

# ODDSFISH!

## PROLOGUE

THE day from which I reckon the beginning of all those adventures which occupied me in the Courts of England and France and elsewhere, was the first day of May in the year sixteen hundred and seventy-eight—the day, that is, on which my Lord Abbot carried me from St. Paul's-without-the-Walls to the Vatican Palace, to see our Most Holy Lord Innocent the Eleventh.

It had been a very hot day in Rome, as was to be expected at that season; and I had stayed in the cloister in the cool, as my Lord Abbot had bidden me, not knowing whether it would be on that day or another, or, indeed, on any at all, that His Holiness would send for me. I knew that my Lord Abbot had been to the Vatican again and again on the business; and had spoken of me, as he said he would, not to the Holy Father only, but to the Cardinal Secretary of State and to others; but I did not know, and he did not tell me, as to whether that business had been prosperous; though I think he must have known long before how it would end. An hour before *Ave Maria*, then, he sent to me, as I walked in the cloisters, and when I came to him, told me, all short, to dress myself in my old secular clothes, as fine as I could, and to be ready to ride with him in half an hour, because our Most Holy Lord had consented to receive me one hour after *Ave Maria*. He said nothing more to me than that; he did not tell me how I was to bear myself, nor what I was to say, neither as I stood in his cell, nor as we rode as fast as we could, with the servants before