

## RESTORATION CONSIDERED AS A DESTRUCTIVE ART.

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It has been very justly said by one of the most distinguished members of our County Archæological Society that the modern restorer is a far more dangerous person than Dowsing, because Dowsing's work was only partial, whereas the restorer aims at being thorough, that is, at destroying every vestige of architectural beauty and historical interest.

We all agree that a copy of an antique statue or of a picture by an old master is not as valuable as the original, and that a restored statue or picture is reduced in value by the process; but we do not all seem to recognise that the same holds good of an architectural building. Yet a careful examination of a mediæval traceried window will show that its curves are not segments of circles, as in the new work, and that its mouldings have endless varieties of sections. If a new window is inserted in an old building, it is usually an imitation of the window next to it. But is it not plain that while the one is soft and graceful the other is hard and mechanical? Direct and simple copying, as Ruskin has said, is palpably impossible. What copying can there be of surfaces that have been worn down half an inch? The whole finish of the work was in the half-inch that has disappeared. In the old work there was life; there was suggestion of what it had been, and of what it had lost—some sweetness in the gentle lines (I quote Ruskin) that sun and rain had wrought. There can be none in the brute hardness of the new carving.

In mediæval times the artists carved the work themselves. Now, of course, we have only designers or modellers, and workmen carry out their directions with mathematical exactitude, with square, line, and compass. It is the difference between a beautiful flowing hand, expressive of every word that it writes, and the copy by a lawyer's clerk, or, worse still, a typewriter.

I myself believe that, much as we may regret some of the mutilations which occurred during the Commonwealth, probably a good many of the pictures and ornaments swept away by Dowsing were vulgar, tawdry, and objectionable in other ways; and I often cannot help hoping that some modern Dowsing may arise, who will destroy some of the interpolations introduced by the so-called restorer. There can be no doubt that any one who wishes to earn a crown of martyrdom would deserve most highly of posterity if he were to go round the churches of this country with a pocketful of stones, and to destroy nine-tenths of the coloured windows, the tasteless designs, the crude greens and blues of modern glass, the product of the half-century now drawing to a close, much of which is literally only painted. I remember being very much shocked at some windows which Wales (whose infamous memory is connected with a peculiarly offensive blue in many church windows) introduced into what is now the cathedral at Newcastle; and the verger sympathetically pointed out that they would not last long, as the congregation had amused themselves, during dull sermons, by scratching the paint off the lower lights with the points of their umbrellas.

It is not only the bad glass which is objectionable, but its introduction into buildings where it is altogether out of place. Few "restorers" seem to understand that stained glass was only invented about the Decorated period, and that our ancestors, wiser than ourselves, recognised that even the increased size of the windows of that style would not give sufficient light if filled with colour; and they introduced the great windows of the Perpendicular style, in which to fit the beautiful glass of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Such buildings as Bath Abbey or King's College Chapel are admirably suited for the display of stained glass; and in windows of such proportions coloured glass, even if bad, is at least not out of place.

But it is certainly wrong to darken the small windows of the Norman or even of the Early English period, to hide the architectural beauties of the finest churches of our country, and to render it impossible to hold service even at midday without the use of light, very frequently gas,

which in itself acts as a disintegrating agent, aggravated by the bad air which is the unhappy accompaniment of crowded congregations in unventilated buildings.

At Glasgow the very beautiful old cathedral has been ruined by the introduction of a vast quantity of bad Munich glass. I remember a story of a well-known antiquarian, who was so much shocked on his first entrance that he sat down flat on the floor of the nave and burst into tears. I confess that I nearly did the same.

Any one who has travelled through Normandy and other parts of northern France, examining the wonderful stained glass which decorates the great churches of Rouen, Chartres, Le Mans, and which may often be found even in comparatively unknown churches, will return with disgust to the garish colours which disfigure so many ecclesiastical buildings in England.

There is an unfortunate desire among many ministers of every denomination to leave some mark by which their ministry may be remembered. They wish it to be said: "This screen was put up in the Rev. Jones's time; this chapel was seated in the Rev. Brown's time." And when Brown has signalled his pastorate by substituting benches for pews, he is succeeded by Smith, who hands down his name to posterity by abolishing the benches and replacing the pews. And among the worst of these memorials are the painted windows.

