

CHURCH RESTORATION.¹

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I have to thank the Institute for having done me the honour of asking me to preside over the Architectural Section of this meeting, which honour I have accepted with much diffidence, as I am only too conscious of my unfitness for such a position.

It might be very properly expected of me, as you are gathered in this important centre in East Anglia, that I should direct your attention to some of the many features of architectural interest with which this neighbourhood abounds; but, in the first place, I am quite a new comer into Suffolk, and, as it is almost a *terra incognita* to me, my place is more properly that of a learner than a guide; and, secondly, there is the less need of any such guidance being given at this meeting, inasmuch as you are engaged every day in seeing with your own eyes the chief objects likely to interest you within a considerable area around this centre.

It has therefore seemed to me that on the present occasion it would be better that the few remarks I have to make should be of a general character. Not, indeed, that I am going to deal with the subject of architecture as a whole, or attempt to deal comprehensively in this brief paper with a subject which occupies ninety-three pages of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

But, as it has been my duty in the last twenty-five years to concern myself in an official manner with what is known in popular language as church restoration, I thought it might not be out of place for me to say a few words on that subject to-night.

It will doubtless be allowed that, being a priest of the Church of England and not a professional architect, my

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observations will properly be concerned with "restoration" as applied to churches, rather than in connection with secular buildings.

Now, what is the true meaning of the much misused word "restoration"? If I turn to Latham's edition of *Todd's Johnson's Dictionary*, I find the simple explanation that restoration is the "act of replacing in a former state"—or, more fully, the *Dictionnaire de l'Academie Francaise* explains thus, "Restauration se dit, particulièrement, en Architecture, d'un travail fait d'après un édifice antique, pour en rétablir les parties qui n'existent plus."

There still remains, however, a considerable ambiguity about the word. If you have the misfortune to lose the sight of an eye on account of the formation of a cataract, perhaps, under the hand of a skilful operator, the cataract may be removed and you have with the aid of glasses a perfect restoration of your sight; but if, unhappily, your eye is smashed up completely by an accident, and the surgical-instrument maker fits you with a glass eye, carefully tinted to match the other, you would not call that "restoration."

At the close of the nineteenth century we have arrived at a period when church restoration is more a thing of the past than of the future; and can we say that, on the whole, the work has been done wisely and well?

Probably, within the present century, at least £50,000,000 has been spent upon the fabrics of churches, though it is quite impossible, owing to no records having been preserved in some parishes, and only very imperfect records in others, to arrive at any accurate detailed statement on the subject. The return obtained from Parliament by the late Lord Hampton (better known as Sir John Pakington) is so deficient as to be of but little use. Perhaps if we divided the sum I have named above equally between new churches and old ones, we should not be very wide of the mark, and therefore we have the sum of twenty-five millions as representing the voluntary contributions raised for church restoration since the close of the eighteenth century.

This is a very large amount of money, and it may well be asked whether it has been always laid out

judiciously. Those of us who are old enough to remember what our parish churches were like forty or fifty years ago can well allow that very much was needed to be done in order to make them at all fit for the high purpose for which they were intended. The gross neglect of the two centuries preceding only evidenced too plainly the need there was for extensive repairs. A friend of mine, vicar of a Devonshire parish, had to take an umbrella up into the pulpit on a rainy day to hold over his head when he was preaching, as the rain poured down in a stream from a hole in the roof over the preacher's head. No one can complain of the repairs which were needed in this church; but, unfortunately, many ardent spirits elsewhere thought that repair always involved "restoration," and such restoration as their own minds suggested rather than that which the necessities of the case demanded.

But, in many instances, even "restoration" was not deemed sufficient, and demolition was thought to be the only cure for a church in which the incongruous insertions of post-medieval date abounded. A case in point occurs to me. In a quaint churchyard in one of our southern counties stood a quainter church. Perhaps the fabric was not rich in features of fifteenth or fourteenth century or of earlier date; but the interior was the quaintest part of all. I was preaching in the church on July 12th, 1874, and from the pulpit I could count seven galleries—some of them consisted only of a tiny pew, to hold two persons, or even but one, perched up against the capital of a nave pillar with a little staircase all to itself. The church had been beautified in the approved churchwarden style; that is to say, it had been whitewashed all over and bands of black some two or three inches wide were painted round the doorways and windows, while a few texts of Scripture within oval black lines adorned the walls here and there. That which immediately faced the preacher was "How dreadful is this place." Well, an eminent architect was called in, and the church was absolutely condemned, and now a brand new church, entirely featureless, and devoid of a single interesting or restful point upon which to fix the eye, occupies the site of the old one.

