

## First appearance of ‘The Firm’

Presently the sound of bells attracted us into the south-east transept, where Miss Agnes, remarkable for ecclesiastical sentiment and mediaeval tendencies, went into raptures at Mr Scott’s screen for Hereford Cathedral, with its wrought iron and hammered copper foliage; but when we came to Mr Nesfield’s dairy fountain—probably the most artistic basin that butter ever floated in—with that wonderful peacock of inlaid British marbles, and the seasons all cunningly devised around, she was for persuading her father to order a similar one for Hollygate; and I verily believe would have exchanged places with Betty at home, and scalded the cream with her own fair hands, so that her wish was accomplished.

It is a curious and interesting epidemic—this ‘moyen age’ mania in our island at the present time: when and how did it first arise? From Pugin’s ashes or the writings of Ruskin? How has it gained such a hold on the hearts of Young England? We see the evidences of it now, more or less, in every church, in every home, in every shop we enter. It is pointing our windows, and inlaying our cabinets, and gothicising the plates we eat from, the chairs on which we sit, the papers on our walls. It influences the binding of our books, the colour of our carpets, the shape of our beer-jugs, picture-frames, candlesticks, what not? As we strolled into the court devoted to the exhibition of Messrs. Morris and Co’s mediaeval furniture, tapestries, &c., who could have believed that it represented manufactures of the nineteenth century—the age, par excellence, of cog-wheels and steam rams and rifled cannon? Six hundred years have passed since the style of yon cabinet was in vogue. On such a faldstool as this the good St. Louis may have prayed. Can’t you imagine Blanche of Castile arranging her tresses at that mirror? I declare the thought suggested itself as I caught my fair cousin glancing at her reflection with no small complacency. ‘Wouldn’t you like to go and see Mr Flaxman’s new statue of “Female Vanity”?’ said I. Whereupon Miss Rose, with a toss of her head, and looking mighty sulky, remarked that she was ready to go wherever her papa wished.

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