

a number of things that sorely needed it. He would have no nepotism at the Papal Court; men stood or fell by their own merits: so I knew very well that my estates in France, even if they had been ten times as great, would serve me nothing at all. He was very humble too—he asked pardon, it was said, even of his own servants if he troubled them—so I knew that no swashbuckling air on my part would do me anything but harm—and, indeed, that was all laid aside, willy nilly, so soon as I came in—since, like all humble men he esteemed the pride, even of kings, at exactly its proper worth, which is nothing at all. He was, too, a man of great spirituality, so I knew that my having come to St. Paul's as a novice and now wishing to leave it again, would scarcely exalt me in his eyes. I felt then a very poor creature indeed as I sat there and listened to him.

"This, then, is Master Roger Mallock," he said to my Lord Abbot, "of whom your Lordship spoke to me."

"This is he, Holy Father," said my Lord.

"He has been a novice for two years then; and his superiors are not sure of his vocation?"

"Yes, Holy Father."

The Pope looked again at me then, and I dropped my eyes.

"And you yourself, my son?" he asked.

"Holy Father," I said, "I am sure that at present I have no vocation. What God may give me in the future I do not know. I only know what He has not given me in the present."

Innocent tightened his lips at that; but I think it was to prevent himself smiling.

"And he is an English gentleman," he went on presently, "and he has estates in France that bring him in above twenty thousand francs yearly; and he is twenty-one years of age; and he is accustomed to all kinds of society, and he is a devoted son of Holy Church, and he speaks French and English and Italian and Spanish and German——"

"No, Holy Father, not German—except a few words," I said.

"And he is discreet and courageous and virtuous——"

"Holy Father——" I began in distress, for I thought he was mocking me.