Again, in a guide book to a large church with which I am acquainted the reader is told, in some such words as these, that the church was elegantly restored a few years ago, nevertheless some objects of antiquity still remain.

How often have we read in the penny-a-liner's account of the reopening of a church that it has been completely restored to its "pristine" condition? I very much question, if the actual thirteenth-century builder of such a church could now visit it, whether he would recognize in the work of the nineteenth-century workman any similarity to his original conception. Unless you have the actual designs of the original fabric before you, it is rubbish to talk of the guesswork of the modern "restorer" as "replacing the church in its former state."

Next, I should like to say a few words on the methods that have been often used. Given, we will say, a church of the Early Decorated period. The date of its erection can be pretty accurately determined by one who has made a study of the subject and is familiar with the indications afforded by material, locality, plan, and the details of mouldings, &c. But, upon close observation, it is found that there are traces, more or less marked, of work of later date. Perhaps there are one or two Perpendicular windows or even of the Debased period—a Jacobæan pulpit, woodwork of a later date, an organ case of the Georgian era with gilded pipes in front, and so on. Your correct restorer tells you these are modern additions, and therefore ought to be done away with and the church restored to the exact state in which it first took shape in the Decorated period. This kind of treatment strikes me as falsification of history; and, speaking from the point of view of a Churchman as well as that of an antiquary, I look upon all such restoration as deplorable. The Church of England has a grand history. We pride ourselves upon its continuity from the days of St. Augustine and St. Aidan, and it does seem to me to be simple barbarism to wipe away all the outward landmarks of such history. It is not a history without its vicissitudes, and there may have been periods of which we cannot be very proud; but is it just, is it true, is it right to try and obliterate all such historical records in order to

arrive at what cannot be more than a fraudulent attempt to pass off nineteenth century work as that of the fourteenth?

But to the arguments I have used this objection may be urged. A person will say, "Our old church is not large enough for the needs of the parish, and a separate additional church is not needed. What is to be done? May we not touch the fabric at all?" I should reply without hesitation, "You must first of all meet the needs of the parish; therefore, if necessity demands it, your old church must be enlarged." But, in doing so, use the greatest care to interfere as little as possible with existing work. Except in a few very rare cases where you have a priceless relic of early times which it would be a sin to destroy, it may generally be managed that the additional work can be added without very serious meddling with old work; and, indeed, if the old work must be altered, your needed addition will but be an extra step in the ladder of the church's history. The fifteenth-century architect did not hesitate so to deal with the work of his predecessor in the fourteenth century when the actual need arose, and the same course may be of paramount necessity now; though we must always bear in mind that every church thus altered removes one more from the constantly dwindling specimens of early work.

So, too, in the matter of repairs. I have not a word to say against carrying out necessary repairs if they are done in a proper spirit. The ravages of the weather in our variable climate create such a necessity; and, as I have before mentioned, we have inherited at least two centuries of heartless neglect. But it is when the man who is called in to repair a church is allowed to try his hand at "restoration" that it becomes necessary to raise one's voice in solemn protest. It is on this account that I always prefer to speak of "repairing" rather than of "restoring" a church.

Before concluding, I should like to touch delicately on one matter which as a Churchman I cannot altogether pass by. In many of the thousands of sets of drawings for the so-called "restoration" of English parish churches that I have seen, there has evidently been a great lack of knowledge of what is the real use of a church.

In our Book of Common Prayer there are many very plain directions in reference to the arrangement and disposition of the internal fittings of a church, and yet these are so often overlooked that one wonders sometimes if the architect employed has ever studied the Prayer Book at all. It is on this ground that I always think that the person who is selected for the work of repairing an old or building a new church should be himself an earnest Churchman. His conceptions of what a church is for must necessarily differ from those of a person of another persuasion, who cannot possibly share the Churchman's views of what is necessary for the purposes of divine worship. I have ventured to mention this subject because I cannot look upon a church as merely an object of architectural interest, or for antiquarian study alone. We must remember that, just as music and painting have been for ages past utilised in the service of the Church, and considerably developed thereby, so—and in a more marked degree—architecture rose to much of its grand nobility under the fostering care of the Church, and always had relation to the requirements of the Church services.

We can hardly claim for the century which is now drawing to a close that it has developed a style of architecture peculiar to itself, which will be the pride of succeeding generations. Whether the twentieth century will do so we cannot foretell; but at least we have a grand inheritance of the works of previous centuries, which we should treasure for their own intrinsic merits and for the valuable historical lessons which often they alone can teach us.

In whatever century we live, we should regard ourselves as trustees of the vestiges of the past, both for our own satisfaction and also for the edification of those who succeed us; and we ought to be very jealous of any wanton interference with the labours of those who have long since been laid to their rest.