

## Architectural "Restorations."

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A VERY conspicuous and very frequent result of the popularity accorded during the last few years to archaeological studies is presented in the desire, evinced by persons to whom whether as owners or official guardians is entrusted the custody of ancient edifices, of restoring those buildings to the appearance which they are fancifully supposed to have originally exhibited. Is the rector, or the squire, or the lawyer-churchwarden, for example, possessed of some knowledge of ancient architectural forms, and of some taste for the marvels of mediæval skill, ten to one but you shall presently hear that the grey old parish church, breathing from every stone of ages long passed away, is to be forthwith "restored," its crumbling mouldings recreated, its half-obliterated sculptures renovated, its time-worn ornaments replaced. Circulars are issued, subscriptions solicited, sums collected, (princely sums too, not unfrequently) meetings held, with chairmen and committees, and treasurers, and secretaries, and gratifying reports of progress. Then, to go a step further, Divine service is suspended, masons and carpenters are called in, and the old church is transformed, transfigured, and metamorphosed with a celerity characteristic of our age and temper. Some months afterwards there is a great gather-

ing; again there is sacred service in the edifice thus operated on; the good rector can hardly be heard for the emotion which well nigh strangles him in his efforts to moderate the expression of his joy at the fulfilment of his hopes and labours; the committee-men assume airs of well-merited importance; and the parishioners at large look kindly on, glad to get back to their church, and more than ever conscious of the misery of absence from its consecrated walls. Thenceforth matters proceed as usual, only that every day some stranger or other, attracted by the report of what has been done, comes to exercise his critical taste in blame or praise of the result, and goes away delighted or disgusted more in proportion to the amount of his knowledge than of the skill displayed in the "restoration" itself. The latter is usually small; and, the more the visitor knows, the more, in general, his feelings are outraged.

There is, nevertheless, very often much that has been effected about which words, even many, would not be thrown away. I have in my mind's eye a church where, in the room of a plain but good Perpendicular porch, leading to a nave of the same age, separated by a Norman arch from a Decorated chancel with a graceful piscina, such a pilgrim may notice the following arrangement:— He may enter by an early English porch, with mouldings multitudinous! He may proceed to a nave whose windows are of the geometrical Decorated period. The Norman chancel-arch has been retained, though re-ornamented; but at present the chancel is early English, with sedilia, two piscinae, and an east window of five lights! The whole is new, and cost four thousand five hundred pounds.

I make no reflection on the spirit which in numberless

instances has suggested such works, or on the liberality and self-devotion which have carried them into execution. Ill would it become me so much as to hint dispraise of what is in many cases so dutiful, so reverent, so disinterested, and so pure. Still I would remember that I am addressing a learned Society, established for the very pursuit of those studies, the cultivation of which has, more than aught else, led the way to the result that I have just noticed; and I would seriously and earnestly endeavour to view the subject as one of our temptations and dangers, as well as one which furnishes an evidence of kindly zeal and an amiable desire of improvement. I feel, indeed, that I ought not so much as to approach the topic on which I desire to make a few remarks, without first presenting its bright side and saying what I can in its favour. Perhaps I may be weakening that which I have subsequently to bring before you. At any rate I shall be honest. I love too well and reverence too deeply the feelings which have prompted many such "restorations," to take an evil advantage of any power which I may possess of exhibiting their real defects, and of pointing out for condemnation and consequent avoidance the issue in which they have resulted.

But I must not be dissuaded by the excellent intentions which in so many instances have taken the lead in carrying out such labours, from boldly stating and truthfully exposing the pernicious effects to which they have contributed. "Restoration" is the title too generally given to such alterations of ancient structures, while "destruction" would be by far the more correct expression. Abundance of zeal is indeed conspicuous; but it is too frequently a zeal without knowledge, if it may not even be said to be an irreparable display of ignorant presumption. Precious

remains are daily attacked under the plea of embellishing what is unsightly and of supporting what is ready to fall. The so-called embellishing consists in the defacement of the object, and the so-called supporting in its annihilation or complete metamorphosis. The old proverb is again exemplified, "Tempus edax, homo edacior," which a great Frenchman of our own age has well translated, "Time is blind, man stupid."

