

to vindicate the honor and duty which belong to Him: it is a part of His mercy to humble those who, in forgetting Him, are about to lose themselves. He sends them prosperity as a blessing; they abuse it, and convert it to a curse. He recalls the abused gift, and sends them adversity to bring them to their duty. Such was the course of divine government in the early ages of the world; such it is to the present day; and such did Jeronimo find it much sooner than he expected.

On a sudden, without any apparent cause, he saw, to his astonishment, the universal respect to his wealth and reputation on a manifest decrease. Some, who before had nearly kissed the ground in his presence, now looked erectly in his face, and kept their strait-forward course, without giving him the honorable side of the path; others kept their bonnets as if they were nailed to their heads; two or three recalled their trusts; others, happening to call for accounts of such trusts, when he was not at home or busy, spoke in a peremptory tone, dropped hints of the laws of the country and the duty of guardians. In plain words, he gradually discovered himself to be as much avoided as he had heretofore been sought. None were punctual in their attendance but those to whom he paid their weekly or monthly pensions. If there could be any doubt that something extraordinary had happened, Jeronimo had, at length, sufficient proof; for, having put himself in nomination for one of the offices of parochial intendant, and of the great church and treasury of Padua, a competitor less wealthy than himself, was preferred by some thousands.

Jeronimo returned home much confounded at this unexpected defeat. In vain he examined himself and his situation for the cause. "Am I not as rich as ever?" said he. "Have I defrauded any one?—No. Have I suffered anyone to demand their payment of me twice?—No. What then can be the cause of all this?" This was a question he could not answer, but the fact became daily and hourly so much more evident, that he shortly found himself as much avoided, and apparently condemned, in every respectable company, as he had formerly been courted and honored.

It is time, however, to give the reader some information as to the actual cause.

A whisper was suddenly circulated, that Jeronimo had not acquired his wealth by honest means. It was reported, and gradually believed, that he was an utterer, if not a coiner, of base money. He had the reputation, as has been before said, of being the most able workman in Padua, in gold, silver, and lace; "And surely," said the gossips of Padua, "he does not wear his talents in a napkin. He employs his dexterity to some purpose." Are you not speaking too fast?" said another neighbor; "I have always held Jeronimo to be an honest man." "And so have I hitherto," said the other. "But do you see this ducat?" "Yes, and a very good one it is." "So I thought," said the other, "till I assayed it: this ducat I received from Jeronimo; let us prove it at your assay, and you will allow that I did not speak without some good foundation." The proposal was accepted, the trial made, and the ducat found to be base in the proportion of one-third copper to two-thirds silver.

The name of this neighbor of Jeronimo, who had defended him, was Guiseppe Gognigero, a very worthy and honest man; not one of those who found a triumph in the downfall of another, though above him in wealth and honor. Guiseppe, as he had said, had always held Jeronimo to be a respectable, worthy citizen. He had had many dealings with him, and had always found him just and punctual to the lowest coin. "Is it possible," said he to himself, "that, after such a long course of honesty and reputation, he has so far forgotten himself as to become a common cheat? I will not believe it. But this fact of the base ducat!—Well; but my friend may be mistaken; he might not have received this ducat from Jeronimo. I am resolved I will make a trial of him myself, before I give in to the belief of these reports in the teeth of so fair a character for so many years." Guiseppe was a shrewd man, and never fixed on a purpose but when he had the ingenuity to find the means of executing it. He went immediately to his home, and, taking a hundred ducats from his private store, went with them to the house of Jeronimo. "Signor Jeronimo," said he, "here are a hundred ducats, which I wish to keep secreted for a certain purpose. I have just embarked in a speculation of great extent, the result of which no one can