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 978-1-108-06194-0 - The Life of Mrs Godolphin
 John Evelyn Edited by Samuel Wilberforce
 Excerpt
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The Life of Mrs. Godolphin.

Vn Dieu ★ vn Amy.

Madam,

I AM not vnmindfull of what your Ladyship lately fuggested to me concerning that blessed Saint now in heaven. Doe you beleive I need be incited to preserve the memory of one whose Image is foe deeply printed in my heart? Butt you would have a more permanent Record of her perfections, and foe would I; not onely for the veneration wee beare her precious Ashes, butt for
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the good of those who, emulous of her vertues, would pursue the Instance of it, in this, or perhaps any age before it. 'Tis certaine the materialls I have by me would furnish one who were Master of a Stile becominge soe admirable a Subject; and wish'd I have, a thousand tymes, the person in the world who knew her best, and most she loved, would give vs the picture his pencil could best delineat: if such an Artist as he is decline the vndertakeing, for fear that even with all his skill he should not reach the orriginall, how farr short am I like to fall, who cannot pretend to the meanest of his Talents. But as indignation (they say) sometymes creates a poem where there is no naturall disposition in the composer; soe a mighty obligation, a holy freindshipp, and your Ladyshipp's comands, irresistibly prevaile with me rather to hazard the censure of my Imperfections, then to disobey you, or suffer those precious memories

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mories to be lost which deserve consecration to Eternity : 'tis then the least and last service I can express to a dying friend for whome I should not have refused even to dye my selfe. Butt, Madam, you will not expect I should be so exactly particular in the minuter circumstances of her birth and what past in her Infancy and more tender years, because, [though] I have sometimes told her pleasantly I would write her life, when God knowes I little thought of surviving her whome often I have wished might be at the closing of myne owne Eyes, I had not the honor of being acquainted with her till the last seven years of her life ; I say the little expectation I had of erecting to her a monument of this nature, made me not so Industrious to Informe my selfe of what was past as I should have beene, for I am perswaded that from the begining something of exterordinary remarkeable was all along conspicuous in her ; nor
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was it possible that my admiration of her vertues, when I came to know her, should not have prompted me to enquire concerneing many particulars of her life before I knew her; something I learned casually conversing with her, diverse things from the papers communicated to me since her decease, and from what your Ladyshipp has Informed me; from whome I might derive ample matter to furnish vpon this subject; butt, as I said, it would become a steadier hand, and the penn of an Angells wing to describe the life of a Saint, who is now amongst those illustrious orders: butt, Madam, 'tis your peremptorye Comand, I should sett downe what I know, and how diffident soever I ought to be of acquitting my selfe as I should, yett since 'tis hardly possible to say any thing soe indifferently, butt must raise an Emulation in those that read or hear of it to Imitate her vertues, [I enter] vpon the adventure.

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Where this excellent Creature was borne, I have learned from you ; when, from her selfe; namely, as I remember, on the Second of August, in the year 1652 ; a month and a year never to be forgotten by me without a mixture of different passions, for then had I born that Child whose early hopes you have often heard me deplore the losf of, nor doe I yett remember him without emotion.

'Tis not to informe your Ladyshipp of a thing you doe not know, butt for methods sake that I speake something of the family of this Lady, which was very honorable; her father was Collonell Thomas Blagge, a Gent. of an ancient Suffolke family, and a person of soe extraordinary witt and signall Loyalty, as not only made him esteemed by that blessed Martyr Charles the First, being made Groome of his Bedd Chamber, butt to
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be intrusted with one of his principall Garrifons, namely that of Wallingford, dureing the late rebellion. How worthyly he acquitted himselefe of that charge in that vnhappy warr is vpon another monumentall Record. Hee lived to see his Majestye who now raignes restored to his Kingdomes and to dye in his favour. Mrs. Blagge his Lady (Mother to our Saint) was a woman foe eminent in all the vertues and perfections of her sex, that it were hard to say whether were superior her Beauty, Witt, or Piety; for, as I have heard from those who intimately knew her, she was in all these very like her daughter, and then I am sure there could nothing be added to render her a most admirable perfon. The iniquitye of the tymes had acquainted her with sorrow enough to have distracted her, being left butt in difficult circumstances, yett she lived to discharge all her husbands engagements that were very considerable

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able, and to provide an honourable competency for noe lesfs then 3 young daughters, whereof this was the youngest.

Itt was by this excellent mother that this rare child was as early intituted in the fear of God as she could speake: and as her exterordnary discernment soone advanced to a great and early fence of Religion, soe she brought her to be confirmed by the now Lord Bishopp of Ely, Doctor Gunning, who itt appeares was soe surprized att those early Graces he discovered in her, that he thought fitt she should be admitted to the holy Sacrament when she was hardly Eleaven years of Age: from that moment forwards, young and sprightfull as she was, she was observed to live with great circumspection, prescribing to herselfe a constant method of devotion, and certaine dayes of abstinence, that she might the better vacate to holy duties

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dutyes and gaine that mastery over her appetite, which, with all other paffions, she had strangely subdued to my often admiration. Butt I should have told your Ladyshipp, though I remember not on what occasion, she went with the old Dutcheſs of Richmond into France, who conſign'd her to the care of the late Counteſs of Guilford, Groome of the Stoole to the late Queens Mother, with whome she continued till her Ma-jeſtye came into England: And this minds me of what I have heard, that being frequently tempted by that By-gott proſeliteſſe to goe to Maſſe and be a papift, our young Saint would not only not be perſwaded to it, but aſſerted her better faith with ſuch readineſs and conſtancy, (as according to the argument of that keen Religion) cauſed her to be rudely treated and menaced by the Counteſs; ſoe as she was become a Confeſſor and almoſt a Martyr before she was 7 years old. This paſſage

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fage I have from her felfe and ſhe would relate it with pretty circumſtances: but long ſtaid ſhe not in France; when being returned to her mother, ſhe lived with her ſometyme in London, till the raigneing peſtilence of Sixty-five breakeing out, every body retireing into the Country, ſhe accompanied her into Suffolke amongſt her fathers Relations there, and paſt the Receſs with ſo much order and ſatiſfaction, that with exterordinary regrett ſhe was taken notice of to quitt it; when being demanded by the then Dutcheſs of Yorke for a Maid of Honour, her Mother was prevailed with to place her little Daughter att Court. This was indeed a ſurprizeing change of Aire, and a perilous Climate, for one ſo very young as ſhe, and ſcarcely yett attained to the twelvth year of her age: butt by how much more the danger ſo much greater the virtue and diſcretion which not only preſerved her ſteady in that giddy Station,

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tion, but ſhe improv'd, that the example of this little Saint influenced not onely her honourable companions, butt ſome who were advanc'd in yeares before her, and of the moſt illuſtrious quality. What! ſhall I ſay, ſhe like a young Apoſtles began to plant Religion in that barren Soyle? Arethufa paſſ'd thro' all thoſe turbulent waters without ſhe much as the leaſt ſtaine or tincture in her Chriſtall, with her Piety grew vp her Witt, which was ſhe ſparkling, accompanied with a Judgment and Eloquence ſhe exteordinary, a Beauty and Ayre ſhe charmeing and lovely, in a word, an Addreſs ſhe vniverſally takeing, that after few years, the Court never ſaw or had ſeen ſuch a Conſtellation of perfections amongſt all their ſplendid Circles. Nor did this, nor the admiration it created, the Elogies ſhe every day received, and application of the greateſt perſons, at all elate her; ſhe was ſtill the ſame, allwayes in
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