Allow me, then, to say a word in favour of mouldings, though crumbling; of sculpture, though mutilated; of walls, and doorways, and roofs, and windows, though imagined to be incomplete and susceptible of considerable restoration. Crumbling, and mutilated, and incomplete they may be. The question is, whether by meddling with them we can do them or ought else a service. I do not think that we can. On the contrary, I think I can show that we cannot—that, so far from doing good, we may to an incalculable extent be doing evil.

What, in the first place, is an ancient edifice? It is a grey relic of ages past and gone. It tells of men and times which have few memorials, and none more visibly and truly attractive than the old walls which they reared, and on which they left the impress of their taste. It was oftentimes the scene of ancient faith, and within its limits some portion of that eventful drama has been transacted which forms the staple of our ecclesiastical or civil history. And not only this: the edifice itself contains a brief chapter, a section at least, of *the history of art*. Its stones cry out to the instructed ear, and reveal wisdom to eyes that have been trained to see. How poor and plain soever, much may be learned from their examination and careful study; at the least, we can speak with assured certainty of the age of the building under our review, and

whether it was the work of one or of several periods. Every detail is more or less interesting, as the work of ancient hands, and declaratory of the mode in which our forefathers met the requirements of their age; to say nothing of a certain innate and inseparable grace which clings to these old structures in every stage of decay and under all circumstances of man's neglect. An ancient edifice is, in one word, a study—a study for the historian, for the divine, the architect, and the artist—for all who love to look back into the vista of the past, either from a desire to escape from, or to bring additional means of enjoyment to, the matter-of-fact vulgarity of the present.

I cannot, indeed, too warmly insist upon the unapproachable beauty and pathetic loveliness of the majority of ancient structures, and the rich mine which they present to modern investigators. Our old churches, for example, and other religious edifices in the several Gothic styles, are models of exquisite taste, and of the perfect command over material which their builders possessed. *They constitute, accordingly the only real schools for modern disciples in the architectural art.* An architect must be imbued with their spirit, and a master of their forms, to be at all worthy of his great name. Not in the studio and over the drawing-table, but amid the walls, and piers, and arches, and ornaments of the structures themselves he can drink in the inspiration and catch the magic of their wondrous beauty. It matters not that the hand of Time, or the still more ruthless attack of human aggression, in the shape of centuries of contemptuous neglect, has despoiled them of a portion of what they once possessed. They have yet abundance to teach, to suggest, to recommend, and to reveal. Every detail has a voice, every arrangement a lesson, every stone a sermon. And



the very dilapidation which is conspicuous adds a value of its own to the lessons which the forms convey; because it certifies to the genuineness of the teaching, and assures the student that he may depend upon what he reads.

Viewing an ancient structure in this light—as a genuine monument of a departed age, and an authentic and truthful pattern for modern imitation—we come to the conclusion that time on the one hand and neglect on the other are in very truth far less injurious than attempts at so-called “restoration.” Time and neglect do not falsify a building; if they add nothing to teach, they introduce nothing to mislead. They do not annex a fictitious character to edifices, and make them utter falsehoods which may deceive the unwary. The utmost which they do is to present in a mutilated form what once was perfect; but they do not give to that mutilated perfection a totally contrary aspect. They do not turn one kind of moulding into another, or change the geometrical tracery of a decorated window into the perpendicular lines of another style, or cut Greek volutes in Norman piers! Let time and neglect do their worst, nothing of this kind can be charged upon them. Can such be affirmed of other influences? Alas! how many a “restored” church must answer the question in the unhappy negative!

