

vocation ; because, truthfully, I doubted whether such gifts and such wealth and such education as were mine could not be used better in the world than in the cloister. I knew that I could take a place to-morrow in either the French or the English Court, without disgracing myself or others ; and it was precisely of this that I had spoken to my Lord Abbot ; and here was our Holy Father himself putting into words those very ambitions that I had. I met his eyes, and knew that I was beginning to flush.

" Well, my son ? " he said.

" Holy Father," I said, " my virtues and capacities, such as they are, I must leave to my superiors. But my desires are those of which your Holiness has spoken. I ask no wages : I ask only to be allowed to serve whatever cause my superiors may assign to me."

He continued to look at me, and for very shame I presently dropped my eyes again.

" Well, my Lord Abbot ? " he said again. " Let us hear what you have to say."

Then my lord began to speak ; and before he was half-done I wished myself anywhere else in the world. For, as great men alone are capable, he could be as lavish of praise as of blame. He said that I was all that of which His Holiness had spoken ; that I had been obedient and exact as a novice ; and he said other things too of which even under obedience I could not speak. Then too he added what he had never said to me before, that he was not sure that I had no vocation ; but that since God spoke through exterior circumstances as well as through interior drawings, His Holy Will seemed to point, at least at present, to a life in the world for me ; that he was sure I would be as obedient there as here ; that I had learned not only to use my tongue but, what is much harder, to hold it. And he ended by begging the Holy Father to take me into his service and to use me in the ways in which perhaps I might be useful. All this, of course, I now understand to have been rehearsed before ; but just at that time I had no more than a suspicion that this was so.

When he had finished, His Holiness once more turned and looked at me ; and I upon the ground : and then at last he spoke.