



Jan 23' 18' to Ena
Philosophy

John Hargrave

given to V. R. P. Sargent
at Doddington Hall.

Dear Antony and Vicky,

I thought it might be a good idea to note down a few of the details and anecdotes concerning Sargent's portrait of my Mother and your grandmother Ena, known as 'A Vele Gonfie' (in full sail), as I hope and trust it has found a permanent home in the beautiful setting of Doddington Hall.

This portrait, so I was told, was given by my grandfather Asher Wertheimer to his daughter Ena, and Robert Mathias, as a wedding present in 1905. Later Sargent did a slightly smaller portrait of Robert Mathias.

It was rumoured that Sargent was in love with Ena, but all that my mother told me was that he was extremely tiresome whilst painting her, and insisted on what seemed to her hundreds of sittings. One day she arrived late and came running in with her cloak flying out behind her; Sargent was so enchanted with this effect that he asked her to continue running so as to keep the cloak billowing out behind her. Mother found this very tiring, so she picked up a broomstick which was lying in the corner of the studio and used it to hold out the cloak. If one looks carefully one can see the broomstick that Sargent painted sticking out at the back. Another time mother thought that at last the portrait was finished and the sittings over, but Sargent insisted that she should go home and come again with a different blouse, as he felt the portrait needed a touch of colour near the throat. In desperation Mother looked round the studio to find something. Her eyes alighted on Lord Ribblesdale's court dress that was lying on the table (Sargent had eventually decided to paint Lord Ribblesdale as a country squire with his dog and his gun), so she snatched up the collar which gave the desired effect, thus saving her from another sitting.

II

Sargent was a frequent visitor at 15 Montagu Square, our home in London, and was evidently very fond of my mother. In fact, years later, when I was married with two children, and after my mother had died in 1935, my father handed me a packet of letters and said to me, "Di darling, I would like you to read them and see if you think your mother had an affair with Sargent". I found them quite illegible and impossible to decipher, so I took them along to my Aunt Betty (Mrs. Rickets, mother's sister), who is the smaller figure in red in the well known portrait of 'Ena and Betty' by Sargent at the Tate Gallery. The postcards of this portrait are on sale but the actual picture is usually in the cellar, or 'reserve' as they call it.

I thought Aunt Betty would surely know, as whenever mother ran away, which was quite often, after a 'tiff' with Dad, she nearly always took refuge with her sister Betty in the country. My father used to ring up Betty and immediately knew, by the suppressed giggling, that she was there. It always ended in reconciliation and I recollect my mother saying to me, "Your father is quite impossible, but remember Di, he has a heart of gold". Of course Aunt Betty was unable to decipher the letters, but when I asked her opinion about "the affair" she replied, "Darling, don't be silly, Sargent was only interested in Venetian Gondoliers". On reflection, I feel there might have been a tinge of jealousy in this reply. Anyhow, mother was married in 1905 and the portrait was finished and shown at the Academy in the same year.

Unfortunately, Sargent never dated his letters with the year; he only put Monday or Tuesday - the day of the week - and occasionally the month. A great many of these were hurried notes, sent, I imagine, by special messengers, as they had no address, and the ones that were posted had the stamps torn off (I expect for my brother John's collection). Occasionally a postmark remains and gives the year. These letters were addressed very respectfully -

III

"Dear Mrs. Mathias" - (no mention of 'Ena'), except on the pencil sketch of which I have enclosed a photocopy (the original is in my brother, David Mathias' possession). Alas, I am quite unable to decipher the words of the dedication or the date. Most of these letters, except for the one that I have photocopied with 'DAMN' on it, and the drawings of us children, are very boring as far as I can make out - all to do with appointments for sittings and acceptances or refusals for dinners, with the occasional cancellation of sittings because of the terrible smogs.

I feel it is always interesting to know a little about the subject of the painting:

Mother had been a student at the Slade; she loved painting, and was inspired, by the costumes for the Russian ballet (Diaghilev was a constant habituée of Montagu Square) to open a children's clothes shop, and called it 'Poulain'. The children's dresses were simple and so pretty that the mothers wanted copies for themselves. 'The Russian Princesses' were the vendeuses who arrived at about 12 a.m., but the cocktail party for the collections was so crowded that mother decided to expand, and open a large premises in Brook Street, opposite Claridges. Unfortunately, thanks to the fact that she hired a supposedly very business-like manageress, who made off with the year's earnings, the shop went bankrupt, so she rented only two floors, and turned it into a picture gallery. This gallery was known as the Claridges Gallery, where she promoted many young, talented, and later famous, artists - Ben Nicholson, Cecil Beaton, John and Barbara Skeeping (Barbara Hepworth), Pavel Tchelitchev (who did Edith Sitwell's portrait, now at the Tate), and ~~Sheepi~~ were some of them. But in order to open the new shop in Brook Street, she needed money, so she decided to sell the Sargent portrait. Mother negotiated all this while my father was away. There is an amazing copy done by Reginald Eves, who, it is said, sat by Sargent's side and copied every stroke. He did this with nearly all of Sargent's portraits, and Mr. Kirkby, curator of the Bowes Museum of Durham,

IV

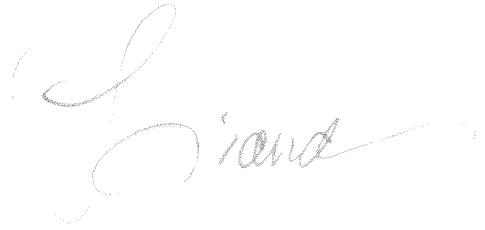
had a large collection of these copies which my brother David was once shown. Mother hung Eves' copy (which is now hanging in my Chateau in Normandy), in the original's place in the dining room of 15 Montagu Square, and it was only six months later that Dad, on showing the portrait to a friend, could not find Sargent's signature! My father was furious with mother, as was Sargent, who, from that day on never came back to visit mother or the family (though he arranged for his friend, Charles Deering in Chicago, to buy it for \$40,000, which was a very good price in those days). Sargent died in April 1925, and in July, mother held an exhibition of 20 of his water colours at the Claridges Gallery.

It was not until 1935 that Dad managed to track down the portrait and buy it back at the same price it was sold for. It arrived back in England in 1936, two days after my Mother's death, so she never saw it again.

When my father died in 1951 he put in his Will that the portrait should go to each of us children in order of age, starting with the eldest and going down on condition that they had room to hang it suitably. He specified that when we children die it should be offered to the Tate Gallery (not realising that it would probably end up in the crowded cellars!). *Sargent died in April 1925, & in July, Mother held an Exhibition of 20 of his Water colours at her Claridge Gallery.*

The portrait went first to my eldest brother John, who had great pride in being able to hang it in such suitable surroundings in the magnificent lofty drawing room of his flat in 23 Rutland Gate. The room is so large that it makes his wife, Lukey's grand piano look like a mere safety pin! There it stayed until February 1986, when Lukey decided to move to a smaller flat and I arranged for it to be sent down to Doddington Hall, the home of my niece, Ena's granddaughter, Vicky Jarvis, the eldest daughter of my younger brother Tony. There, in this beautiful historical Elizabethan house, filled with family portraits by Romney and Reynolds, priceless

furniture and china, and looking out on a fragrant rose garden, this lovely portrait can be admired and enjoyed by all the visitors.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Diana de Bosmelet". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the printed name.

Diana de Bosmelet

June, 1986