Time and neglect, then, are really friends, when compared with the interference of those misguided though avowedly friendly persons who irreparably injure, while they profess to benefit. For contrast more minutely the operations of the two influences. The influence of time and neglect we have already noticed. Great as may be their hostility, their influence is truthful; they instruct us honestly, and without so much as attempting to mislead. They say, ‘We have done our utmost to destroy; but

what has escaped our aggression is genuine and true. You may be assured of what you see, and depend on what we have suffered to remain.' Good and satisfactory. But the "restorers!"—what must they admit, if they be but equally truthful in the account of their labours? They must confess that they have falsified that which they have touched, and that they have entirely removed from the object its special and peculiar value. They may have made the edifice more commodious and comfortable, as they call it, and, as they may fancy, more stable and secure, but they have taken from the structure that priceless quality which, when once lost, can never be restored. They have turned truth into falsehood; they have made that which once could confidently and authoritatively instruct, a vehicle for the transmission and extension of a lie; they have closed for ever the lips of a witness that could not mislead, and in its stead they have given life to another, whose every word is falsehood, and whose every hint is delusion and deceit. Who would do so in any other department of archæological interest? Who but a madman would, for example, retouch an ancient manuscript, or attempt to bring out into greater relief the precious lines on some inedited coin? Doings similar to these are left to architectural "restorers." And oh! how it makes the hearts of many of us bleed, when, after an absence of years, we revisit some beloved shrine, the idol of youth or early manhood, and find that the well-intentioned but ignorant spoiler has been there, and has "restored" our treasure into a false pretender to that which it never really was, whilst he has obliterated the truthful lines and erased the indubitable characteristics which unhesitatingly and clearly revealed its specific peculiarities and real claims on our regard. What he has

left behind is our treasure and delight no longer ; but, with all the smooth outside which he may have given it, nought else but literally, “a mockery, a delusion, and a snare ;” or, if I may quote my own words in another place, “a hypocrite in stone and plaster, as despicable in its way as a hypocrite in flesh and blood !”

Permit me to cite an example in this very county, an example of which indeed I can scarcely bear to speak with patience. For the sake of brevity, I select one single object—an object, however, which used to possess for me very many and sacred charms—I allude to the font of St. James’s Church, in Taunton. It was one of those fine octagonal fonts of the fifteenth century, with which most of us must be familiar, adorned with niches, figures, and quatrefoils. When the church was “restored” to its present condition, the font was not permitted to pass without its share of the general outrage. On a subsequent visit I could not so much as recognise the dearly-loved relic. It also had been “restored ;” that is, all its ancient peculiarities had been obliterated, the chisel had passed over its entire surface, an Italian artist in plaster had supplied some figures, which were stated to be produced “without violating the true character” of the monument. A handbill, issued on the completion of these atrocities, magniloquently asserted that the font had been “restored to its original perfect state,” and that the said restoration was “accomplished in a manner highly creditable !” This is precisely the kind of ordeal to which many of our churches have been ruthlessly subjected, an ordeal which has been followed by a result similar to that in the case of the font of St. James’s, whose proper synonyme is—destruction !

May I add, without offence, that in this same town of



Taunton there is a precious Tower, now, alas, in jeopardy from the same feeling as that to which I have referred—hanging, as it were, in the balance of public opinion, and whose days, for aught that I know, are numbered! My accomplished friend, the architect applied to, has honourably and truthfully declared of it, “The old tower, so long as it remains, will always be more valued than a new one, however perfect.” Most thankful shall I be if any words of mine shall aid in recommending such an opinion, and in leading to a more accurate judgment those who, with the best intentions, (for of that their liberality is a convincing proof) seem, nevertheless, inclined to dispute its truth.

But observe not only the unpardonable violation of every feeling of reverence, truthfulness, and reality, whereof such doings are guilty, but the irreparable injury which is thus perpetrated on every department of art. Let it not be forgotten that restoration at the very best can be but restoration. Its authority, therefore, must needs be limited, and by a large class of minds will not be so much as recognised at all. Because, in fact, *the authority of a restored building is but the authority of the restorer.* The edifice ceases to be an independent testimony, and becomes the mere exponent of the views of some modern architect. Its artistic value is entirely gone; and the nearer it apparently resembles the original, the more false it is, and the more certain to deceive. I do not underrate the taste and acquirements of modern builders by thus expressing my grief over the ancient works with which too many of them have presumed to meddle. I have some learned members of that noble profession among my most intimate and valued friends—men so imbued with the feelings of their great predecessors that all their creations are veritable impersonations and

