

**Introduction to the *Discourses*
Sir Joshua Reynolds**

It is a happy memory that associates the foundation of our Royal Academy with the delivery of these inaugural discourses by Sir Joshua Reynolds, on the opening of the schools, and at the first annual meetings for the distribution of its prizes. They laid down principles of art from the point of view of a man of genius who had made his power felt, and with the clear good sense which is the foundation of all work that looks upward and may hope to live. The truths here expressed concerning Art may, with slight adjustment of the way of thought, be applied to Literature or to any exercise of the best powers of mind for shaping the delights that raise us to the larger sense of life. In his separation of the utterance of whole truths from insistence upon accidents of detail, Reynolds was right, because he guarded the expression of his view with careful definitions of its limits. In the same way Boileau was right, as a critic of Literature, in demanding everywhere good sense, in condemning the paste brilliants of a style then in decay, and fixing attention upon the masterly simplicity of Roman poets in the time of Augustus. Critics by rule of thumb reduced the principles clearly defined by Boileau to a dull convention, against which there came in course of time a strong reaction. In like manner the teaching of Reynolds was applied by dull men to much vague and conventional generalisation in the name of dignity. Nevertheless, Reynolds taught essential truths of Art. The principles laid down

by him will never fail to give strength to the right artist, or true guidance towards the appreciation of good art, though here and there we may not wholly assent to some passing application of them, where the difference may be great between a fashion of thought in his time and in ours. A righteous enforcement of exact truth in our day has led many into a readiness to appreciate more really the minute imitation of a satin dress, or a red herring, than the noblest figure in the best of Raffaele's cartoons. Much good should come of the diffusion of this wise little book.

Joshua Reynolds was born on the 15th of July, 1723, the son of a clergyman and schoolmaster, at Plympton in Devonshire. His bent for Art was clear and strong from his childhood. In 1741 at the age of nineteen, he began study, and studied for two years in London under Thomas Hudson, a successful portrait painter. Then he went back to Devonshire and painted portraits, aided for some time in his education by attention to the work of William Gandy of Exeter. When twenty-six years old, in May, 1749, Reynolds was taken away by Captain Keppel to the Mediterranean, and brought into contact with the works of the great painters of Italy. He stayed two years in Rome, and in accordance with the principles afterwards laid down in these lectures, he refused, when in Rome, commissions for copying, and gave his mind to minute observation of the art of the great masters by whose works he was surrounded. He spent two months in Florence, six weeks in Venice, a few days in Bologna and

Parma. "If," he said, "I had never seen any of the fine works of Correggio, I should never, perhaps, have remarked in Nature the expression which I find in one of his pieces; or if I had remarked it, I might have thought it too difficult, or perhaps impossible to execute."

In 1753 Reynolds came back to England, and stayed three months in Devonshire before setting up a studio in London, in St. Martin's Lane, which was then an artists' quarter. His success was rapid. In 1755 he had one hundred and twenty-five sitters. Samuel Johnson found in him his most congenial friend. He moved to Newport Street, and he built himself a studio--where there is now an auction room--at 47, Lincoln's Inn Fields. There he remained for life.

In 1760 the artists opened, in a room lent by the Society of Arts, a free Exhibition for the sale of their works. This was continued the next year at Spring Gardens, with a charge of a shilling for admission. In 1765 they obtained a charter of incorporation, and in 1768 the King gave his support to the foundation of a Royal Academy of Arts by seceders from the preceding "Incorporated Society of Artists," into which personal feelings had brought much division. It was to consist, like the French Academy, of forty members, and was to maintain Schools open to all students of good

character who could give evidence that they had fully learnt the rudiments of Art. The foundation by the King dates from the 10th of December, 1768. The Schools were opened on the 2nd of January next following, and on that occasion Joshua Reynolds, who had been elected President--his age was then between forty-five and forty-six--gave the Inaugural Address which formed the first of these Seven Discourses. The other six were given by him, as President, at the next six annual meetings: and they were all shaped to form, when collected into a volume, a coherent body of good counsel upon the foundations of the painter's art.

H. M.

TO THE KING

The regular progress of cultivated life is from necessaries to accommodations, from accommodations to ornaments. By your illustrious predecessors were established marts for manufactures, and colleges for science; but for the arts of elegance, those arts by which manufactures are embellished and science is refined, to found an academy was reserved for your Majesty.

Had such patronage been without effect, there had been reason to believe that nature had, by some insurmountable impediment, obstructed our proficiency; but the annual improvement of the exhibitions which your Majesty has been pleased to encourage shows that only encouragement had been wanting.

To give advice to those who are contending for royal liberality has been for some years the duty of my station in the Academy; and these Discourses hope for your Majesty's acceptance as well-intended endeavours to incite that emulation which your notice has kindled, and direct those studies which your bounty has rewarded.

May it please your Majesty,

Your Majesty's

Most dutiful servant,

And most faithful subject,

JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

Gentlemen,--That you have ordered the publication of this Discourse is not only very flattering to me, as it implies your approbation of the method of study which I have recommended; but likewise, as this method receives from that act such an additional weight and authority as demands from the students that deference and respect, which can be due only to the united sense of so considerable a body of artists.

I am,

With the greatest esteem and respect,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most humble

And obedient servant,

JOSHUA REYNOLDS