



FAC-SIMILE OF THE JEWEL WORN BY THE
HONORABLE MRS. ALDWORTH.



INSCRIPTION ON THE BACK OF THE JEWEL.

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF THE HON. MRS. ALDWORTH

OF NEW MARKET, COUNTY CORK.

In the absence of exact information with respect to dates promised by relatives of the Doneraile family, the following is offered to show, as near as possible, the precise time of the initiation of the Honourable Mrs. Aldworth.

She was the youngest child and only daughter of the Right Honourable Arthur St. Leger, created first Viscount Doneraile, June 23, 1703, and Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of John Hayes, Esq., Winchelsea. His Lordship died in July, 1727, and was succeeded by his eldest son, brother of the subject of our notice.

From all the circumstances that have come under observation, we are inclined to fix the period of her initiation so late as 1739, and to believe that she was a little older than nineteen.

The Honourable Elizabeth St. Leger, was married to Richard Aldworth, Esq., of Newmarket, County Cork, who was son to Sir Richard Aldworth, Provost Marshal of Munster.

We have it from undoubted authority, that the occurrence took place when her brother was Viscount, *i. e.* after the death of her father.

So far facts. Now suppose the occurrence took place within a year or two (it may be more) after her brother succeeded to the honors of the viscountcy, say 1730, and the period of her birth about 1713; but from all we can learn, her initiation took place much later than 1730, and until we get from the authenticated records of the family, the exact periods of birth, marriage, and death of this very celebrated lady, the dates must be a matter of supposition.

The principal reason we have for doubting, amongst others, that she was not initiated so early, is a communication received from the son of a Brother who witnessed the ceremony and all the attendant circumstances, in which he states, "That the Honourable Mrs. Aldworth was initiated at the Doneraile House, and in Lodge "44" of Ireland, the Warrant of which, though dormant, is in the hands of the writer of the letter." The writer is Richard Hill, of Doneraile, the son of Arundel Hill, Esq., (since dead) who witnessed the initiation, and who lived to a very old age, and was not unknown to our biographer, who in his younger days was frequently in his company.

We will now proceed to give the following facts of the case in all its bearings, and authenticate the Portrait.

The Warrant of Lodge "44" was issued in 1735. It was what may be called an Aristocratic, or at least a highly respectable Lodge, including all the elite of that very populous and delightful country around Doneraile, and held generally in the Town, but often, under the presidency of Lord Doneraile, at his residence, as in the instance about to be related.

It happened on this particular occasion, that the Lodge was held in a room separated from another, as is often the case, by stud and brick-work. The young lady being giddy and thoughtless, determined to gratify her curiosity, made her arrangements accordingly, and with a pair of scissors, (as she herself related to the mother of our informant,) removed a portion of a brick from the wall, and placed herself so as to command a full view of every thing which occurred in the next room; so placed, she witnessed the two first degrees in Masonry, which was the extent of the proceedings of the Lodge on that night. Becoming aware from what she had heard, that the Brethren were about to separate, for the first time she felt tremblingly alive to the awkwardness and danger of her situation, and began to consider how she could retire without observation. She became nervous and agitated, and nearly fainted, but so far recovered herself as to be fully aware of the necessity of withdrawing as quickly as possible; in the act of doing so, being in the dark, she stumbled against and overthrew something, said to be a chair, or some ornamental piece of furniture; the crash was loud, and the Tyler, who was on the lobby or landing on which the doors both of the Lodge-room and that were the Honourable Miss St. Leger was, opened, gave the alarm, burst open the door, and with a light in one hand and a drawn sword in the other, appeared to the now terrified and fainting lady. He was soon joined by the members of the Lodge present, and luckily, for it is asserted, that,

but for the prompt appearance of her brother, Lord Doneraile, and other steady members, her life would have fallen a sacrifice to what was then esteemed her crime. The first care of his Lordship was to resuscitate the unfortunate lady, without alarming the house, and endeavor to learn from her an explanation of what had occurred; having done so, many of the members being furious at the transaction, she was placed under guard of the Tyler and a member, in the room in which she was found. The members re-assembled and deliberated as to what under the circumstances was to be done, and over two long hours she could hear the angry discussion, and her death deliberately proposed and seconded. At length the good sense of the majority succeeded in calming, in some measure, the angry and irritated feelings of the rest of the members, when after much had been said, and many things proposed, it was resolved to give her the option of submitting to the Masonic ordeal, to the extent she witnessed, (F. C.), and if she refused the Brethren were again to consult. Being waited on to decide, Miss St. Leger, exhausted and terrified by the storminess of the debate, which she could not avoid partially hearing, and yet, notwithstanding all, with a secret pleasure, gladly and unhesitatingly accepted the offer. She was accordingly initiated.

We may remark, that the inmates of the house, save those referred to, were in perfect ignorance of the transaction.

Thus vanishes the story of the Clock Case, with all its romantic appendages; thus Cork and Newmarket are deprived of the honor of her introduction into Masonry, the latter town, indeed, may almost claim her as its own, as it was the scene of her Masonic acts and benevolence. Placed as she was by her marriage with Mr. Aldworth, at the head of a very large fortune, the poor in general, and the Masonic poor in particular, had good reason to record her numerous and bountiful acts of kindness, nor were these accompanied with ostentation, far from it; it has been remarked of her, that her custom was to seek out bashful misery and retiring poverty, and with a well directed liberality, to sooth many a bleeding heart—"She was the best and kindest of women." A single glance at her portrait will exhibit a woman of strong mind, inflexibility of purpose, and rectitude of life, whilst we have the record of numerous acts demonstrating that she possessed, most fully, all those tender sensibilities of heart, with which it has pleased the Great Architect to implant in woman.

In the year 1807, a respectable tradesman, who kept a looking-glass and picture-frame manufactory in the north main street of Cork, conceived the idea of publishing prints of the Honourable Mrs. Aldworth; he carried his intention into effect, as may be seen by the old prints; for this purpose he procured the only portrait that has been known to have been taken during her life. With the prints he published a short memoir, in a pamphlet, the substance of which is here given, for the material of which, he was principally indebted to the late Arundel Hill, Esq., of Doneraile, before mentioned, and whose authority on the subject, even unsupported by contemporary evidence, is most indubitable. So much for the facts of the genuineness of the print and history.

We have said something of the goodness of this gifted and illustrious lady; she was strictly religious as well as punctual and scrupulous in her masonic duties; in all the relations of life, whether as wife, mother, relative, friend or mistress, she stood pre-eminent. One circumstance, as necessary for our proof, must not be omitted: Mrs. Aldworth took a fancy to a young relative, named Margaret Philpot, to whom she became so attached, that with the consent of her father and mother, she determined on bringing her up, and having her constantly with her. This lady was her confidant and bosom friend, and corroborated the truth of the pamphlet when published. When the protegee was married, as she afterwards was, to Mr. Newsom, of Cork, Mrs. Aldworth presented her with her portrait, amongst other gifts, as a memorial of her friendship and affection, and from this portrait the Cork prints were engraved*. Thus we may say, that, both the narrative and the authenticity of the likeness is substantially proved to be correct.

* These prints are now so rare that from three to five pounds have been given for a copy.

The above Fac-simile of the Jewel worn by the Honourable Mrs. Aldworth is engraved by permission of a relative of Bro. Philpot, in whose possession it is at present, and by whom it was kindly lent to the Publisher.

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