I often think of Oliver Cromwell's wise saying:—"I heed God's house as much as any man; but vanities and trumpery give no honour to God; nor do painted windows make man more pious."

I suppose we are all agreed that what is called cathedral glass is an abomination. There seems to be an idea that the beautiful works of nature should be hidden from the church-goer. To me the sight of the green trees and the blue sky are an aid to devotion.

And there is a horrible fashion, lately introduced by glaziers, of alternating square panes with diamond panes in the same window. The combination is most unsightly. I lately entered a church in Suffolk, where the Decorated tracery of the windows, as viewed from the outside, was remarkably beautiful; from the inside, the effect was

entirely marred and lost by the insertion of the sort of coloured glass which is common in the bar windows of small beer-houses, combined with the mixture of square and diamond panes to which I have already alluded. When I sadly remarked on this fact to the clergyman, he drew himself up proudly, and said: "That is a matter of opinion; we think the coloured glass very beautiful, and the alternate square and diamond panes relieve the eye."

It might be the saving of many interesting and beautiful relics of the past if bishops would instruct their examining chaplains to set papers in architecture, as well as in theology, and there seems to be no reason why architecture should not form part of the curriculum of theological colleges. No doubt there are some of our clergy who are well instructed and take a real interest in the subject; but the deplorable devastation of the grand monuments raised by our forefathers shows a lamentable and, I am afraid, a general ignorance of the first principles of art, an ignorance which is not confined to clergymen. Take, as an instance, the hall of the Society of Civil Engineers in Great George Street. It was originally a perfect and uniform type of Renaissance architecture—not, perhaps, specially beautiful or attractive, but pleasing from its correctness. It has lately been necessary to make some structural alterations. The roof and the upper part of the walls, have been left intact, with the rich colours and gilding of the original hall; the lower part of the walls after an interval of an ugly wall-paper, is of the severest Old English oak panelling. Personally, I suppose that we should most of us prefer an Old English oak-panelled hall to a room copied from an Italian palace; but I should have thought that the mere light of nature would have shown to the architect responsible for the alterations the extraordinary incongruity of the two styles in one hall.

What we want, therefore, is to make generally known the simple rules of art and of good taste. The ignorance and vulgarity of the present day are appalling. When one enters some churches, one is almost tempted to suppose that some people believe vulgarity to be an essential part of religion. The most beautiful and interesting carving is studded with nails introduced to

support tinsel and cotton-wool decorations. Thousands, I might almost say millions, of pounds have been spent in absolute crime, for I can call it nothing else. Even the liquor traffic pales by the side of this terrible evil; for I believe that it does actually give some people pleasure to get drunk, whereas no one, as far as I know, except the actual "restorers," takes delight in the destruction of St. Paul's Cathedral, which has been temporarily delayed by the unanimous voice of the nation.

And this brings me to another very abominable practice of the modern restorer—stencilling. Of all the cheap and nasty styles of so-called decoration, this is the nastiest—at least, as it is used in the present day. Those who practise it, and who imagine that they are restoring the fresco patterns of which traces are to be found in some of our old churches, do not seem to understand that when a pattern is repeated by hand it is never exactly the same. It is the exact reproduction of the flower or other ornament, every little bulge and dent the same, by means of the stencil plate, over and over again, which is so unpleasant. Stencilling is no doubt an excellent invention for lettering trunks or bales of goods, but it is not suitable for the decoration of church walls. In Hadleigh, in this county, the whole chancel has lately been stencilled in such a way that it exactly resembles the farthing-a-yard paper which you see in cottage bedrooms. In the church of Stoke-by-Nayland, a very beautiful monument to Sir Francis Manocke has recently been repainted. All the armorial bearings look as if they had come straight out of a coach-builder's yard. And worse than that, the plain stone back of the arch, behind the recumbent figure, has been stencilled (although I believe there was no trace of former colouring), and that with so mean a pattern that a visitor actually said to me a few months ago, in perfect innocence, "What a pity that they have papered the back of the monument!"