reproductions of the styles of mediæval days. A new church in such accomplished hands is sure to have merit, and perhaps transcendant excellence. Need I mention such men as my friends Mr. Ashpitel, Mr. Charles Baily, Mr. Anthony Salvin, and Mr. George Gilbert Scott? They shall build you edifices which faithfully reflect the forms of old, and show that exquisite taste and true artistic feeling have yet among ourselves some hearts in which to dwell. But the labours of architects must be confined to their proper province. And that province lies not in changing the character of our old buildings, but in constructing new ones in which the old spirit is truthfully embodied; not in erasing from those examples of our forefathers' skill which have happily descended to our own times the marks which constitute their value, as real examples of ancient art and sources from which its true peculiarities may be learned and understood, but in diligently studying those peculiarities, in jealously guarding them, and in truthfully reiterating them in the works which they construct. With the precious originals let them not dare to tamper. Let them, and let us, remember, that no restored monument is an example of ancient art; that henceforth no lessons can be learned from it, no suggestions obtained, no counsels taken; that, how clever, picturesque, and graceful soever the restoration may be, it is, and it ever will be, a restoration only. No pilgrim will ever religiously visit it, or, if he do, will ever draw from it the wisdom that one crumbling fragment of the building which preceded it would never have failed to give him. It will hereafter fire no patriot's soul and kindle no poet's eye. Its historical importance, its artistic value, its architectural authority—all are gone—gone irretrievably—gone for ever. In words which have lately emanated from the Executive

Committee, of which I have the honour to be a member, of the Society of Antiquaries, and which we have properly embodied in a brief circular for distribution, as circumstances shall occur, through the length and breadth of England, whose memorials are exposed to such fearful jeopardy :—so-called restoration is not only “wholly opposed to the judgment of the best archæologists,” but is essentially “untrue in art, unjustifiable in taste, destructive in practice,” and productive of “irreparable mischief.”

“Woodman spare that tree!” sings in pathetic strains the fair! “Rectors, churchwardens, vestrymen, architects,” sighs the archæologist, “spare your churches, have pity on your ancient houses, and let your crumbling walls alone.” They will last much longer than many of you suppose. And rest assured that you cannot match them, if you try! You may remove subsequent additions, unsightly galleries, flat ceilings above which timber roofs lie concealed, multitudinous coats of whitewash, and as multitudinous coats of paint. You may let the light into windows, and allow feet to pass through doorways where modern brickwork has denied an entrance; and you may take away as many recent excrescences as you please, be they of whatever kind they may. And then you will have done to the old portion of your church all that you ought to do. “But the structures themselves are falling,” perhaps you answer. First of all, I reply, be sure of this. Then, if the fact be certain—if time, or neglect, or both, have produced their worst result—endeavour what you can to simply strengthen, without removing, and without adding to. See what iron will effect in the way of binding together parts which are becoming disunited. Let your motto be, “Preserve.” Recollect that everything rescued from destruction is a precious gain. And reflect for a

moment before we part on the alternative. Suppose you were to allow those ancient glories to be removed, and that the very best and most accomplished architect of the age were to superintend the introduction of other ornaments, or the erection of another fabric. How would you yourselves regard his work after he had finished it, and perhaps had done his best and effected his mightiest? You would think it, perhaps, clever, perhaps grand, perhaps artistic and striking. This is *all* that even you yourselves could think it. A grey fragment of the former edifice would be really dearer to you than all the rest. Never could you regard the new as you did the old, itself hallowed and hallowing all that was united to it. You would look upon it with different eyes, and think of it with different hearts. Stay your hand, I entreat you, while you yet possess your ancient treasure: after the visit of the spoiler you will look and long for it in vain. Tenderly watch its signs of decay. Protract its duration as long as possible. And keep it faithfully—keep it religiously—keep it inviolately. Resist all attempts to “restore.” The solemn ruin shall breath what no restoration can ever reveal. For, once more—and never be the maxim forgotten—RESTORATION IS DESTRUCTION, AND A MONUMENT RESTORED IS A MONUMENT DESTROYED.

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