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Restoration

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The term Restoration and the thing itself are both modern. To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair, or rebuild it; it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time. It is only since the first quarter of the present century that the idea of restoring buildings of another age has been entertained; and we are not aware that a clear definition of architectural restoration has as yet been given. Perhaps it may be as well to endeavour at the outset to gain an exact notion of what we understand, or ought to understand, by a restoration; for it is evident that considerable ambiguity has insensibly gathered about the meaning we attach, or ought to attach, to this operation.

We have said that both the word and the thing itself are modern; and, in fact, no civilization, no people of bygone ages, has conceived the idea of making restorations in the sense in which we comprehend them.

In Asia, both in ancient and modern times, when a temple or a palace has become dilapidated, another has been, or is now, erected beside it. Its decay is not regarded as a reason for destroying the ancient edifice; it is left to the action of time, which lays hold of it as its rightful possessor, and gradually consumes it. The Romans replaced, but did not restore; a proof of which is, that there is no Latin word corresponding with our term “restoration” in its modern sense. Instaurare, reficere, renovare, do not mean to restore, but to reinstate—to make anew. When the Emperor Hadrian undertook to rehabilitate several public buildings in Ancient Greece and Asia Minor, he proceeded after a fashion against which all the archaeological societies of Europe, had they then existed, would have protested: though he made some claim to antiquarian knowledge. We cannot consider the renovation of the Temple of the Sun at Baalbec as a restoration, but as a rebuilding, in the style then prevailing. The Ptolemies themselves, who affected archaism, did not altogether respect the forms of the buildings of the old dynasties of Egypt, but replaced them according to the fashion of their own time. As to the Greeks, so far from restoring,—that is to say, from reproducing exactly the forms of the edifices which had suffered decay,—they evidently believed it better to give the stamp of the day to repairs that had become necessary. Building a triumphal arch like that of Constantine, at Rome, with fragments torn from the Arch of Trajan, is neither a restoration nor a reconstruction; it is an act of vandalism—a barbarian pilfering. Nor can the covering with stucco of the architecture of the Temple to Fortuna Virilis, at Rome, be considered as a restoration—it is a mutilation.
The middle ages had no more of the sentiment of Restoration than the ancients: far from it. If it became necessary to replace a broken capital in an edifice of the twelfth century, it was a capital of the thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth century that was substituted for it. If on a long frieze of crockets of the thirteenth century, a portion, or a single one, should be wanting, it was an ornament in the taste of the day that was inserted. Thus it often happened that before an extremely careful study had been devoted to the styles of various periods, archeologists were led to regard these modifications as anomalies, and to give a wrong date to fragments which should have been regarded as interpolations in a text. […]

Our age has adopted an attitude towards the past in which it stands quite alone among historical ages. It has undertaken to analyze the past, to compare and classify its phenomena, and to construct its veritable history, by following step by step the march, the progress, the successive phases of humanity. So remarkable a fact cannot be, as some superficial thinkers suppose, a mere fashion, a caprice, or a weakness, for the phenomenon is a complex one. Cuvier, by his works on comparative anatomy, and by his geological researches, unveiled all at once to the eyes of his contemporaries the history of the world before the reign of man. Imagination follows him with eagerness along this novel path. Next comes the philologist, who discovers the origin of European languages, all issuing from the same source. The ethnologist extends his labours to the study of races and their aptitudes. Lastly, comes the archaeologist, who investigating the productions of art from India to Egypt and Europe, compares, discusses, and discriminates them, unmasking their origins and their affiliations; and by the analytical method succeeds gradually in coordinating them according to certain laws. To see in this process a mere caprice, a fashion of the hour, or a state of moral distemper, is to judge hastily of a fact of considerable importance. As well might it be asserted that all the facts revealed by science since Newton's time, are the result of a caprice of the human mind. If the fact is considerable as a whole, how can it be destitute of importance in its details? All the labours above referred to are linked together, and co-operate with each other. If the European has reached this phase in the development of the human intellect, that while advancing with redoubled speed towards the destinies of the future, and perhaps even because he advances thus rapidly, he feels the necessity of collecting all that belongs to his past,—just as we collect a large library to prepare for future labours,—is it rational to accuse him of being led by a caprice,—an ephemeral phantasy? On the other hand, are not the backward and the blind the very persons who disdain these studies, pretending to regard them as useless rubbish? Is not, on the contrary, the dispelling of prejudices and the disinterment of forgotten truths one of the most efficient means of furthering progress?

Should our time have nothing to transmit to future ages but this new method of studying the monuments of the past—whether in the material or the moral sphere—it will have deserved the gratitude of posterity. But we know also that our age is not satisfied with casting a scrutinizing glance behind it; this work of retrospection cannot fail to develop the problems presented by the future and to facilitate their solution. Synthesis follows in the wake of analysis. […]

We proceed, then, to explain the programme now adopted in England and in Germany, which have preceded us in the path of the theoretical study of ancient art, a programme accepted also in Italy and Spain, which seek in their turn to bring criticism to
bear on the preservation of their ancient buildings. This programme lays down at the outset the general principle that every building and every part of a building should be restored in its own style, not only as regards appearance but structure. There have been few buildings, particularly during the middle ages, built all at one time; or if so built, that have not undergone some considerable modifications, either by additions, transformations, or partial changes. It is therefore essential, previous to every work of repair, to ascertain exactly the age and character of each part, to form a kind of specification based on trustworthy records, either by written description or by graphical representation. Moreover in France each province has its own style,—a school whose principles and practical methods should be ascertained. Data derived from a building of the Ile-de-France cannot therefore serve as a guide to restoration in an edifice of Champagne or Burgundy. These diversities of schools exist to a rather late period: they follow a law to which there are many exceptions. Thus, for example, while the fourteenth century art of Sequanian Normandy bears a great similarity to that of the Ile-de-France at the same epoch, the Norman renaissance differs essentially from the renaissance of Paris and its environs. […]

