on which his pen might be usefully employed, in endeavouring to remove some of those misconceptions which *seem* to place the pursuits of the Christian, in opposition to the researches of science; a *spectral imagining*, which can alone maintain its supposed existence, so long as it can be invested with the undefined character that will be communicated by the darkness of ignorance, or by the twilight of information, but which must vanish before the full-born day of knowledge:—for Christianity and true science can

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

PREFACE.

never be opposed;—and it may be fearlessly said, that the investigations of the latter, if conducted in a spirit of inquiry after truth, will *always* serve to *explain and confirm* the former; although they will also dissipate the mistakes of some of its most valuable professors.

The idea thus suggested to the Author was acted upon, and from this arose a series of communications to the “Christian Observer,” during the course of the past year. These Essays are now collected into one volume, and are presented to the Public, with various corrections, and additional illustrations, in the hope that they may prove acceptable to a larger class of readers; and that they may be useful in undermining the wall of prejudice, which has been just alluded to: their Author most sincerely and fervently prays, that they may prove the means of widening the agency of real religion, by contracting the limits of the prejudices against its influence.

It is perhaps a little extraordinary, that a work undertaken with this view, should have

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

xi

been charged with a tendency to *infidelity*. Of late years, this term has been very commonly applied to all those who stepped out of the beaten track, in order to extend the boundary of present knowledge, and to inquire into the secret springs, by whose operation, certain phenomena were obtained, and certain results attended. Perhaps it might be well to inquire, how far the zeal which has prompted a charge of this general nature, was really the *offspring* of a *Christian spirit*, and how far it may have been the product of indulging a natural severity, and other peculiarities of character,—themselves at variance with that spirit, and in so far as this may have been the case, closely allied to infidelity. The effect of Christianity is one of meekness and forbearance—of tenderness and prudence:—may the Author and his friends, and those who differ from him, strive earnestly to drink more deeply into the spirit which was in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to imitate his most perfect example. For himself, he can only most solemnly appeal to the great Searcher of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

PREFACE.

hearts, that his simple object has been, to extend the influence of genuine Christianity, and the glory of Christ; and he humbly prays that such may be the result of the present inquiry; and if so, to God be all the praise!

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of
Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other
Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

	Page
CHAPTER I.	
INTRODUCTORY Remarks	1
CHAPTER II.	
Division of the subject.—Of superstition in general.	
Its essential character. Its varieties. Its causes	21
CHAPTER III.	
Materiality of the brain, and its subjection to the agency of physical causes. It is the organ of mind, and will influence its manifestations. It is liable to morbid action, according to the particular organ of the body which may be in a state of irritation; proofs of this position, arising out of simple, and morbid, and sym- pathetic excitement of the brain	50
CHAPTER IV.	
Particular sympathies of the brain;—with the heart— with the blood—with the organs of respiration—with the stomach—with the liver—with the function of secretion in general—with the muscular system—with the skin, &c. &c. Conclusions -	82

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER V.

Phenomena of disordered brainular function, and its influence on the manifestations of mind.—Sensorial feebleness or perversion; great susceptibility; hallucination; unconquerable wakefulness; change of intellectual and moral manifestations 112

CHAPTER VI.

The same subject continued.—Early and slight changes of character accompanying this state. Varied influence upon the bodily functions; intermittent or remittent character of the brain's maladies—epilepsy—possession. Causes producing irritation of the brain; viz. original malconformation; wounds; concussion; compression; fever; local inflammation; the entire class of nervous diseases; hypochondriasis. General inferences 128

CHAPTER VII.

Phenomena of sleep, and its morbid states. Its physiological laws. Its morbid conditions. Waking dreams or reveries. Nightmare. Dreams 147

CHAPTER VIII.

The same subject continued.—Definition of dreams; no dreams in natural sleep; dreaming independent of the intellectual faculties; proximate cause of dreaming; exciting causes; imperfect sleep; irritation of the brain; dreams of disease; their endless variety, and organic classification. Dreams of insanity; distinction of dreams, arising from primary or secondary irritation of the brain; recollected impressions; accidental associations 162

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

XV

CHAPTER IX.

The same subject continued.—Somnambulism. Second sight. Animal magnetism. Influence of imagination, and of superstitious credence. Is there *any* truth in popular superstitions? 181

CHAPTER X.

The same subject continued.—Are dreams commissioned for the discovery of crime? Application of the Author's principles to the history of W. Corder. Agency of the devil in the production of dreams, and various errors. Vision of angels, &c. 202

CHAPTER XI.

On presentiments. Omens. The case of martyrs, and their extraordinary supernatural aid. Opinions of Dr. Hibbert, and of the author of "Past Feelings Renovated." 217

CHAPTER XII.

Agency of evil spirits; possession; *dæmonomania*; temptation; astrology; doctrine of apparitions; spiritual contemplation; peculiar physical state 231

CHAPTER XIII.

Critical inquiry into the views of a recent writer in the "Record," on the subject of apparitions 248

CHAPTER XIV.

Influence of nitrous-oxyde gas on the brain:—agency of Belladonna, Stramonium, opium, hemlock, fox-glove, &c.; various illustrative cases. Influence of several mental excitants in the creation of apparitions 268

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04423-3 - Essay on Superstition: Being an Inquiry into the Effects of Physical Influence on the Mind in the Production of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, and Other Supernatural Appearances

William Newnham

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XV.

- Influence of brainular disease on the function of volition.
 Appearance of departed spirits to distant friends.
 Other supernatural appearances. Various illustrative narratives 298

CHAPTER XVI.

- The same subject continued.—Examination of some popular histories of supernatural visitation. Lord Tyrone and Lady Beresford. Lord Lytton, &c. . 318

CHAPTER XVII.

- Summary review of the preceding argument . . . 340

CHAPTER XVIII.

- The same subject continued 363

CHAPTER XIX.

- The same subject continued 383

CHAPTER XX.

- Conclusions arising from a review of the whole subject 409