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John Evelyn Edited by Samuel Wilberforce
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The Life of Mrs Godolphin

John Evelyn (1620–1706), a founder member of the Royal Society, was a horticulturalist and author, best remembered for his diaries. Throughout his prolific writings he exhibits a strong distaste for the corruption of life at court. The beautiful and pious Margaret Godolphin (1652–78), a courtier more than thirty years Evelyn's junior, with whom he struck up an intense friendship in 1672, was maid of honour in the household of Queen Catherine, wife of King Charles II. To Evelyn she represented the antithesis of the corruption he despised. Written as 'a record of her perfections' following her death in childbirth, this hagiographic biography reflects the extent of Evelyn's devotion. Left among his unrevised manuscripts, it was not published until 1847, nearly two centuries after its composition. Edited by the bishop and orator Samuel Wilberforce (1805–73), the work includes helpful notes and genealogical tables that elucidate the text.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108061940

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2013

This edition first published 1847

This digitally printed version 2013

ISBN 978-1-108-06194-0 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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Mrs Godolphin
From an Original Painting in the Collection at Woodton

LONDON. WILLIAM PICKERING. 1847.

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THE LIFE OF
MRS. GODOLPHIN
BY JOHN EVELYN

OF WOOTTON ESQ.



Now first published and
Edited by SAMUEL Lord Bishop of OXFORD
Chancellor of the Most Noble
Order of the Garter



LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING

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To His Grace

E D W A R D,

Lord Archbishop of York, Lord High
Almoner, &c.

MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,

*YOUR Grace will, I trust, allow
me to inscribe the following
pages to you.*

*Your unmerited kindness, shown
to me on many other occasions, en-
trusted them to me for publication ;
and I well know that whilst your
Grace has felt that the light of such
an example as they exhibit ought not
to be concealed, you rejoice to know
that*

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Dedication.

that you have lived to see a British Court which in purity of morals and domestic virtue affords the most blessed contrast to those evil days through which Margaret Godolphin was enabled to live in the brightness of a godly purity, and to die in peace.


*I have the honour to be,
Your Grace's obliged and
affectionate*

S. OXON :

Cuddefdon Palace,
Feb. 1847.



Introduction.

HE following Memoir was drawn up by the accomplished John Evelyn, of Wootton, and intended by him for publication; but it never received his final corrections. In a manuscript paper of memoranda left at Wootton in Mr. Evelyn's hand-writing, its title occurs in a list of " Things I would write out faire and reform if I had the leisure." In his family, the MS. has remained until the present time, having passed into the hands of Mr. Evelyn's

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	<p>Evelyn's great - great - grandson,* His Grace the Honourable Edward Venables-Vernon Harcourt, Lord Archbishop of York, by whom it has been entrusted for publication to the care of the present Editor. The MS. which is written with extraordinary care and neatness, and apparently in Mr. Evelyn's own hand-writing, has been print- ed almost as it stands. The ori- ginal spelling, which is not uni- form throughout the volume, has been preserved wherever its strangeness did not throw some obscurity over the meaning of the passage. A few words which here and there were needful to com- plete the sense have been con- jecturally inserted, but always in brackets.</p>
	<p>* See Table V. p. 265.</p> <p>The</p>

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The text is illustrated by two genealogical tables, a short sketch of the life of Sir George Blagge, and a valuable body of illustrative notes, which the Editor owes to the accurate and well-furnished pen of John Holmes, Esq. of the British Museum, who has kindly contributed them to this volume.

From the genealogical table it will be seen, that Mrs. Godolphin sprang from an ancient and honourable house, and that her blood still flows in the veins of some of the most illustrious of the nobility of England. Her husband, who rose to the highest honours of the state, was early left a widower, and, surviving his wife thirty-four years, never remarried. He transmitted to Francis, their only child, the earldom of Godolphin. This
 Francis,

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Francis, 2nd Earl of Godolphin, married Henrietta Churchill, eldest daughter and co-heir of John Duke of Marlborough, to whom in her own right passed the dukedom of Marlborough. By the death without issue of William Godolphin, first, Viscount Rialton, and afterwards, Marquis of Blandford,—their only son who attained to manhood,—the honours of the house of Marlborough passed to the family of Spencer from the descendants of Margaret Godolphin. By the marriage of Mary the heiress of the 2nd Lord Godolphin to Thomas the 4th Duke of Leeds, her name and blood passed into the succession of that illustrious house.

