

*Recent Prints by W. Lee Hankey, R.E.*SOME RECENT PRINTS BY
W. LEE HANKEY, R.E.

CAPTAIN LEE HANKEY'S development as an engraver has been full of interest as it has been marked always by experiment and advance. He has etched in bold firm lines; he has made monochrome aquatints of quality; he has been one of the foremost exponents of the colour-print from aquatint plates for the tints and soft-ground etching for the contours; and always he has expressed uncompromisingly his own vision; but it is with the intimacy of the direct touch of the dry-point upon the copper that he has found, perhaps, his most characteristic expression. His manner of handling the method is distinctive and admirably adapted to his pictorial conception. This is seen with particular charm in the group of prints which he has produced within the last two or three years. His period of active service in the earlier part of the war brought him in contact with various types of French and Flemish peasantry, and in the simple pathos of their humble, war-gripped lives he has found pictorial material which has made poignant appeal to his human, no less than to his artistic, sympathy. With a peculiar tenderness of expression, therefore, he has used his dry-point, visualizing his subjects with the ample tonal sense of the painter rather than with the etcher's suggestive reticence of line, albeit linear definition, artistically unobtrusive, invests the designs with essential vitality.

More than one of these prints has already been seen in THE STUDIO, notably *Her Sole Possession* (March 1917), a young French war-widow drawing comfort from the nestling of her infant.

Now we reproduce some further typical examples of this appealing phase of Captain Lee Hankey's art. There is something beyond artistic beauty in these prints: there is real human emotion. In *The Widow* the artist has concentrated himself on the utter sorrow expressed in the toil-worn face of the bereaved woman, with her sleeping baby held dejectedly upon her lap, while the wistful look of the child by her side seems to emphasize the poignancy of this moment with the outlook of long, sad, laborious years to come. Here the dry-point work is remarkably rich and luminous. A

Flemish Mother is a charming contrast, for here is hope expressive in the young woman's gaze—a little anxiety, too, perhaps, for the husband is doubtless in the firing-line; but the delicious baby on her knee is so much alive, and herein is a solacing joy. The composition is engagingly simple, the tender sentiment of the thing convincing. *Tant Difficile* gives us a pathetic glimpse into one of these humble little homes, from which the bread-winner has been drawn for soldiering, never probably to return. The poor room, with its tell-tale of difficult life for this young mother, has been realized, in all its small detail, with true pictorial harmony. It is characteristic of the artist that he appears to love plump babies and small children, in all their potent helplessness, even as Swinburne loved them, with such a tender vitality he depicts them, while delicately suggesting their relative significance and the sheltering mother-love. In *French Folk*, an aged peasant woman seems to be trying to comfort, with her sad, wise resignation, a young girl, maybe her grandchild, to whom the war has brought a sorrow doubtless that recalls an experience of her own in the long ago. The face of this old wrinkled woman, with all its expression of character and feeling, is a remarkable study that Rembrandt himself might not have disdained, and the aged hands with the claw-like fingers, how truly they are drawn! *Fading Light* also gives us a beautifully pathetic study of an old woman; but the light is going out of her life, and, as she lies on her death-bed, with her hands powerless, she gazes upward into some hopeful beyond, where there can reach her no longer any tidings of the war, that, with its horrors so near, has saddened her last days. How living, how intimate the scene is! With what tender, loving draughtsmanship the artist has realized it! A gladder beauty is that of *A Daughter of Spain*, a print, indeed, of charm, done presumably in the happy days of peace, when the artist's "active service" was to draw for delight's sake an attractive girl sitting with easy grace in the sunshine of her native warm South. Two other phases of Captain Lee Hankey's art are also shown here. *Sur la Neige*, with its delicate drawing of leafless trees in a sunny atmosphere, reveals his sensitive feeling for landscape; while *An Easter Egg*, done from four—or was it five?—plates, shows him quite at his best as a maker of artistic colour-prints.

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