

RESTORATION

It seems that a commission has been appointed by the Department of the Interior to devise rules and regulations for the protection of the monuments and relics of antiquity. It is an elevated and difficult task to find the correct formula for protecting the highest values of bygone culture. Some of the members of the commission are excellently qualified to serve on a commission whose function it is to protect antiquity in its complete artistic implication, but it is very dubious whether they will succeed in influencing the resolutions of the board to establish an almost unthinkable inconceivable legal formula.

The efforts of the commission may result in the compilation of accurate lists of antiquities, in splendidly edited rules and regulations, in the wide distribution of circulars throughout the provinces and districts by the Department.....But with what will the ardent wish be kindled in the hearts of the masses to safeguard the beautiful remains from destruction? Under what heading of rules and regulations are we to explain to the masses and to all municipal governments that destruction of monuments means a lowering of the cultural standard of a country?

The commission will adjourn; in whose hands will the wonderful rules then remain? In whose portfolios will the beautiful circulars be submerged? In what cabinets will the accurate and lengthy lists of antiquities be buried?

Will the commission have full right also to propose individuals who could be useful in such a complex artistic undertaking?

Much is now being written about the monuments of antiquity. Even too much, I am afraid. The complaints about the mishaps to our monuments are to become commonplace! I am afraid that these monuments may fall into

ruins, likely into an accompaniments lamentations. True enough, rules are useful for the preservation of antiquity, particularly now, where many relics have reached a fatal stage. Still more urgent, however, is the presence of people, the evidence of genuine love and devotion to the cause.

I remember the memorable conference of the Architectural Society regarding the notorious restoration of the Church of Nereditz Saviour in Novgorod. I remember how, after having mourned the Saviour, the meeting began to mediate on the possible ways and means of restoration, concluding with the statement that every restoration is a piece of art in itself. Each restoration requires, outside of scientific preparation, also purely creative enthusiasm and highly artistic execution. The late N.V.Sultanov, a man of great culture, expressed himself quite decidedly to the effect that it is impossible to discuss restoration on the basis of general rules and that each individual case requires specific attention and discussion. It was evident to everyone that the important thing was not how to conduct the conference, on restoration, but who would participate in it.

No doubt, the board system provided excellent means for discussion. The chief drawback, however, lies in the lack of responsibility. Think of the various occurrences that happen in secret balloting. Remember that none of the members is willing to assume the blame for an unpleasant incident. The rates of such casualties in board resolutions is simply appalling. All responsibility is lost in the labyrinths and variations of the board meeting, which finally adjourns with helpless shrugging of shoulders and gesticulations.

In the resolutions of board meetings, a most dreadful invention of our times - all personal responsibility, a responsibility involving clear, indelible consequences, is entirely lacking.

Personal responsibility is an absolute necessity. The initiator deserves the first censure and the first praise. There are persons equipped

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with the strength and courage to assume the great responsibility of preserving the legacies of culture - monuments of antiquity. There are persons needed to undertake the various stages of antiquity.

Yet, even if we find champions of ancient beauty, who will listen to them and heed them?

By what channels can we touch the soul of the average man to whom a relic means nothing but old rubbish? Where are the keys to unlock the souls of a hundred million people?

Not so long ago, full of unforgivable dreams, we were relating "lyric tales". This is what we said: "Russia has always renounced its cultural legacies very lightly. It is time to understand and appreciate the position which antiquity holds in an enlightened country. Do not our monuments become horrifying corpses, desiccated remains, unwanted by anyone, filling the corners of church crypts ^(cellars). Let these relics not frighten us; let them live and bring into our lives the brightest sides of bygone epochs. It is painful to watch them lose all vitality. Grandfather's favorite study furnished with painstaking care, has been turned into a dusty storage room. We revere our dead. We make efforts to put up monuments in their memory. For a time we preserve in a dignified manner the monuments and everything that belonged to our dear departed ones. Is it really so incomprehensible then that the relics of antiquity in which the entire heritage of past beauty is comprised should be even more valuable and precious to us?

If the soul of the family still lives in us, can it be that the soul of the race is entirely dead? Can it be that the all-unifying, all-embracing, soul of the earth will not cause people to realize the significance of the heritage of antiquity? It is impossible; it is true that nationalism has not been able to deal with the significance of antiquity, but the soul of the earth, more profound than the spirit of nations, has the power to defend its treasures - the treasures of the soil that has outlived many nations.

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Not in dusky prison light should relics end their days; they should brighten the festivities of the people.

Give the monument that "tranquil" position which it held at its creation, and the masses will pour into such a living museum. In the revival of the monuments the thousands of museum pieces will simultaneously be revived again and will begin to communicate to the visitors in a completely different language. They will become vital parts of a wonderful and fascinating whole. Unafraid of dry pedantry, the young people will approach their ancestral heritage; full of hope, they will look upon its visage and there will be few, in whose souls the beautiful sentiments of early childhood, buried later beneath some very necessary things, will not be stirred.

We need sensitive people around our monuments of antiquity. Besides "archeological" institutions we must create societies of friends of antiquity. I believe that such societies will soon develop.

To the municipal government of the city of Novgorod, which numbers many wealthy merchants, let us speak in the words of one of my earlier articles on antiquity: "Good people, do not let a profitable business slip through your hands. The better preserved a monument, the more genuine - the greater its value. Let the monument attract entire trainloads of the curious. May God forgive you, but profit on your monuments, sell the views, charge entrance fees to the public. Feed the visitors in the name of antiquity, give them to drink in the name of ^{to} , entice them with beautiful fables, surround each spot with glamorous legends (publishers, hearken!) pile up the love episodes, heavier and heavier, frighten them with tales of cruelty, kindle their imagination with looted riches - trade, sell and rejoice!

(May God ^{sanctify} ~~bless~~ the means!) Rent out these monuments, ^c look them up from the passerby, safeguard them honestly and keep them securely, as you do your stocks and bonds.

There is great investment in monuments; it only requires an experienced

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hand to make large profits on them. Business transactions are risky, but relics
and monuments are ~~just~~ like wine - the older, the more valuable.

With your thoughts upon what is nearest your heart, ^{preserve} ~~save~~ 'antiquity'.

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