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978-1-108-06592-4 - *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney: Including Various Letters, and Testimonies to His Genius, &c., Also, Some Particulars of the Life of Peter Romney, His Brother*

John Romney

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Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney

Written by his son John Romney (1757–1832) and published in 1830, nearly three decades after the artist's death, this collection of anecdotes and biographical episodes traces the extraordinary career of George Romney (1734–1802), highlighting his early training as a joiner in the family firm, his artistic education at the hands of the disreputable Christopher Steele, and his eventual fame as a portraitist of fashionable London. Recollections of personal and professional encounters with such influential figures as Laurence Sterne and Richard Payne Knight provide insights into the circumstances that inspired Romney's most famous works. Including an engraving of his self-portrait of c.1784, a section on his brother and fellow painter Peter Romney (1743–77), and a list of the designs and studies which were donated in 1817 to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, this work reveals much about the eighteenth-century art world, its patrons and its pitfalls.

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M E M O I R S
OF THE LIFE AND WORKS
 O F
G E O R G E R O M N E Y,
 INCLUDING
 VARIOUS LETTERS, AND TESTIMONIES TO HIS GENIUS, &c.
 ALSO, SOME PARTICULARS OF THE LIFE OF
P E T E R R O M N E Y, HIS BROTHER;
A YOUNG ARTIST OF GREAT GENIUS AND PROMISING TALENTS, BUT
OF SHORT LIFE.

Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
 The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar;
 Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime
 Has felt the influence of malignant star,
 And poverty's unconquerable bar.—BEATTIE.

Haud facile emergunt, quorum virtutibus obstat
Res angusta domi.—HORACE.

Nature scatters the seeds of genius to the winds, and though some may perish among the stony places of the world, and some be choked by the thorns and brambles of early adversity, yet others will now and then strike root even in the clefts of the rock, struggle bravely up into sunshine, and spread over their sterile birth-place all the beauties of vegetation.—GEOFFREY CRAYON.—*Sketch Book.*

BY THE REV. JOHN ROMNEY, B. D.

FORMERLY FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON;

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN AND CRADOCK, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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TO
THE MUSE OF PAINTING.

—
Ἦδὺ το σοφισμα τῆ ζωγραφῆς.
—

Muse, with the magic hand, and fervid mind,
 Who dip'st thy pencil in the rays of light,
 And with the rainbow tints, by taste combin'd,
 Giv'st scenes of rapture to my gazing sight—
 The hanging wood—the rock's romantic height—
 The giant ocean raging on the shore—
 The smooth and lucid lake, like mirror bright—
 Or waterfall—times past thou can'st restore ;
 Placing before mine eyes, each splendid deed
 Of patriot warriors, and of chieftains bold,
 Who for their country's sake were doomed to bleed,
 But have in Fame's bright page their names enrolled—
 Nay more ; thou can'st surpass by art refin'd,
 The mirror's truth, and paint the speaking mind.

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P R E F A C E.

THE author, when he first meditated these Memoirs, did not forget the judicious advice of Horace,

———versate diu, quid ferre recusent,
Quid valeant humeri ;

and certainly should, under any other circumstances than those in which he was placed, have declined the undertaking : but when he considered how much he was bound by duty to protect the posthumous fame of his revered Relative, and saw with mortification that all the accounts which have been given both of him and of his works were either defective, false, or injurious ; his scruples arising from diffidence soon yielded to a more powerful impulse, and he should have deemed himself guilty of very culpable indifference if he had not endeavoured to dispel the malignant cloud that hangs over his Father's memory, and to place his character in its true light ; by giving publicity to the documents in his possession, and by relating such circumstances as were within his own knowledge respecting the life and works of so rare a genius, which in fact none but himself could

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communicate. Whatever, therefore, may be his defects, he flatters himself that the candid reader, in weighing his motives and duties, will acquit him of any unbecoming vanity or presumption. Had he foreseen during the life of Mr. Romney, that the duty of being his biographer would devolve upon himself, he certainly could have saved many interesting anecdotes and characteristic traits which are now absorbed in the impenetrable gulph of oblivion. Still, however, there may be some who may, notwithstanding, think that he has been too circumstantial : but as there is a curiosity in the public in general, to know every thing respecting men who have risen to eminence by the mere force of genius ; if he had had no higher motive than to gratify this, he should have felt himself sufficiently justified in what he has done ; but he had a more exalted object in view—he wished, as far as he was able, to trace out every step in the arduous path which leads to distinction, that future aspirants in that noble and fascinating art might know what they had to encounter, and how to overcome—for circumstances apparently trivial in themselves, often tend to illustrate the philosophy of the human mind, and to shew by what means genius advances to its maturity. Seward, in his *Anecdotes of distinguished persons*, (and he was no bad judge in these matters,) says “nothing is trifling in the history of genius.” And a biographer of La Fontaine observes ; “ En effect, soustraire les petites circonstances

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de la vie d'un homme illustre, c'est, à mon avis, dérober un plaisir véritable aux lecteurs curieux, et les priver des moyens les plus surs de bien démêler ce qu'il vaut."

The author may, perhaps, be thought to have expressed himself somewhat too strongly upon some occasions, he feels, however, that he has not transgressed the bounds which truth and justice prescribe ; no tenderness for the feelings or memory of others ought to preclude him from doing justice to one, whose claims upon his protection were superior to every other consideration.

Something may, also, be required as explanatory for the tardiness of this publication. In fact, the author had no intention of writing Mr. Romney's life till many years after his decease, and was only induced to do it in consequence of the errors and misrepresentations of others ; his bad health, also, contributed much to delay the performance ; not to mention other impeding causes arising from different avocations. Even, when finished, it was retarded considerably on account of printing ; till, at length, he met with a very intelligent printer in his own neighbourhood, who has acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the author, and he hopes also, to that of the public.

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