

Appendix 14

Rex's advice letter to Joan

Letter from Rex to Joan

Jan 15th

A letter written by Reginald Aglio Dibdin, aged 61, to Joan Mary Guise, within a month or so of her husband, Tony, leaving for active service in Asia. This letter gives some insight into the depth of thinking of Rex and also coupled with letters from Tony written at that time, with the state of seeking of Joan.

From 17 Wynell Rd
Forest Hill SE23
14th Jan 1944

My Dear Joan

Thankyou for you letter and the enclosure which is a wonderful present and very welcome.

By all means keep the M-S (Manuscript). Rewrite it as it should be if you like – melody and harmony as well is you think it worthwhile.

Re your criticism, to be honest I think you are right at least till I hear the difference actually played. All the same – such iconoclasm – such devastating destruction of self-idolatry! How can I expect Beethoven and Boccherini and Mendelssohn and Sir Henry Wood to be at the Gates of Parnassus to welcome a new Master of Melodic Phrase ? All I can expect now is , “Back door entrance you!” “and mind the dog!” from a surly porter. And Cerberus will add further indignity by yapping the first bars out of time and tune from his three heads in initiation of a mock-fugue. All that because you dared to tell the truth about it.

I think it was Hilaire Belloc who said of Chesterton that “he sits on the steps of Brompton Oratory and tells passer-by how wonderful it is inside but does not goes in himself.” In the end Chesterton went in; but how and why he solved his personal difficulties I do not know.

Everyone has their own difficulties and the only conclusion I have come to is that none of these are intellectual. Intellectual arguments are excuses for emotional and practical inertia, to put it mildly. Take the point you mentioned “Infallibility”. I believe every Dibdin, at least, at some time has been infallible in his own eyes on some point. That none of the others ever agreed with him on that, made no difference. Fortunately they grew out of it sooner or later.

I want to rule in the point – Will you have one infallible, many infallibles, or no infallible ? Giving man his own last word means anarchy.

Put it to the vote – democracy with an unhappy minority !

Leave it to a Committee of the wisest – aristocracy, with the puzzle – who is to select the wisest ?

Pretend there is not and cannot be an infallible – chaos !

You see intellectual difficulties have a way of tumbling round themselves into a whirlpool of nonsense.

I have shaken up a good many so-called democrats by saying “In the kingdom of Heaven there is an absolute Monarchy. Everyone does as he is told and likes doing it. That is why it is Heaven. In the other place there are committees and minority voters and rebels and revolutionaries of every brand. Everyone has to do as he is told and does not like doing it. That is why it is Hell!

Very suspicious of me I know, especially in a world where everyone pretends that the highest wisdom is vested in the votes of the least intelligent and most selfish brutal members of Trades Unions.

I am not telling you to accept the Doctrine of Infallibility. All I say is put intellectual arguments on one side. They evade the real issue. Find your own solution on real spiritual grounds!

I know that Gate. I have seen it many times – somewhere doing the Excelsior Stunt. Sometimes passing on duty – sometimes not on duty.

If you can find the spirit in the Universe – like the Red Indian and his “Great Spirit”, you can find it in the part of the Universe enclosed by walls and gates. As to the Rules of Society”, we Dibdins never did like discipline. We have always fancied ourselves as divinely inspired rule-makers of others. The trouble again is that we have always wanted to make different rules from one another. Again I cannot tell you to do what I don’t do myself. But I cannot tell you to do as I do because I do not know whether I am doing right or not. I feel like a wild sort of sheep-dog who has always been on the fringes of the outer world fighting off enemies of civilisation. Somehow I feel I should be out of place joining all the good little camels in the sheep-fold!

Just show me a fine wolf in sheep’s clothing and I will be in my element making the fur fly ! And perhaps that feeling is only spiritual pride in disguise! and your wicked uncle is just a bad old man all the while. One thing I do know for certain is that, having read and wrestled with arguments and doctrines and philosophies and ‘isms’ of all kinds, during a long and wicked life, I have seen through the stock pseudo-scientific and sham spiritualistic and mock mystic substitutes for a simple faith in a in a single world. – Love manifesting throughout all life and showing itself to us in all ways that our limited powers can appreciate.

It is the spirit which affirms an everlasting yes to whatever is worth while and leaves the criticism of God to the Devil who always denies.

There you’ve made me confess more than I meant you, but I hope my doing so, may make it easier for you to carry on until your real shepherd calls, or whistles, and good sheep dogs must come to heel.

I’ll come over again in a week or two and try to cheer you up
Love from Uncle Rex.