Eliza Soane’s Letter to her son George, February 11th, 1812

21/02/2022

An edited transcript, in script format, from historical archives at the Sir John Soane Museum, of Eliza Soane’s private letters.

Made, on occasion of the talk event, *Introducing Eliza*, for the exhibition, *Dear friend, I can no longer hear your voice*, March 2022.

Susan Palmer, Head Archivist,

Sir John Soane’s Museum

who typed up the original

transcript.

Anne-Marie Creamer

W: <http://amcreamer.net>

Introducing Eliza talk event: March 2022

“Eliza Soane’s Letter to her son George, 1812”

CAST

‘CHARACTER’/ Protangonist NAME #1: Eliza Soane (age 48, at the time of writing):

Character description.

NOTE: This is an edited version of Eliza Soane's personal letter to her younger son George Soane, who had been continually running up debt and fraud, imploring him to face the realities of his situation. Two years after this letter George served time in the Kings Bench Prison.

Eliza was brought up by her uncle who became her ward, London builder George Wyatt, in the mid-late 18th cent. She was middle class, inheriting a sizeable fortune from her uncle upon his death. She married John Soane on 21 August 1784, then a promising architect and son of a brick layer. They are known to have had a loving marriage. They had had four children, two of whom had died in infancy. There were problems between with the sons and their father, resentments and temper which were to eventually breakdown after Eliza’s death.

Eliza was the center of family life, her wit and emotional intelligence often diplomatically managing family or social rifts. She applied the same skills to support her husband’s progress as he became an eminent English architect and Head of Architecture at the Royal Academy. Eliza's wider private letters reveal an intelligent empathic woman; a person of wit and reading; able to navigate the complex social world of regency Britain; a valued loyal friend; in the context of the times, considered a kindly employer; principled, she could be persuasive & forthright. At the time of writing this diary Eliza was married to John Soane for twenty-six years.

George was a renegade son, who had thwarted all his father’s attempts to turn him into an architect, married against his parents’ wishes and embarked on an unsuccessful literary career that left in in debt. Father and son had a resentful relationship, which would continue to escalate after this letter so that in 1815 George wrote an anonymous letter to the newspaper mocking his fathers’ work. John Soane felt the shock of this led to Eliza’s turn of ill health and hastened her death.

“Eliza Soane’s Diary of trip to Liverpool 1810”

Eliza Soane:

Feb 11- 1812

After the impertinent letter I received from you when last at Margate, you will doubtless be surprised at the trouble I am now taking – but your letter to your Father has just fallen into my hands – by that letter I judge you are in distress, - and however you may have injured me – by robbing me of my Child - & consequently shortening my days – yet be the sin your own head – you may be a Parent, & you may have an ungrateful son, (Eliza’s own underlining) & then you will know what I have felt for you…

In the last conversation you, & I, ever had you may recollect, I declared that if you adopted the plan, you seemed then determined on, no power on Earth should ever induce me to consider you in any other light, but as a single man – such I now consider you – at the same time I must acknowledge, I pity you from my heart, - for you being unfortunately of an Obstinate, violent, self-willed disposition, and having fallen into bad (Eliza’s underlining) hands, you are become the dupe of Vilainy, and destruction must follow. I fear the Task Master you are now bound to, you find more rigorous than your own Father, - notwithstanding the wicked, & cruel insinuations I am told by many you have been pleased to give to the World, - surely when your Father wished you to choose a respectable profession by which you might have been independent – there was nothing unnatural in it – nothing harsh – or cruel – yet when you search your own heart, & look back on your own conduct, you must acknowledge this was the groundwork of all your misfortune, but as retrospection is now useless – as the die is cast, and in my opinion your misery, misfortune, & disgrace sealed.

I say disgrace, because you have put it out of your own power to support yourself & family in an honourable manner, and consequently must heard with such, as from your Education your Soul must shrink. I have only to add violence on your part can do no good – you have by your impatience ruined yourself – but remember you may be the Father of a large family - & how then will you bear reflection – when you consider you have involved your children in poverty & disgrace – when you consider them at the Age of maturity blushing for a Fathers conduct.

As to the companion, you have made choice of – as I know nothing of her, I can say nothing – but give me leave to assure you, I do not feel myself bound by any tie – to receive a Woman forced on me - & one whose parents I consider in the light I do hers – yet as I trust she makes a part of your happiness – tis your duty (in whatever station you may be placed) to treat her with kindness – and although it is impossible she & I can ever meet – yet would it add another to the many you have already inflicted to hear she is made miserable by your ungovernable temper.

I feel my health declining – my heart is almost broke - but a short time & all will be well. While I am in this World – a Mothers feelings cling to me & make me wretched, yet my dear George believe me, I never lay down in my bed without sending up prayers to the Heaven for your safety, nor ever pass a day without shedding many many tears on your account.

Enclosed is the five pounds you lent me the last time we met in Clarendon Square & likewise fifty pounds for your present necessities, your hearing from me in like manner this day three months must depend on your self – let me know by post if you receive this safe.

E.S.

To G Soane.

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