

WHERE TO GO.

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Modern Witchcraft.

BY LINA MOLLETT.

THE supernatural and the psychical, the hypnotic and the esoteric, are nowadays after-dinner topics that hardly ever fail to rouse the vitality and interest of the most apathetic guest—call forth anecdotes from the discursive, theories from the introspective and metaphysical, and act as effectually as dynamite on dullness.

How highly civilised we are! How learnedly we sound the depths of the human soul and its unbodied possibilities of action! How vastly superior *we* (philosophising over sherry and walnuts) are to our ignorant ancestors, who, after suppers of ale and beef, gathered round their huge log fire to be enthralled by some old grandame's ghost or witch story, and speak in awed whispers of the evil eye, the wee man in grey, the lady in white, and a variety of highly-respected spirits, who, without any of the paraphernalia necessary to modern spirit-rappers, were wont to take occasional or periodical exercise amidst the scenes of their earthly woes and wrongs.

Poor, foolish ancestors! They superstitiously believed in the miraculous influence, curative or malignant, of some minds over the bodies and souls of others.

What modern schoolgirl has not been fascinated by tales of "The King's Touch," Joan of Arc inspiring hosts by the strength of her conviction, or, maybe, of German Wallenstein, whose extraordinary talents of leadership and personal influence over the roughest of half-trained mercenaries were ascribed to frequent communings with the unseen elements of spiritual existence. All through the web of history runs a thread of superstition, which seems to be an integral part of man's nature. The vagaries of his Satanic Majesty and suite are grave realities to the chroniclers of the past.

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Then followed a period of the practical, common-sense and common-place, of the hideous in art, of a literature of truisms, massive mahogany household gods, the workshop of the tangible material comforts of this life, jolly rosy John Bull faces and white-washed barns, bare as the imagination of the time for spiritual contemplation.

Recently, as was to be expected from what we know of the sea-saw movement of man's mind, reaction set in, and, as the immortal clown says: "Here we are again!" Yes, there they are again, ghosts, wizards, and witches, resuscitated and reinstated from dusty lofts and gloomy Hades, advanced too in life with our Nineteenth Century progress, and decked out with fine grand titles—a veritable aristocracy of the supernatural!

The Psychical Society familiarises us with ghosts, and shows us that undoubtedly wraith-seers are quite as common as giant gooseberries and sea-serpents in a lull of political episode, and certainly more interesting. Esoteric Buddhism introduces us so heartily to the spirit world, that our cold English nature warms into polite intercourse with minds minus matter; novelists write prophetic novels, that immediately become significantly popular, and even a highly-respectable ecclesiastical magazine condescends to discuss gravely in its columns "the reliability of ghost stories."

No longer do ladies suspected of intercourse with invisible beings of doubtful morals burn on market-places, involving in their ruin the Tommy or Tabby of their domestic hearth. Oh, no! Encouraged by the awed interest of their enlightened Nineteenth Century fellow citizens, they show forth their experiences in the leading daily papers, and gather round themselves admiring disciples.

No longer do men who "enchant by strange arts" (as the Legislature of the Seventeenth Century would have put it) linger in dungeons, suspected or accused of "holding covenant with a familiar spirit, a crime punishable by death. We call them no longer "wizards," but hypnotists, or mesmerists. Their influence is interesting to those who are scientific (and, I must add, even more to those who are *not*). We do not question their curative power in many forms of weakened will and hysteria, and wherever that power is exercised for the good of suffering humanity incompetent and careful hands (I suppose I ought to say *minds*) there is no one who would wish to stay it; but when we are told that popular exhi-

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