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CLASSIFICATION	SUBJECT	SOURCE	DATE
Biog.	Bridell, Frederick Lee	S. T.	21 Jan. 1888

FREDERICK LEE BRIDELL, THE SOUTHAMPTON ARTIST.

The interest excited in the life and work of this distinguished Southampton painter, by what has recently appeared in our columns, has induced us to reproduce the following admirable sketch of Bridell's artistic career which appeared in "The Art Journal" for January, 1864, immediately after the now famous painter's decease:—

Our number for September last contained a brief notice of this artist's death. But his genius was of an order so rare, and his loss to art is so great, that we may be excused for returning to the subject. The premature close of the life of a man of genius is always sad, but it is so in a pre-eminent degree when it comes before he has had the time or the opportunity to make his genius felt, or to secure the recognition which alone compensates to the artist for years of lonely struggle and nervous exhaustion. Raphael, Shelley, Keats, and others, it is true, died young; yet had they lived to a good age, could they have made their "heritage of fame" one jot more secure? In their case there is little to regret. But the annals of art, could they be written, would tell of many a hand palsied in the prime of its power, just when the mastery over the materials of the art had been gained, and when the strong poetic soul had begun to show with free and fluent pencil how nature was mirrored within it, and how well and wisely it read and could interpret the deep significance of

"The power, the beauty, and the majesty,
That have their haunts by dale, or piney mountain,
Or forest, by slow stream or pebbly spring,
Or chasms and watery depths."

Not a few such pass away, leaving a name utterly unknown, except, it may be, by some stray connoisseur. Others, like Bonington and Müller among painters, or Schubert among musicians, rise rapidly into renown; but only when recognition comes too late to quicken the pulses or lighten the hearts of the men who have done so much for the enjoyment of others. Of this number, we fear, was Mr. Bridell; for although within a certain circle his works were known and appreciated, the time had not come when his fine powers, which latterly were ripening with striking rapidity, must have forced a general recognition, and placed him in the very foremost rank of poetical landscape painters.

Frederick Lee Bridell was born in Southampton, in November, 1831, of respectable, but not wealthy parents. He very early showed a talent for painting, and at the age of fifteen began life in his native town as a portrait painter. His early efforts were wholly unassisted, for at that time Southampton had not the means of supplying even the elements of an education in art. While Mr. Bridell was still in his sixteenth year, his works attracted the attention of a picture cleaner and dealer, visiting Southampton, who induced him to enter into one of those engagements by which young men of real power have not unfrequently bartered for a bare subsistence brains, time, and health. Whether Mr. Bridell's engagement was of this one-sided nature we do not pretend to say. It secured for him, at all events, the means of a prolonged study abroad, the fruits of which were conspicuous in the artist's best works. But, on the other hand, a mistaken view of self-interest on the part of his employer kept him back from the London public long after he ought to have been winning a place among the artists of the British school.

It was not till 1859 that Mr. Bridell exhibited in London, when he produced a marked impression by his fine picture of "The Coliseum by Moonlight," exhibited in that year at the Royal Academy, and again last year at the International Exhibition. There was in this picture the unmistakeable presence of an eye that looked at nature with the sympathies of a poet, and a hand that dealt with what it undertook in a fashion of its own, and that no common one. The impression then made Mr. Bridell fully sustained by his subsequent works. A visit the following year to the North Italian lakes resulted in several noble pictures. These were eagerly sought after by the lovers of art whom circumstances threw across his path. Mr. John Platt and Mr. Josiah Radcliffe possess two specimens of a very large size, while Mr. Theodore Martin and others may be mentioned as the owners of many smaller pictures from the same field, all distinguished by consummate truth, combined with poetical and perfectly original treatment. There was nothing small or trivial in Mr. Bridell's representations of nature. He did not fritter away your attention upon the foliage of a fern or the details of a fence. He placed the grand panorama of plain, forest, lake, mountain, and sky vividly before you; made you look at it with his eyes, contemplate it with his mood, and feel the influences of the whole scene as he himself had felt them. He was not one of those men who are "put out by nature." On the contrary, he obviously never feared to grapple with her either in her coyest or her grandest moods. His sketches demonstrate this. But it is impossible to look at his pictures and not to feel that at his easel, and while his imagination was most active, nature was ever before his eyes, and that he was bent to fix her varied features upon his canvas with that individuality of stamp which is their subtlest charm, but for which so many are content to substitute merely conventional types. In his painting of skies and clouds in particular, Mr. Bridell seems to us to occupy a place among British artists only second to Turner. Some of his earlier works may be open to the charge of heaviness in treatment, but this defect cannot be alleged against any of his later pictures. We have present to our minds as we write several which bear the same place in our memory as the actual sunrises and sunsets, twilights and moonlights, of which every observer of nature carries a store in his memory, as revelations of beauty never to be forgotten. In the shifting aspects of the clouds, in the gorgeous hues of the dawn and twilight, in the trailing vapours of lake and mountain, Mr. Bridell obviously revelled. He possessed the rare art of preserving in his colours all the transparency and airy lightness of reality. His best pictures impress us with the same sense of beauty and completeness as fine poems, or a fine strain of music; and we speak from personal experience when we say that a picture in his best manner will make you forget that you are looking at it in a London room, and lose yourself in the solemn sweetness of after sunset upon the Lake of Como, or a summer dream of the olive-clad slopes of wind-swept Soracte.

