

wonted word or look from him told you that he had been shaken with unusual emotion, that something had passed. You prayed for one at a distance. A letter comes brimful of such things as startle you, you cannot believe your eyes, it so exactly corresponds with the prayer, something you longed and prayed for. A certain conjunction of events, you are helpless, powerless to bring them about. One after another they fall into their places, and personages arrange themselves with an almost dramatic precision. *You* cannot see; *they* do not know the hand that is moving, only one unlooked-for coincidence after another brings about the conjunction of events which you desired, and you have got your chance at last. Long you could not believe that God was occupying Himself

with these trivialities. You said, 'How can these things be?' And we announce to you a doctrine as old as the earliest record of the Bible, probably immeasurably older. We tell you that the great God works spontaneously, sympathetically to us-wards, through a system of divinely appointed intermediary agencies. And then, when this truth has been represented and re-stated according to present modes of speech, and expressed in the latest terms of our knowledge—then the answer to prayer and the whole question of the soul's contact with a spiritual world becomes as easy and intelligible as the answer of one man to another, and the influence and helpfulness, and the care and the love, and protecting regard and watchfulness of a human spirit in the flesh over another.

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## CURRENT LITERATURE.

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THE first place must, of course, be given this month to Mr. Gladstone's paper on "Ritualism and Ritual," in the *Contemporary Review*. The powerful hold the subject has taken on the public mind in England, and the general eagerness to learn the ex-Premier's views upon it, are evidenced by the fact that this number of the *Review* has reached a third edition. Yet, now that the oracle has spoken, no one is satisfied. Mr. Gladstone leaves everything as he found it, for his utterances are as vague and ambiguous as those of the priestess of Apollo. The Evangelicals complain, as the *Times* puts it, that "there is plenty hinted at that would be more distasteful to an English mind." Moreover, the very question at issue, the bone of contention between the contending parties, is purposely ignored. The question how far Parliament ought to tolerate innovations in ceremonial, made "for the purpose of assimilating it to the Roman or Popish ceremonial; and, further, of introducing the Roman or Papal religion into this country, under the insidious form, and silent but steady suasion, of its ceremonial," is only stated to be dismissed from view. Yet this is precisely what Mr. Gladstone was expected to consider fully and to express his opinions upon with clearness. Nor are the Ritualists better pleased; for there are passages in the essay which seem to insinuate that they are substituting ritual for inward

devotion, and bringing in the reign of "formality and deadness." Finally, the Roman Catholics are not merely dissatisfied with the essay, but positively in anger about five words in it—"the bloody reign of Mary." Perhaps the Dean of Westminster and his friends are the only Churchmen likely to regard Mr. Gladstone's attitude with complacency. Yet the speech delivered by the ex-Premier last session on the Public Worship Bill might have saved the belligerents from disappointment. The essay is only a new edition of the speech, elaborated and adjusted to the ear of the theological public. Mr. Gladstone is opposed to coercion and favourable to comprehension in ceremony, if not in doctrine. He, therefore, desires to mediate, and hence deals in casuistry, so as, if possible, to keep the subject *in nubibus*. The result might have been anticipated. Leaving on one side the definitions, the complaint that Englishmen want æsthetic taste, and the remarks on the progress of ritualism in all the churches, the gist of the essay is easily given. Ritual may be good or it may be bad; there may be too much of it or there may be too little; and both excess and defect are faults. If ritual ministers to personal religion it is good, no matter what the amount of it; if ritual impedes or is a substitute for the religion of the heart, then it is harmful, no matter how small the extent of it. All depends on the individual worshipper; for what is