

generous backer, and patron of Frances Hodgkins, Christopher Wood, and several other fine painters. She had about twenty Christopher Woods, magnificent things, which she was refusing to sell. Wood had met with his tragic death not very long before this, and she was still living in the shadow of that great loss. She insisted that within a few years these paintings would be worth three and four hundred pounds apiece. Lucy wasn't really interested in the money. She wanted Christopher Wood's reputation to be established at its proper level. (She turned out later to be right in all her predictions).

Lucy Wertheim was a great admirer of the work of Frances Hodgkins. And, seeing that we were both New Zealanders, she wanted to bring us together. There was a bit of backing and filling on Miss Hodgkins' part which I found puzzling. I was a nobody—and she was very definitely a somebody: but one is always glad, surely, to meet someone from back home—or is one?

Then, one night, I did meet Frances Hodgkins. Lucy had us both to dinner. I had never seen the painter, and had no notion of what she looked like. I remember walking round on that dank winter evening to Lucy's flat in Regent's Park Road, next-door to Cecil Sharp House, with a light step and with a certain dewiness in my eyes. When I entered the room I became aware of a figure seated in the corner, in the warm shadow cast by the heavy lamp-shade. I sensed at once, if not hostility, at least a certain aggressive reserve. Lucy introduced us. Then, after a few moments, it began. I was a New Zealander? Surely I didn't go about boasting of the fact? Surely there was nothing very extraordinary about it? And why should I assume that she might be the least interested in meeting a New Zealander? And so it went on. Surprised and embarrassed, I tried clumsily to fence with her, playing for time. I felt that there was something pent up, and that the best thing was to let it spill itself freely. I refused to be provoked by this quite astounding bitterness, realising confusedly that it was not really directed at me. I was merely an occasion of it; and I had become, for the moment, a symbol. I let her carry on.

AFTER a while the tension began to slacken, and I felt more at ease. I took stock of this strange woman. Her appearance was very different from anything I had imagined. She looked to be about sixty, a very vigorous sixty. She was short, and her clothes had a strong suggestion of the gipsy—I have a confused mental image of red cloth, and a very full skirt, and some metal ornaments, bangles and brooches and ear-rings and so on, which at this distance in time can't be sorted out clearly. Her personality was more striking than her clothes. It seemed to reverberate around that small room. Her manner of speaking was blunt and forceful, thoroughly downright. There was no damned humbug about her.

On the wall of the room hung one of the loveliest of her works that I have

seen. Its smooth, sensuous quality seemed to belie the somewhat rocky front with which I was being presented. As my eye roved from the woman to the picture and back again, I knew quite certainly that her bark was worse than her bite. That painting gave the show away.

We talked a good deal, that evening. When she had got over her first resentment at having New Zealand thrust at her as if she were expected to like it, she became communicative, and talked wittily. I liked her bluntness, and her oddness, very much. There was a fierce honesty in her that compelled admiration. After a while I came to have some inkling as to why a New Zealander such as Frances Hodgkins could feel such a degree of negative emotion about her natal land. I felt subdued, and a little chastened; for I was aware of the particular sort of resentment, the complete lack of sympathetic understanding—in many cases, the blank indifference—with which her attitude would be regarded by most of her countrymen. Her impatience had, I think, little egotism in it. What she was protesting against, at bottom, was a certain lack of spirit in the life of New Zealanders. If she had been a snob or a comfortable dilettante I, in turn, would have become resentful. But here, beyond all doubt, was a woman full of spirit, one who had endured poverty and disappointment, pursuing her chosen work with ardour and with a bitter honesty that forbade her to take short cuts to quick success. Her protest stood.

Frances Hodgkins has some claim to be considered the greatest living woman painter. If her work is hardly known in New Zealand, that is our loss, and ours alone. Not only has she left us, and lost interest in New Zealand; in her development she has perhaps left us far behind. It is a melancholy thought.

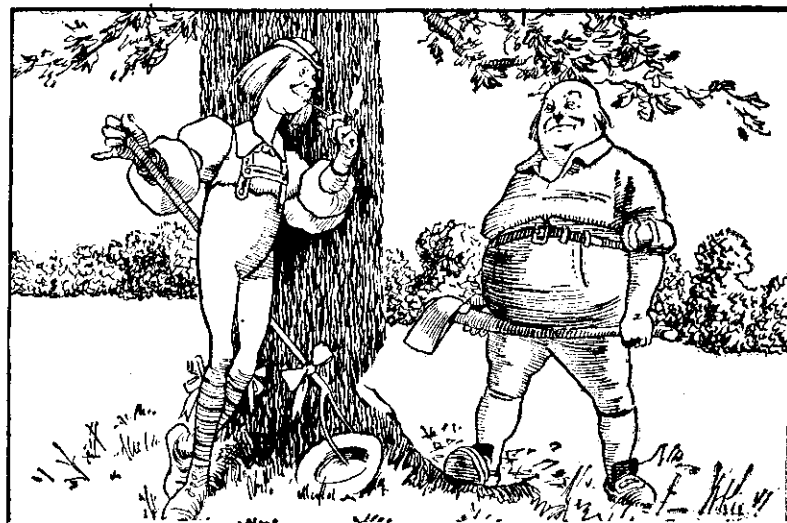
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Figures for the Year

SINCE March, 1946, the number of radio licences in New Zealand has increased from 395,139 to 418,029. Wellington still leads, with 144,846, and then come Auckland with 140,430, Canterbury with 74,957, and Otago with 57,796.

Last year there were only 845 amateur licences in force; the number has risen this year to 1260. The main cause of this increase is the lifting of war-time restrictions and, of course, the number of men who, released from the Armed Forces, have gone back to their old hobby of operating an amateur transmitter.

No research licences were issued last year, but now that war-time restrictions have been raised, three are in force—two in Wellington and one in Otago. These licences are held by universities and are issued solely for the study of radio and general research purposes.



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