

a sympathetic and kindly friend of all young artists, aiding, encouraging and supporting them . . . Mr Hodgkins was entirely self-taught . . . Art with him was a hobby, and not a trade, and during nearly the whole of his life it was his custom, not only to spend his holidays in sketching excursions, but to rise very early in the morning, and spend hours in his studio, when the rest of the world was asleep. He painted almost to the day of his death and the unfinished picture which was upon his easel when he died is perhaps one of his finest works . . . There can be no doubt that Mr Hodgkins' art work became stronger and better as time went on . . . if he had given up his whole life to his art he would have been a famous painter . . . in his special medium (watercolour) he was an acknowledged master, and none of our younger artists have yet approached him in delicacy and precision of tone. The charm of his work consists chiefly in the exquisite tenderness of the colouring, the delicacy of graduation and tint; also the fine atmospheric effects.¹³

This was the comment of a contemporary with a detailed knowledge and appreciation. Later judgments have type-cast William Hodgkins as one of those nineteenth century painters 'who saw in the landscape only a reflection of that of Europe' for whom it was 'natural to apply to these [New Zealand] subjects the forms, light and colours of English, Scottish or American landscape painting'.¹⁴



[Mountain mist] *watercolour* 19 x 29cm Art Coll. A213:66

While grateful for the research and discrimination which made pioneering judgments in the history of the visual arts here, it is perhaps now possible to make some re-appraisal from the greatly increased evidence of original and, until now, unknown works. The watercolours in the Hodgkins family donation do not suggest an insensitive application of alien forms and colours, but rather an acute observation of character and a very finely-tuned sense of colour nuance. In his handling of the medium William Hodgkins