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SIMPSON, WILLIAM (1823-1899)

William Simpson was born 28 October 1823 in Glasgow. At the age of twelve, he began work at a Glaswegian architect's office where he cultivated his skills in the visual arts. Two years later, Simpson was apprenticed to Allan and Ferguson, a firm of lithographic printers, for whom he sketched old buildings. He was employed by Day and Son upon moving to London in 1851, and at the outbreak of the Crimean War he was commissioned to portray the conflict by Colnaghi and Sons. His brief was to provide on the spot sketches, and his work's sense of immediacy made him a pioneer war artist. His sketches in Balaclava from November 1854, and his representations of the fall of Sebastopol in 1855 cemented his reputation. In 1858, Day and Son sent him to India in the wake of the Munity and he spent three years sketching Hindustan, Kashmir and Tibet for the company. Returning to London in 1861, he spent four years finishing 250 of these paintings. Day and Son then went bankrupt and his paintings were seized as part of the company's assets. Simpson was a prolific special artist and correspondent of the *Illustrated London News*, having befriended William Ingram in 1868. As a special artist, his work was notably diverse. He reported a variety of events from marriages and coronations to explorations and wars. In November 1866, he covered the marriage of Cesarewitch, later Alexander III with the princess Dagmar of Denmark, before portraying his visit to Jerusalem with the Palestine Exploration Fund. He depicted his trip to Abyssinia with Lord Napier in 1867-68, and the following year covered the opening of the Suez Canal. In 1870, he covered the Franco-Prussian war at Paris and Metz where he was captured and accused of spying but, having made his sketches on cigarette paper, he was able to destroy them by smoking them upon capture. He was sent back to Paris where he escaped and travelled to Sedan in order to witness the surrender of Napoleon III. He then covered the Paris Commune in 1871, the Emperor of China's marriage in 1872 and the Modoc Indian War of 1872-73. He travelled to India to report on the Prince of Wales' 1875-76 visit. In 1877, he visited Mycenae and the Troad to illustrate Dr. Schliemann's explorations. From 1878-9, he travelled with Sir Samuel Browne during the Afghan war and returned to the Afghan frontier in 1884-5 with Sir Peter Lumsden and the Afghan Boundary Commission. Simpson also covered the coronation of Czar Alexander III during May 1883 in Moscow. In addition to this long history with the *Illustrated London News*, Simpson also contributed articles to *Fraser's Magazine*, *Good Words*, *Harper's Magazine*, and the *Daily News*, to which he contributed a popular series of articles on Chinese social life in 1872. Simpson was involved in several societies and associations, and jointly founded the Society of Biblical Archaeology. In March 1874, Simpson was elected an associate of the Institute of Painters in Water Colours, and became a full member in February 1879. Simpson was heavily involved in the institution's acquisition of the Royal Charter, becoming the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours in 1884. Simpson was also an original member of Society of Painters in Oil Colours, established in 1883. Becoming a Freemason in 1871, he was one of the first members of Quatuor Coronati Lodge and became its master 1888. Simpson was also the author of many travel books and memoirs. He died 17 August 1899 in North West London, and was buried in Highgate cemetery. **AD**

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William Simpson is widely-known today as the war artist whose first-hand depiction of the Crimean War helped bring home the reality of that ill-managed campaign to the British public. His were the surrogate eyes of Empire in many Victorian military adventures, and he reported faithfully and, indeed, sometimes disapprovingly, on what he saw: "wherever shot and shell and ugly sword-blades are about, there he is sure to be", wrote the Glasgow Baillie of him in 1878, for Simpson was the first of the Victorian "Special Artists" whose primary focus was war. William was born in Glasgow on 28th October 1823, the son of James Simpson, a dissolute labourer who worked in the shipyards, and Ann (née Johnstone), a gentle woman for whom he always retained great affection.