

**SOME ACCOUNT OF THE ANCIENT
BOROUGH TOWN OF PLYMPTON
ST. MAURICE, OR PLYMPTON
EARL; WITH MEMOIRS OF THE
REYNOLDS FAMILY**

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Some Account of the Ancient Borough Town of Plympton St. Maurice, or Plympton Earl; With
Memoirs of the Reynolds Family by William Cotton

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WILLIAM COTTON

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OF
The Ancient Borough Town
OF
PLYMPTON ST. MAURICE,
OR PLYMPTON EARL;
WITH
Memoirs of the Reynolds Family.

BY
WILLIAM COTTON,
A FREEMAN OF THE BOROUGH.



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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH the town of Plympton has not yet attained to the like distinction of *Arquà*, or *Stratford-upon-Avon*, or become so famous as to attract pilgrimages to the *Shrine of Reynolds*, it can, nevertheless, boast of having given birth to as great a genius, in his own line of art, as Petrarch or Shakespeare. For, as the Drama, before the time of Shakespeare, was still in its infancy, being almost entirely confined to mysteries, miracle-plays, and court-pageants, so was the art of painting in this country, previous to the birth of Reynolds, in a state of almost Cimmerian darkness and obscurity; England not having produced a single painter of any repute, with the exception of Hogarth, and he was scarcely known but as a caricaturist and an engraver.

The birth-place of so great a genius as Reynolds will, doubtless, hereafter become an object of deep interest to artists *yet unborn*, and the streets of his native town, the school in which he received the rudiments of parental education, and the beautiful

fields and lanes through which he oftentimes strayed in his youth, will be visited with perhaps as much delight as the quiet banks of the Avon, or the bold scenery of *Arquà*, amid the *Euganean* hills. Let us, then, hope that the walls of the quaint old school-room will be carefully kept in repair by the trustees, and that the memory of England's greatest portrait painter will be preserved in the valley of the Plym as long as the world endures. Let it not be said (as it once was) to a traveller, who asked to be shewn the house in which Joshua Reynolds was born, "Don't know, Sir; I never heard the name; don't think he lived hereabouts."

It was my fondest wish to have founded in the town of Plympton an Institution dedicated to the fine arts, and the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds; and with that intent I offered, in 1848, to give a valuable and extensive collection of *Books on Art, Prints and Original Drawings by the Old Masters*, if a suitable building were provided for its reception, and a sufficient sum subscribed for the future maintenance of the Institution. I thus hoped to lay the foundation of a Museum of Art in Plympton, such as might hereafter become worthy of the county of Devon, and of the name of Reynolds; but circumstances prevented the execution of this design, and the collection has been since located, in a very handsome room at Plymouth, built for the express purpose, and attached to the Public Library, in Cornwall

Street. It must, however, be a subject of regret to some persons, that the original plan, with regard to Plympton, could not be carried into effect, and I was myself naturally anxious to connect my Library with a town of which I had just been elected a Freeman.

It may be presumed that some account of a place which gave birth to so great and original a genius will be favourably received by the public in general, as well as by the inhabitants of Plympton, accompanied as it is by some new anecdotes of the Reynolds family, and that its sale will help to raise a fitting monument to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was

— born to improve us in every part,
His pencil our faces, his manners our heart.

THE
BOROUGH OF PLYMPTON.

CORRIGENDA.

- Page 114, line 6, for "Lennox," read "Lenox."
" 116, Note, for "secondly," read "recently."
" 126, line 8 from bottom, for "celebrated," read "elevated."
" 128, " 10, after "admired," insert "even."

through Modbury and Plympton to Tamerton, and thence, by a ferry across the river, into Cornwall. Although the town is not, perhaps, of itself sufficiently attractive to arrest the attention of the mere tourist, yet any lover of the fine arts must view with interest a place rendered celebrated from its having given birth to Sir Joshua Reynolds, our greatest portrait painter, and the acknowledged founder of the English school in that department of the art.