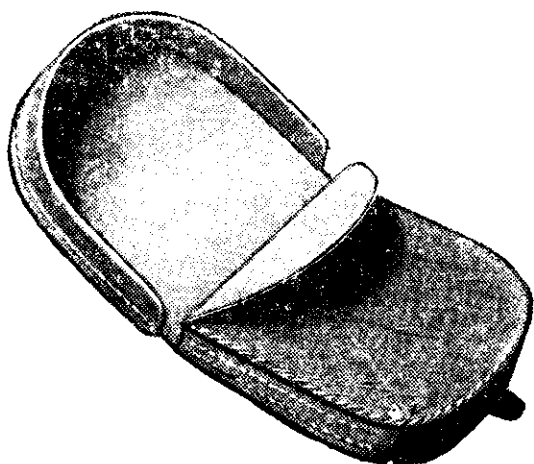


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IN THE PLEASING PASTEL PINK TIN—1/8½, AT MAIN TOWNS.

## BOOKS

### An Artist Discovered

FRANCES HODGKINS, *FOUR VITAL YEARS*, by Arthur R. Howell; Rockliff. English price, 16s.

(Reviewed by E. H. McCormick)

ONE is grateful for anything that throws light on the career of Frances Hodgkins, and I read this book with intense interest. The author, who was Miss Hodgkins's dealer in the late twenties and early thirties, reveals with surprising candour the methods he used to launch this "unknown" artist on the London art world. Most of us have a rough idea of what goes on in building up a reputation, but it is rare to have the process explained so circumstantially. Having said so much, Mr. Howell might have said a little more—what the artist was paid for her work, for instance, and what output was expected of her under the terms of her contract.

The book does not, however, touch on the cruder aspects of commerce: Mr. Howell, speculator in a twofold sense, has a taste for aesthetic and semi-philosophical pondering which he also attributes to Miss Hodgkins. On very slender evidence, he constructs a theory that in her practice as an artist she was deeply influenced by J. S. Bach. I confess I do not follow all the subtleties of the argument, and I find the appropriate comment in Mr. Howell's own words: "Apart from the importance of drawing attention to Miss Hodgkins's work, what, up to now, have all the words of interpretation written on it contributed to its appreciation?"

In spite of a suggestion in Mr. John Piper's foreword, I doubt whether Mr. Howell's purpose was, in any strict sense, biographical. But from remarks of his own and from the letters he quotes it is possible to construct a picture of Frances Hodgkins during this phase of her life. There is dignity as

well as pathos in the spectacle of this woman of sixty, proud, stoical, undemanding, "although at times almost without the means of living"; or, when Mr. Howell last visited her, painting by electric light in a room whose "bare floor held only a piece or two of furniture." And, disclosing an abyss, she herself writes: "I simply cannot face living alone in any house at the present moment. . . . Having had so much of it in the past I know its horrors. . . ." Mr. Howell has printed the letters with scrupulous fidelity to the text, and it is ungracious to lament that so gifted a letter-writer should make her first published appearance as the author of these crabbed, banal notes scribbled in haste, usually about business affairs. Even here there are flashes of wit or imagination and hints of mild malice: "not even a fly settles on me—but sometimes a butterfly"; "a blue day like a cake of cobalt"; "an inspired plumber" (of Leger).

Appendices include a brief chronology, not always accurate, and lists of works which might form the basis of a *catalogue raisonné* if some disinterested scholar were prepared to spend ten years and a fortune in compiling it. Amongst eight illustrations are four paintings reproduced in colour. Perhaps the most notable of these is "Tanks, Barrels and Drums" (1937), depicting objects that appear in water-colours of the early nineties. Possibly a more fruitful field of investigation than the influence of Bach! The book is very well produced, and, one hopes, will initiate a series of similar monographs on the life of this remarkable woman.

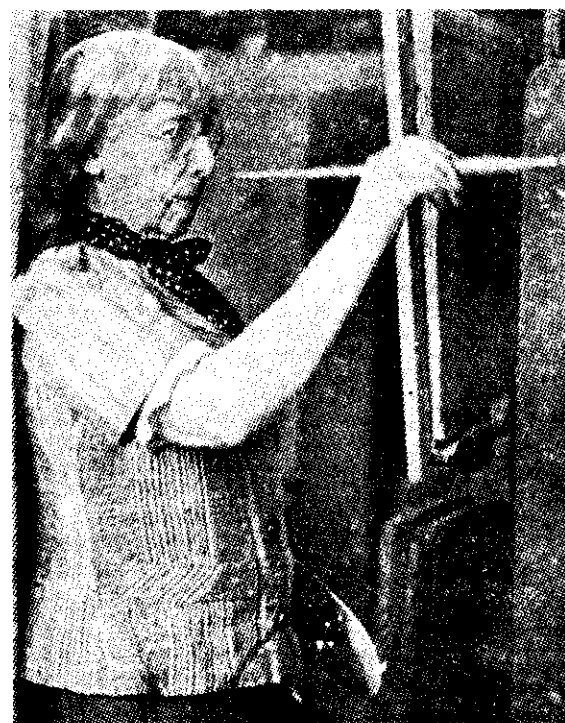
### A NEW LIGHT

THE LAGOON AND OTHER STORIES, by Janet Frame; Caxton Press, Christchurch; 10s. 6d.

IT is probably quite right that this book, beautifully produced by the Caxton Press, should appear without a blurb on the dust-jacket: stories of such rare quality can be their own recommendation: the reviewer who is confronted by them may very well risk following the publishers' lead, and limit himself to saying no more than will serve to emphasise their merits.

There is very little of what is common experience for every New Zealander that hasn't found its way into the 24 stories: it is all there—soil, sea and sky, bird and beast, plant and flower, all seen and felt as though with dazzled wonder and delight for the first time in human history. But it is from the New Zealanders themselves, or some of them, that the stories mainly derive their piercing flavour of anguish and suffering.

Perhaps one may say that in their entirety they seem to pose a



FRANCES HODGKINS  
Tanks, barrels, drums—and Bach

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 18, 1952.