Let me give a word of advice to any one that is interested in a monument which really requires some renewal of colour. Do it with your own hands. The hired artist must necessarily repaint with the brightest colours and the most correct outline, after the fashion

of the coach-painter ; he is bound to do it ; whereas the armorial bearings should only be sufficiently touched up to show the metals, colours, or furs plainly, without making them appear new. Moreover, arms were seldom painted very carefully three or four centuries ago, and the somewhat rough outlines of the ordinaries should remain intact. I know that, in a very interesting wall-painting of the arms of the principal families in Suffolk in the reign of James I, which I restored myself at Grundisburgh Hall, with the aid of an old MSS. in Fitch's *Suffolk*, the arms, which were entirely obliterated, and to which I had consequently to give a fresh outline, can be perfectly distinguished by their more correct drawing, although I hope that the difference is not glaring. Moreover, in the early Jacobean monuments there is a great deal of colour and gilding. I think that it will not be found advisable in any case to restore this to its pristine brilliancy, which would not accord with the time-worn and darkened surface of the material, whether stone, marble, or alabaster.

There is another point in which, in my opinion, the church restorer fails, and that is in the monotonous sameness of the church furniture ; the same benches are reproduced in almost the same form in every village-church. It is really quite a relief nowadays to find oneself (and how rarely !) in an old-fashioned church-warden building, with a three-decker, high pews, and a gallery. I do not pretend to admire the style, but it is at least a change from the everlasting pitch-pine seats, and I wish some few of these churches could be preserved, as specimens of their period. There was, until recently, a fine example at Orford—the old Corporation pew, the gallery advancing well into the nave, and the pillars still bearing the lines of black paint which they had worn since the funeral of the last Earl of Orford buried in the church.

At Coddensham there were not long ago exceedingly beautiful carved oak pews. They have all been swept away, and replaced by the worst abomination of all, chairs, except in one corner, where Lord de Saumarez, with a patriotic instinct which does him infinite credit, refused to allow his own seats to be removed ; and they



remain, an isolated evidence of the beautiful work once to be seen there, and which is now probably adorning the house of some one who had the discrimination to buy it.

The mania for varnished pine-seating has extended to Nonconformist chapels, and it is rendered additionally objectionable by the fact that the contractors have an ingenious plan of fixing a sharp projecting board on the back of the seat, an instrument of torture which renders attention to the service difficult or impossible, and which is apparently derived from the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance.

At Tuddenham, a church which contains some very fine carving, the top of the old screen, consisting entirely of elaborately carved and extremely sharp points, has been very cleverly fixed at the back of the chancel seats, from which it projects several inches at the exact height of the human head.

There is an unfortunate fashion among "restorers" of replacing the old three-decker by a stone pulpit. It is obvious that, in the somewhat cold interiors of our English churches, it is desirable to introduce, where possible, a touch of some dark shade, and there is no doubt that the rich colour of old oak furniture (and all oak will become old in time, if not "restored" away) greatly improves the general appearance of the building. Stone pulpits and chairs add to its cold and unhospitable look.

The "restoration," as distinct from the preservation, of screens seems to me to be another mistake; the introduction of screens, where no traces are left, a very serious one. The uninterrupted view of a large church from west to east is a very great beauty, especially when the architecture is of the same style throughout. Take Hereford Cathedral, a very perfect example of Norman architecture, cut into two parts by a gaudy coloured bronze screen, introduced by Sir Gilbert Scott, of whom I can never trust myself to speak. At Woodbridge you will have an opportunity of observing a "restored" screen, and I think that you will agree with me that the contrast between the new work and the old is a melancholy sight, and that the appearance of the fine

church has greatly suffered. Of course I am all for the preservation of a really fine old screen where it exists, but restoration and preservation are very different things, and at its best, a screen tends to impair the congregational character of the service. The attempt to restore, when you are not even certain what has been destroyed, is generally, if not always, a failure. There is a very fine roof in Grundisburgh Church, but I doubt whether it was wise to give new wings to the angels, which now look like bats tied to the beams and struggling to be free.

