

THE BUGBEAR OF RITUALISM.

A modern writer observes, "mankind in this world are divided into flocks, and follow their several bell wethers. Now, it is well known, let the bell wether rush through any gap, the rest rush after him, were it into bottomless quagmires. Nay, so conscientious are sheep in this particular, as a quaint naturalist and moralist has noted, if you hold a stick before the wether, so that he is forced to vault in his passage, the whole flock will then do the like when the stick is withdrawn: and the thousandth sheep shall be seen vaulting impetuously over air, as the first did over an otherwise impassable barrier." Now this description of a flock of sheep is an exact description of the general aimless rush that one very large flock of men are making now. Ask an ordinary person what he means by that ritualism which is such a bugbear to him, and perhaps he will not be able to say at all, or if he can luckily hit upon an answer, it will be totally different to that which every other person in a hundred will give. In fact, if he has been declaiming for a month daily against ritualism, he will think it hard to be asked what he means by it. An illustrious person had once been inveighing against a modern popular game, and was simply asked by a bystander, whether he could play it, or understood it. No, the reply was, he could not say that he did understand it. Just so is the popular outcry against the modern bugbear, the ghost of modern ghost seers, which when a stronger light is brought to bear upon it, shrinks down to very different proportions from those in which their imagination depicted it. Now, we do not for a moment, suppose that we can prevent any of this flock of bugbear seers from vaulting over the stick, over which the bell whether vaulted, even if we remove the stick; this would be quite lost labour, yet we may try and explain very briefly something about this dreadful matter, that the sheep may at least have some stick to jump over. And this is not altogether easy, if we are too strictly tied to proper logical definitions; for in that case we should have great difficulty in finding any explanation of ritualism, which did not include too much; for the most resolute anti-ritualist who sits through the whole Sunday service, and resolutely declines every response, is standing out for his view of forms and ceremonies, as strictly as his neighbour who adheres to the instructions of his service books. Surely then the man who refuses to use particular forms is quite as much of an ultra ritualist, as the man who uses too many; both are attaching an exaggerated importance to ritual and according to that strange inconsistency, to which all of us are liable, it frequently happens that the very man who in private life attaches most importance to forms, who values order in his household, neatness and beauty in his apartments, and conducts himself according to all the strictest rules of society, seems to think this very order, and beauty, and ceremony quite wicked in the House of God. But taking the popular meaning of ritualism, two things are included under the term; two things so entirely separate, that a churchman might value

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