HAMPSHIRE

We have received the following further communication from Mr. Henry Rose :-

[To the Editor of the SOUTHAMPTON TIMES.]

"SIR—In my letter last week upon Mr. Bridell I spoke of a mutual drawing class composed of about half-a-dozen of us. Permit me to add a few lines, and say that we used to meet at the house, and by the earnest request of Mr. Philip Carter, mattress maker, Nos. 2 and 3, Strand. Mr. Carter was known to the public as an ardent Chartist, who harangued large assemblies in the Park from the elevation afforded by a chair, generally getting very excited himself and impressing his hearers with the same feelings. His vehemence often got him into scrapes, and once before the magistrates. He was a tall man, of great energy, and generally walked as though he had conscientious reasons for doing four to five miles an hour. He had no school education; in his early life he was engaged in tending sheep on Salisbury Plain, driving the plough, &c. He used to tell thrilling stories of privations and hardships he had gone through, but he had educated himself, and his mind was well stored with general knowledge. Our experience of him was that he was a gentleman of fine feeling, tender susceptibilities, generous impulses, keen appreciation of the beautiful and true, and possessing a passionate love for the fine arts, especially drawing and painting, in which he showed great ability, his pictures testifying that he was a real artist. He was an enthusiast, and did much to inspire us in the sentiment and practice of art. He agitated for the establishment here of a Government School of Art, which

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Unfortunately for his fame, most of Mr. Bridell's best works have never been exhibited. Chief among these is a landscape of an important size (painted in emulation of Turner, as Turner had previously painted in emulation of Claude), illustrative of Spenser's description in the "Faerie Queen" of the Temple of Love. It was commissioned by Mr. Wolff, of Bevois Mount House, Southampton, and justifies the artist's ambitious hope of rivalling, without imitating, his great predecessor. Mr. Wolff was among the first to appreciate the rising genius of Mr. Bridell. He bought largely of him, and his collection, containing, among others, 'The Coliseum,' is fine and important enough to merit the title of 'The Bridell Gallery,' which Mr. Wolff has given it. This gentleman, we believe, courteously allows lovers of art to inspect his collection. Another large picture, entitled 'Sunset on the Atlantic,' exhibited six years ago in Liverpool, produced an impression there which has never been forgotten. This picture also has not been seen in London.

In 1858 Mr. Bridell married in Rome the daughter of Mr. W. J. Fox, then member for Oldham. The lady is herself an artist, and their union was one of those rare marriages of sympathy almost ideal. For some time past it had been painfully apparent to Mr. Bridell's friends that his health was seriously shaken. He continued, however, to work on hopefully, and contemplated making another visit to Rome this autumn, to carry out a design for a series of landscapes illustrative of the rise, grandeur, and decay of Rome, which he had long had in contemplation. To this series his "Coliseum," shrouded in gloom and shadow, with malaria mists veiling its base, would have formed, as he intended, the appropriate close.

