



THE
LADY FREEMASON.



HOW SHE CAME TO BE INITIATED.



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— TO —

BRO. ARCHIBALD LANG,

P.M. of LODGE GLASGOW, No. 441.

P.Z. of CHAPTER GLASGOW CATHEDRAL,

No. 67.

This little book is most fraternally
inscribed in admiration of his qualities
as a Freemason.

D. M. GOUDIELOCK,

Editor,

Scottish Masonic Historical Directory.

GLASGOW, *April 1908.*

Afflictions Sons are Brothers in distress,
A Brother to relieve how exquisite the bliss.

—BURNS.



THE HONOURABLE MRS. ALDWORTH
(Née the Hon. Miss St. Leger, A.D. 1710).

The Lady Freemason.

HOW SHE CAME TO BE INITIATED.

THE initiation of the Hon. Miss Elizabeth St. Leger, afterwards the wife of Richard Aldworth, Esq., has long been a recognised fact in the history of Freemasonry in Ireland.

The Warrant of Lodge Doneraile, No. 41 of Ireland (now dormant), where she was initiated, 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. The Lodge meetings were generally held in the town, but sometimes under the presidency of Lord Doneraile at his residence, Doneraile House, County Cork, as in the instance about to be related.

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

Miss St. Leger had been reading at the library window, and the light of the afternoon having failed she fell asleep. She knew that the Lodge meetings were sometimes held at the house, but she had no idea, on that evening, when she entered the library that a meeting was about to be held in the next room. It happened on this particular occasion that the house was undergoing certain internal alterations. The Lodge was held in a large room on the ground floor, separated from another. The alterations having required the removal of some of the panelling from the larger room, a portion of this had been taken down and the bricks loosely replaced, without mortar, in the position they were ultimately to occupy. Against these loose bricks the oak panelling had been temporarily reared. The sound of voices in the next room restored her to consciousness, and from her position behind the loosely placed bricks of the dividing wall she easily realised that something unusual was taking place in the next room. The light shining through the unfilled spaces of the temporary wall also attracted her attention. Prompted by a not unnatural curiosity, Miss St Leger determined to gratify her curiosity, removed one or more of the loose bricks, and thus was easily enabled to watch the proceedings of the Lodge for that night. For some time her interest in what was transpiring was sufficiently powerful to

hold her spellbound, the quietness of her mind remained undisturbed for a considerable period, and it was not until she realised the solemnity of the responsibilities undertaken by the candidate that she understood the terrible consequences of her action. Becoming aware from what she heard that the Brethren were about to separate, she for the first time felt tremblingly alive to the awkwardness and danger of her situation, and the wish to hide her secret by making good her escape without observation took possession of her thoughts. Her passage into the hall was easy, but it happened that the doors of the two rooms were close together. Outside in the hall the Tyler was on guard, and from this point her retreat was cut off. Miss St. Leger realising that the Tyler, Lord Doneraile's butler, well knowing the condition of the temporary wall, would at once, from her frightened appearance, grasp the situation, became nervous and agitated, and, 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 in the lobby, 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. The old and trusted family servant, divided between his affection for his young mistress and the duties he owed to the Lodge, hesitated whether he should call for aid from the household or alarm the Lodge. Fearing however to leave the door of the Lodge unguarded he decided to summon his master. This course brought Miss St. Leger's father and brothers into the hall.

They were soon joined by the members of the Lodge present, and, but for the prompt attitude of her brother and other prominent members, her life would have fallen a sacrifice to what was then considered her crime. The first care of his Lordship was to resuscitate the unfortunate lady without alarming the house, and endeavour to learn from her an explanation of what had occurred. The young lady having been carried back into the library, and restored to consciousness, they learned what had occurred. On hearing this many of the members became furious. She was placed under guard of the Tyler and another brother, in the same room in which she was found. The brethren re-assembled and deliberated as to what, under the circumstances, was to be done, and for two long hours she could hear the angry discussion, and her death 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, and after much had been said and many things proposed, it was resolved to give her the option of submitting to the Masonic ordeal up to the point in the ceremonial of which she had been a witness (F.C.), and if she refused the brethren were again to consult. Being asked to decide, the fair culprit, endowed with a high sense of honour, and exhausted and terrified by the heated feelings of the debate, which she could not avoid hearing, and yet, notwith-

standing all, with a secret pleasure, gladly and unhesitatingly accepted the offer. She was accordingly initiated, and became a Freemason. The circumstances, as recorded, took place at a time when Miss St. Leger was a young girl and unmarried, and was probably about the year 1710. It may be mentioned that the inmates of the house, apart from those referred to, were in perfect ignorance of the transaction. The Honourable Elizabeth St. Leger was afterwards married to Richard Aldworth, Esq., of Newmarket, County Cork, who was the son of Sir Richard Aldworth, Provost Mareschal of Munster.

Thus vanishes the story of the clock case, with all its romantic details; Cork and Newmarket are deprived of the honour of her introduction into Freemasonry, and though the latter town, indeed, may almost claim her as its own, as it was the scene of many of her Masonic acts and benevolence. She also attended all the Masonic assemblies and processions, and generally added lustre to the Craft, which had so reluctantly adopted her as its first and only daughter. 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 regard her numerous and bountiful acts of kindness. Nor were these marked by 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 soothe the many a bleeding heart. She was the best and kindest of women. She did not neglect altogether the other duties of the Craft, and was, as far as she went, a most exemplary Freemason, and frequently on the occasion of a Masonic procession, it was her custom to precede the Lodge in an open chariot. A single glance at her portrait will show a woman of strong mind, indeflexibility of purpose, and rectitude of life, and it is recorded that she possessed, most fully, all those tender sensibilities of heart which it has pleased the great Architect to implant in women. She was strictly religious, as well as punctual and scrupulous in her Masonic duties, and in all the relations of life, whether as wife, mother, relative, friend, she stood pre-eminent. One circumstance, before concluding, is worthy of notice, and should serve as a lesson to those who boast the superiority of manly discretion and understanding. Mrs. Aldworth had such a veneration for Freemasonry that she would never suffer it to be spoken of lightly in her hearing, nor would she touch on the subject but with the greatest caution, even when in company with her most intimate friends, whom she knew were not Freemasons, and when she did it was under evident embarrassment, and with a trembling apprehension lest she might in a hasty moment commit a breach of Masonic duty. The Hon. Mrs. Aldworth lived until she was 80 years of age. She died in 1773, and was buried in the Davies Vault in the Old St. Finbarr Cathedral, Cork. In the Parish Church of Doneraile a tablet is erected to her memory.