I cannot leave the subject of screens without saying one word about the reredos. In how many churches have we not seen the proportions of a fine old East window completely spoilt by a modern reredos, which projects above its base! Some years ago, when Rochester Cathedral was under restoration, I was delighted with the exceeding beauty of the six-lighted Lancet window at the east end. The next time I visited the cathedral this lovely feature was entirely spoilt, cut to pieces by a reredos. The top of the reredos must never rise above the base of the window.

Norfolk and Suffolk are pre-eminently rich in fine buildings, both ecclesiastical and domestic, and it is our duty to use our best efforts to preserve them, not only by arresting decay, but by stopping the ruthless work of the so-called "restorer."

It is a matter of great regret that so many beautiful old halls (for in old days every manor had its manor house or hall, as it is called in the Eastern Counties) are being gradually allowed to fall into decay, or are spoilt by the introduction of bow-windows and other horrors. Why people of independent income do not try to purchase these exceedingly comfortable, well-built houses, instead of erecting for themselves ugly, jerry-built, and very uncomfortable Cockney villas, I have never been able to understand. I need not describe the Suffolk hall, the plan of which has been so admirably explained by Mr. Corder, in the preface to his work on the "Corner Posts of Ipswich"; but I cannot refrain from saying that the archæologist may spend many happy days in this corner of England in examining such interesting relics of by-gone architecture as Seckford Hall (built by Sir Thomas



Seckford in 1586), Otley Hall (much older and little known), the stately Helmingham Hall, the well-known Parham Old Hall, and such less famous manor houses as Newbourn, Grundisburgh, Mock Beggars Hall, and many others. Almost every little town in Suffolk contains work of the most lovely and interesting character. I could go on for hours describing the buildings which I have so loved to study, but the time has come for me to sit down and I must therefore briefly state my conclusions. What I specially wish to press on the Meeting is:—

1st. The study of architecture. Try and induce others to take the same interest in architecture that you do yourselves; it is so engrossing and attractive a study that it can hardly fail to interest if once taken up. Perhaps it might be taught in secondary schools.

2nd. Take the greatest care of your monuments, and you will not want to restore them. A few timely repairs to the roof, a few sticks and leaves cleared from the water-courses, may save both roof and walls from ruin. Above all, keep a sharp watch at Easter, Christmas, and Harvest time. Strictly forbid the entrance of nails and hammers into the church. Do not let a really fine bit of carving be broken off because it gets in the way of a sprig of holly.

3rd. When reparations are necessary, new stones may be substituted for decayed ones, when they are absolutely essential to the safety of the fabric; portions likely to give way may be propped with wood or metal; sculptures ready to detach themselves may be bound or cemented into their places. But no modern or imitation sculpture should be mingled with ancient work; and no attempt should be made to repair or restore carving, painting, or stained glass.

4th. It often happens that those who wish to preserve some ancient part of the church feel that their want of archæological knowledge disqualifies them from opposing the more fully informed architect. They should not let themselves be overawed by learning which in reality does not affect the question. It needs no special training to understand whether the architect's plans aim at preservation or alteration. It is a simple question of fact, and what has to be decided is, "Shall the old church be maintained,

or shall we have an archæological exercise by the architect?" The changes involved in such an exercise are often undertaken with a light heart by those whose taste follows carelessly the passing fashion of the hour, and to whom it has never occurred that their church is already one of great beauty; but a little reflection would often convince those whose imaginations are not wholly dulled that there is little gain and much loss in such changes.

5th. Avoid varnished pine, cathedral glass, and encaustic tiles. In my own church at Assington, some barbarian has covered up the gravestones of my ancestors, which I know from the inscriptions on the monuments must be lying below, with the most hideously vulgar, garish, encaustic tiles. It is a great grief to me, and I know not when public opinion will allow me to tear up the floor of the chancel.

Our most precious heirlooms are the ecclesiastical buildings scattered about our country. Many well meaning, I might say excellent, clergymen have an idea that we are wanting in reverence when we discourage attempts to restore their old buildings to their supposed original plan, and to embellish them with ornament of the style in vogue at the particular period to which it is aimed to bring them back.

The venerableness, charm of originality, distinction as a work of art, must be lost in their reproduction, however ingeniously carried out; while many links with the past, and associations with the simple faith and earnest lives of our forefathers, are swept away.