Mr. Bridell died of consumption at the early age of thirty-two. His frame, naturally sensitive and delicate, had, we fear, been overtaken. In his passionate enjoyment of his art he seemed to forget that the body has its claims as well as the spirit; and even after the dilated pupil and hollow cheek gave token to his friends of the insidious bane that was sapping his life, we have known him go on working at his easel without intermission for periods that would have taxed the energies of the strongest man. Two of his latest pictures were painted for the last Royal Academy exhibition, but were returned. This, as all the world now knows, was no disgrace. Disappointment it certainly was. He bore it bravely, but we shall not soon forget the pang we felt when, as he showed us with a half timid satisfaction these beautiful pictures, and told us of their rejection, we looked at the worn face and the eager eyes, to which disease had already begun to give a painful brightness, and thought that this perhaps last chance of reading his success in the admiring eyes of his fellow-men had been denied him by the miserable selfishness of those who thrust out true art from the walls of the Academy to make room for vulgar commonplace, and repetitions of effects that have been stale for years. It is easy to understand how little pictures, so full of bold originality, could be appreciated by those who have long since lost sight of nature in the tricks of a vicious mannerism. But in that great school of poetic landscape art in which Turner, Constable, and Müller, are the leaders, and which has its representatives among Frenchmen in Daubigné, Rousseau, Francois, Ziem, Flandrin, and others, Mr. Bridell had already taken foremost rank. Had he lived, he must have earned a European reputation; and numerous and fine as are the works he has left, his early death is, in the interests of art, deeply to be deplored. We have only to add, that in manners Mr. Bridell was simple, amiable, and modest. Firm without self-assertion, sincere without being obtrusive, we can believe he was beloved by his friends, as most certainly he was respected by those whose knowledge of him was comparatively slight.

doubtless had its influence in the fulfilment of his desires. He was a man of large sympathies with his fellow-creatures, always ready to help a lame dog over a stile, or share his last penny with one less fortunate than himself; and were he here now, Mr. George Parker would have an earnest helper; he would give his energy, and money too, if he happened to have any, which was not always the case; for though he spent very little upon himself, his generous care for others often emptied his pockets. He emigrated to Australia, and, if now living, must be a very old man. Of those of us who met at his house only Mr. William Burgess, of Manitoba (a letter from whom to me appeared in the *Independent* of the 4th inst.), and myself remain. We hold an ever grateful and abiding sense of the help and inspiration we received from Philip Carter, the eccentric mattress maker of the Strand.

"I am, Sir, yours, &c.,

High-street, Jan. 18, 1888.

"HENRY ROSE."

Mrs. Bridell-Fox, widow of the late Mr. Bridell, writes to the Editor as under :-

"Sir—I see with great pleasure that the name of Mr. Frederick Lee Bridell is not forgotten in the place of his birth. It is very gratifying to know that his fellow townsmen appreciate his character and genius—a genius that was capable of raising itself from the lowest state of society to the highest.

"I write to say that, should your excellent idea be carried out, of a local exhibition of Mr. Bridell's works, I beg that the committee will put themselves into communication with me, as I believe that I could indicate to them in what quarters to apply for the loan of some of his best works. I myself still possess a few choice water-colours (two of which have just returned from the Jubilee Exhibition at Manchester), which I should be happy to lend, as well as a few small but brilliant studies in oil.

"I should like to correct the impression made by his friend, Mr. Rose, as to Mr. Bridell's health. It gave way, as Mr. Rose says, with the anxiety he suffered at the time of his differences with Mr. Holder, the dealer to whom he had bound himself; but when I first made his acquaintance in London in 1858, just before he started for Rome, his health had revived. The long list of large and brilliant pictures which left his easel from that time until within six months of his death, in 1863, give evidence of no failing powers, and would have done credit to the industry of a far stronger man.

"As a matter of detail, I should also like to correct the statement that the small sketches and studies for pictures sold by me shortly after his death realised the sum Mr. Rose named. Individually they fetched good prices; but the fact is that the whole total of the sale did not amount to nearly half the sum mentioned, and half of that again was from other sources.

"I am, Sir, yours truly,

"ELIZA F. BRIDELL-FOX.

"4, Campden Hill road, Kensington,
Jan. 18th, 1888."