

William Strutt 1825 - 1915

William Strutt was born into an artistic family. His grandfather was one of the first students to enter the school of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. William's father, also a William, was a well known painter of miniatures. William studied art from a young age, and completed his artistic training in France, studying with a master painter until being accepted to Ecole des beaux Arts, where he studied with several masters. The end of his student years found him in "a fierce battle with poverty." He returned to England in 1848, the year of the revolution in France. In 1850 William, filled with "the urge to seek new fields" left for Australia.

In Australia William quickly found work as an illustrator for the new "Illustrated Australian Magazine. His life in Australia was filled with adventure and a continuation of the development of his artistic ability and style. He was especially talented as an animal artist. He spent some time in New Zealand, and contributed many paintings that illustrated the life, animals and people of Australia and New Zealand, and also painted many works depicting famous scenes from those island's history, "Burkes Burial" probably being the best known. It now hangs in the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne. William was one of the principle founders of the Melbourne Art School. William Strutt is much better known in Australia than in his native England, as he was a prominent part of that island continent's colonial history.

William, the wife he found in Australia and their four children returned to England in 1862 to find that his mother had died and he was executor of her will. He lived in Essex on a small farm left to the family by an aunt of his father. Soon after returning to England the Strutts had their fifth child. He moved to London to further the education of his children and continue his artistic career, which he was making good progress with. In 1870 he was unable to let the Easton Lodge and had to return to Essex. The move wasn't good for his career and from 1869 to 1880 there is record of only two exhibited paintings. He had to supplement his income by teaching art and painting.

In 1881 the Strutt family shifted to West Kensington and in the 1880's William enjoyed much more popularity and he had many paintings exhibited by the Royal Academy. He became a member of the Royal Society of British Artists in 1889. His income from his paintings soon outstripped his income from teaching and as a result he taught fewer students. He painted many heroic works and seemed to be in his prime. Many of his paintings had spiritual themes. In 1896 he painted "Peace, and a little child shall lead them". This work was reproduced by Franz Hanfstaengl that same year and was a remarkable worldwide success. To quote the artist: "the success of the reproduction of "Peace" has been something quite extraordinary and though I get no pecuniary benefits in it, as the copyright is gone, I think it is collaterally benefitting me." The painting was sold to a person who gave it to the Brecon Cathedral in memory of C. F. Gilbertson.

As William lived to be 90 he did experience difficult financial conditions during the later part of his life and evidently painted many other studies of 'Peace', one of which is the painting we reproduced for our print. William died in 1915 and the inscription on a simple stone reads: "The Painter of Peace".

The picture titled "Peace and a little child shall lead them" has a special magic. The sepia reproduction put out by Franz Hanfstaengl was a wonderful success at the end of the 19th and into the beginning of the 20th century. This review from 1906 says it all.

"But the work which has endeared Mr. Strutt to us all, young and old alike, the picture which has charmed the whole World, is that called 'Peace', or 'A little child shall lead them'. Perhaps no other work or art ever captivated so large a number of people, of all sorts and sizes, of every nation and religion. The superb picture itself is the property of one man, who keeps it to himself, but by means of the camera, copies of it are to be seen in every shop-window where such matters are sold, and there is hardly a home where it is unknown. The Emperor of Russia places it in his palace, the English working man hangs it on his cottage wall, it brings peace and joy wherever it goes."



W. STRUTT.