

painters as well as at the French, and Frances Hodgkins was famous among them. The war that was waged against them here in New Zealand found a focus in a picture of hers when an advanced group in Christchurch bought it with a view to presenting it to the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. It was called 'The Pleasure Garden'. It wasn't a very large picture, and was pleasant in colour and texture. Its positive qualities were attractive. The only negative description that comes to mind is 'inoffensive'. Yet the fight against its acceptance for the gallery reached enormous proportions, and went on for years. It began, I think, in the late thirties or early forties. It wasn't over until well into the fifties, because some time after I went to live in Greymouth in 1950 the Westland Art Society had it for a fortnight, and asked me to look after it. The would-be donors adopted the strategy of sending it round all the art societies of New Zealand to test their reactions. I haven't the date of its acceptance for the McDougall at hand, but it must have been well into the fifties. At any rate it wasn't until enough members of the old gang had died and their places on the board of the gallery had been taken by others. They had literally fought to the death against their expatriate countrywoman because she had escaped from their prison. That her work, if recognised, might liberate others was their fear.

As late as 1960 on a visit to Nelson (I had a grant of money to paint there from the Association of New Zealand Art Societies) I found that there was still resistance to 'The Pleasure Garden'. Some members of the Suter Gallery Board of Trustees had resigned over the presentation of another Frances Hodgkins watercolour to their gallery. But my instance was more private. In Riwaka, I went to visit an old lady who in our younger days had been the first to instruct me how to paint in watercolours. I hadn't seen her for about thirty years, and was curious to find out if her work would still excite me as it did then. It didn't and our conversation soon flagged. I cast round in my mind for something to revive it over the cup of tea she had got for me, and lit on Frances Hodgkins; another woman painter, a famous one. What did my hostess think of her work?

'You know that picture, "The Pleasure Garden",' she began. Indeed I did, I boasted, I had had it in my house for a fortnight. It was most inappropriate, I went on, that such a great row should have developed and been sustained so long over such an inoffensive picture. She waited till I had finished, and then pronounced: 'It is an immoral picture.' I was staggered. 'But why?' I asked. 'There are people without any clothes on, walking in the garden.' 'Oh, those aren't real people, they are only stone sculptures.' But she had further objections. Had I noticed the objects on the table? I had to confess I couldn't remember the picture in such detail. 'Wineglasses