But to confine ourselves to the middle ages: difficulties multiply in problems of restoration. It has frequently happened that buildings of a certain period, or of a certain school, have been repaired again and again, and that by artists who do not belong to the province where the edifice is found. This has been an occasion of considerable embarrassment. If both the original and the altered parts are to be restored, should the latter be disregarded, and the unity of style, which has been disturbed, be re-established; or, should the whole with the later modifications be exactly reproduced? In such a case the absolute adoption of one of the two alternatives may be objectionable; and it may be necessary, on the contrary, to admit neither of the two principles absolutely, but to proceed according to the special circumstances of the case. What are these special circumstances? It would be impossible to indicate all: it will suffice to call attention to some of the most important, so as to exemplify the critical side of the work. In preference to the possession of every other accomplishment—archaeological skill among the rest—the architect entrusted with a restoration should be a clever and experienced builder, not only in a general but a special sense; that is to say, he should be acquainted with the methods of construction employed at different periods of our art and in the various schools. These methods have a comparative value; they are not equally good. Some, indeed, had to be abandoned because of their defective character. Thus, for example, an edifice built in the twelfth century, and which had no gutters under the eaves of the roofs, had to be restored in the thirteenth century and furnished with gutters combined with escapes. The whole of the crown work is in a bad state; and an entire renewal is contemplated. Should the thirteenth-century gutters be done away with in order to replace the ancient twelfth-century cornice, of which traces are also found? Certainly not: the cornice-gutter of the thirteenth century should be replaced, retaining the form of this period, since there is no such thing as a cornice gutter of the twelfth century: and to put a hypothetical one, intending to give it the character of the architecture or that period, would be to commit an anachronism in stone. Again: the vaulting of a nave of the twelfth century had by some accident been partially destroyed, and rebuilt at a later period, not in its primitive form, but according to the mode then in vogue. This latter vaulting, threatening in its turn to give way, has to be reconstructed. Shall it be restored in its later
form, or shall the primitive vaulting be replaced? Yes; because there is no advantage in doing otherwise, and there is a considerable advantage in restoring unity to the edifice. The question here is not, as in the previous example, that of preserving an improvement made on a defective system, but one in which we have to bear in mind that the later restoration was made according to the ancient method—which consisted in adopting the forms in vogue at the time, when an edifice had to be renewed or restored—whereas we proceed on a contrary principle—that of restoring every building in its own style. But this vaulting, which is of a character foreign to the first, and which has to be rebuilt, is remarkably beautiful. It has given occasion to the opening of windows adorned with fine painted glass. It has been contrived in harmony with a system of external construction of great value. Shall all this be destroyed for the mere sake of an absolute restoration of the primitive nave? Shall this painted glass be consigned to the lumber room? Shall exterior buttresses and flying buttresses, which no longer have anything to support, be left purposeless? No, certainly. We see, therefore, that in solving problems of this kind, absolute principles may lead to absurdities. […]

Similarly, in the unseen parts of buildings we should scrupulously respect any trace that may be seen to give evidence of additions and modifications. […]

In restorations there is an essential condition which must always be kept in mind. It is, that every portion removed should be replaced with better materials, and in a stronger and more perfect way. As a result of the operation to which it has been subjected, the restored edifice should have a renewed lease of existence, longer than that which has already elapsed. […] Buildings, like individuals, acquire idiosyncrasies, which must be taken into account. They have a temperament peculiar to themselves, if we may so term it; and which must be studied and intimately known before a regular course of treatment. The nature of the materials, the quality of the mortars, the ground, the general structural system, whether by vertical points of support or by horizontal bindings, the weight and greater or less concreteness of the vaultings, and the comparative elasticity of the structure—constitute different temperaments. […]

The edifice ought not to be less convenient when it leaves the architect's hands than it was before the restoration. Speculative archaeologists very often disregard present requirements, and severely censure the architect for having made concessions to them; as if the building confided to his treatment were his own, and as if he were not pledged to carry out the programme given him.

But it is in these circumstances, which frequently present themselves, that the intelligence of the architect is called into play. He always possesses the means of reconciling his rôle as restorer with that of artist commissioned to meet unforeseen requirements. Moreover the best means of preserving a building is to find a use for it, and to satisfy its requirements so completely that there shall be no occasion to make any changes. […]

In such circumstances the best plan is to suppose one's self in the position of the original architect, and to imagine what he would do if he came back to the world and had the programme with which we have to deal laid before him. […]

We must admit that we are on slippery ground as soon as we deviate from literal reproduction; and that the adoption of such deviation should be reserved for extreme cases; but it must be allowed that it is sometimes commanded by imperious necessities, which we cannot evade with a non possumus. That an architect should refuse to introduce
gas-pipes into a church, in order to avoid mutilations and accidents, is intelligible, for the edifice can be lighted by other means; but that he should refuse to lend himself to the formation of a heating apparatus, for instance, under the pretext that the middle ages did not employ this system of warming ecclesiastical buildings; and that he should thus expose the faithful to the risk of catching cold for the sake of archaeology is, to say the least, ridiculous. As this means of warming necessitates chimney stacks, we should proceed as a master of the middle ages would have done if he had been obliged to contrive them; and above all, not try to hide this novel feature; since the ancient masters, so far from dissembling a necessity, sought on the contrary to invest it with a becoming form, even making decorative features of such material requirements. […]