

"My son," he said, "you have heard what his Reverence has said of you; and I too have heard it, and not to-day for the first time. It seems that you are right in thinking that for the present at any rate you have no vocation to Holy Religion. Well, then, the question is as to what is your Vocation, for Our Lord never leaves any man without a Vocation of some kind. You are very young for such service as that on which we think to send you; for we shall send you to the Court of England first, and then perhaps now and again to France; but you look five years at least older than your age, and, I am told, have ten times its discretion. I need not tell you that you will have no very heavy mission given to you at first; you must mix freely with the world and use your wits and see what is best to be done, sending back reports to the Cardinal Secretary. You will live at your own charges, as you yourself have said that you wished to do; but you may draw upon us here for any journeys that you may undertake upon our business up to a certain amount. In a word you will be in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, though without direct office or commission beyond that which I now give you myself. You will have full liberty to make a career for yourself in the English or French Courts, so long as this comes always second to your service to ourselves. If you acquit yourself well—in the way which will be explained to you later—you may make a career with us too, and will have rewards if you want them: but for the present there must be no talk of that. As you must be in the world yet not of it; so you must be of the Court of Rome yet not in it. It is a delicate position that you will hold; and, to compensate for the informality of it, you will have the more liberty on your side, to make a career, as I have said, or to marry, if God calls you to that, or in any other way. . . . Does that content you, my son?"

I do not know what I said; for all that the Holy Father had told me was what I myself had said to my Lord Abbot. I knew that affairs in England were in a very strange condition, that the Duke of York who was next heir to the throne was a Catholic, and that Charles himself was favourably disposed to us; and I knew a number of other things too which will appear in the course of this tale; and I