Autobiografie van Tamara Karsavina

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Frontispiers: Tamara Karsavina, an early portrait



I FINISHED WRITING this book on August 20, 1929, the day I heard of Diaghiley's death. I did not change then what I had written about him: I left him still alive as I had known him. In this revised edition I have done the same. But I have added a chapter in an attempt to bring some unity into the features of Diaghiley's personality, some of which features are wattered about the book, and some of which are newly told.

This depetes does not use at being a condensed biography, nor

This chapter does not aim at being a condensed biography, nor yet a psychological analysis; it is just a por rait in the mirror of my

Tamara Karsavina October 20, 1947

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It is PARTLY from my Father's tales, told to me in later years, and partly from my own early recollections that I can piece together a fairly consecutive story of my childhosod, a story made up of a series of little pictures like those in a child's alphabet.

My Father loved to talk to me of the time when I was quite small. When, in his spare hours, he sat by the window with his album and water-colours, I used to stand or sit by him watching him work. I can see even now the little pictures he used to make of different national



Platon Karsavin, Tamara Karsavina's father

costumes—Spanish, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Polish—each man with his lidy on the opposite sheet. All their dresses were minutely done, but the faces all looked to me to have rather large noses, and the ladies complexions seemed too tawny.

He never took his eyes off his worl, as he mimicked some incident of my bapyhood. He would only pluse now and then to wash his brush and suck it. The pictures were meant to help such of his pupils

as wanted to learn national dances.

My first clear recollection is how my nurse put me down on the path outside some house. Holding me under the arms, she first steadied me and then left me on my own. I started off toddling, at first fairly straight. Then my feet carried me faster and faster till I could not follow them. Father caught me up just in time.

Next comes to my mind a summ'er at Ligovo, near Petersburg. The house we occupied stood in the park of Count Posen's estate. We came down in early spring. I was recovering from inflamation of the lungs, and the doctor said I rust drink birch sap. Just at the back of the house there was a plot of grass encircled by young birchtrees not yet in leaf. I often watched with interest the sap being drawn from a hole drilled in the tree. It spuried out in a strong jet and we gathered it, usually in the norming, in an earthenware jug.

The juice had a sweet astringent taste.

Of the preceding illness I remen, ber very little, only lying on a big ottoman converted into a bed, if my hands a small mirror with which I darted 'sun rabbits' across the ceiling and on the striped wall-paper. I dreaded the appearance of Mother with a cold compress which she changed on me several times a day. She told me afterwards that she dreaded it too, is I used to cry ever so pitifully and feebly. My memories of this time are somewhat blurred. A few things, however, were impressed so deeply on my mind that even now they stand out clear and have not lost all their magic. The house we then had at Ligovo seemed vast and beautiful to me; and very likely my child's impression of it was not far wrong. What I remember of a large round room with a domed ceiling and niches seems to me now as if it could only have belonged to a fairly big country house of the late eighteenth century.

Though so very different from the small flat in which we lived in town, the place had a strange familiarity to me. In some inexplicable way, faint detached images of a life I had never seen and never could have heard of took hold of the. They had no beginning and no conclusion; just very vivid epitodes, like sudden flashes, that I

could not fit in anywhere. One especially insistent image, amounting in its vividness almost to a memory, puzzled me greatly. I could describe a pond, still and regular. I, a child, and a woman that seemed to be my Mother, stepped out of a carriage. She held my hand anc we walked round the pond towards a large house with a somewhat flat façade and many windows.

I moved with some difficulty; the path was gravel, and my high

I moved with some difficulty; the path was gravel, and my high heels made me unsteady. My dress was voluminous, heavy and stiff, not my everyday one. I felt timid, as I always did when taken on a visit. There the image stopped abruptly, and it teased me so not to know whom we thus went to see that I put endless questions about it to my Mother. She seemed amused by my story, but neither then nor after vards tried to find a matter-of-fact explanation of it.

How hig the grounds were of our Ligovo house I could not realise. The place then must have been in its decline. I do not remember any flower-beds. The park was shady and overgrown; and there was in it, at some distance from the house, a pavilion with minarets, called a Turkish bath, one of the ingenious devices of a Russian maison de plaisance of this time. Father told me that we spent a summer; in it once, but never went back, as it was damp. An artificial pond in front of it had a circle of very green starlike weeds round its edges. The pavilion stood empty, and my brother and I



Lev Karsavina's brother

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