But it was not for gentle descent or noble alliance that Margaret

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garet Godolphin was the most remarkable or best deserves remembrance. Rather did she add distinction to an ancient line, and transmit to all her posterity that memory of her virtues and inheritance of good deeds without which titles and hereditary rank are but splendid contradictions and conspicuous blemishes.

Her lot was cast in the darkest age of England's morals; she lived in a court where flourished in their rankest luxuriance all the vice and littleness, which the envy of detractors without, has ever loved to impute—and at times, thank God, with such utter falsehood—to courts in general.

In the reign of Charles the Second, that revulsion of feeling which affects nations just as it
 does

does individuals had plunged into dissipation all ranks on their escape from the narrow austerities and gloomy founes of puritanism. The court, as was natural, shared to the full in these new excesses of an unrestrained indulgence; whilst many other influences led to its wider corruption. The foreign habits contracted in their banishment by the returning courtiers were ill suited to the natural gravity of English manners, and introduced at once a wide-spread licentiousness. The personal character, moreover of the King helped on the general corruption. Gay, popular, and witty, with a temper nothing could cross, and an affability nothing could repress, he was thoroughly sensual, selfish, and depraved—vice in him was made

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made so attractive by the wit and gaiety with which it was tricked out, that its utmost grossness seemed for the time rather to win than to repulse beholders. Around the King clustered a band of congenial spirits, a galaxy of corruption, who spread the pollution upon every side. The names of Buckingham and Rochester, of Etheridge, Lyttelton, and Sedley, still maintain a bad preeminence in the annals of English vice. As far as the common eye could reach there was little to resist the evil. The Duke of York, the next heir to the throne, a cold-hearted libertine, shared the vices of the King, without the poor gloss of his social attractions. It was the day of England's deepest degradation, when in private life morality was a reproach, truth departed

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parted, and religion a jest; when in affairs of state French gold and foreign influence had corrupted and subdued the throned monarch, and England's King was daily losing what had been gained by the Protector of the Commonwealth.

It was a day of heartless merriment, upon which fell suddenly a night of blackness, which swallowed up its crew of godless revelers. A picture more deeply tragical than that thus simply sketched by Mr. Evelyn at the end, of Charles himself, can scarcely be conceived. "I can never forget the inexpressible luxury and prophaneness, gaming and all dissoluteness, and as it were total forgetfulness of God (it being Sunday evening) which this day fe'nnight
 I was

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I was witness of, the King sitting and toying with his concubines, Portsmouth, Cleaveland, and Mazarine, &c. a French boy singing love songs in that glorious gallery, whilst about 20 of the great courtiers and other dissolute persons were at Basset round a large table, a bank of at least 2000 in gold before them, upon which two gentlemen who were with me made reflexions with astonishment. Six days after was all in the dust."

Evelyn's Diary, Feb. 1684-5.

In the midst of such a general reign of wickedness, it is most refreshing to the wearied spirit to find by closer search some living witnesses for truth and holiness—
 some

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some who, through God's Grace, passed at His call their vexed days amongst the orgies of that crew, as untainted by its evils, as is the clear sunbeam by the corruption of a loathsome atmosphere. Such an one was Margaret Godolphin, whom neither the license of those evil days, nor the scandal and detraction with which they abounded, ever touched in spirit or in reputation. Verily she walked in the flames of "the fiery furnace and felt no hurt, neither did the smell of fire pass upon her."

In what strength she lived this life the following pages will declare. They will shew that ever by her side, conversing with her spirit through its living faith, there was a fourth form like unto the Son of God. And one thing for
our

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our instruction and encouragement may here be specially noted : that in that day of reproach she was a true daughter of the Church of England. Puritanism did not contract her soul into moroseness ; nor did she go to Rome to learn the habits of devotion. In the training of our own Church she found enough of God's teaching to instruct her soul ; in its lessons she found a rule of holy self-denying obedience ; in its prayers a practice of devotion ; in its body a fellowship with saints ; in its ordinances a true communion with her God and Saviour ; which were able to maintain in simple, unaffected purity her faith at court, in dutiful, active love her married life ; which sufficed to crown her hours of bitter anguish and untimely death with a joyful

joyful resignation and assured waiting for her crown.

Such is the sketch presented in these pages to the reader. May he in a better day learn in secret, for himself, those lessons of heavenly wisdom which adorned the life and glorified the death of Margaret Godolphin.

