

The small farmer twirled his cap sheepishly, but the other met his questioner's look without quailing. He had evidently got the better of his liquor.

"Samuel," said he in a more subdued and calm voice, "we are old friends, you know, and if I have addressed you that question, it is because I have friendly reasons for it. You see I have brought Bavard with me. He is to be my witness."

Varny drew his pipe from his lips and reflected a moment, then looking earnestly at his interlocutor, said:

"Well, let me first hear your reasons. I have no doubt they are friendly, as far as you are concerned, but they may not be such, after all, as to justify me in answering you."

"Varny, you are aware that this is an anxious time," said the visitor.

"I know it is."

"Spirits are very much excited."

"So I perceive," smiling maliciously.

"And it is every man's interest to let people know unequivocally how he stands."

"That depends."

"How?"

"On what people you mean."

"Why, in the first place, your enemies."

"I care nothing about them."

"But what if they should care about you?"

"Let them. I shall thank them for their politeness."

"But don't you mind their rumours?"

"Not a particle."

"And what about your friends?"

"That is another matter."

"Some of them may believe those ugly rumours."

"Then they are not my friends."

"Former friends become the worst of enemies."

"Alas! that is too true."

"Some of these have already threatened you."

"I despise their threats."

"Two or three are very violent."

"I dare them."

As he said this, Varny rose from his seat, looking very stern. A great passion was rising within him, but he contained himself so far as not to betray it too openly to his visitors. During the foregoing dialogue his eye had frequently rested on Bavard, and there was something in the fellow's manner which displeased him. It was upon him that he discharged the first volley of his ill-humour.

"Bavard, you have not yet opened your lips," said he sharply.

The small farmer bounded on his seat, looking puzzled and embarrassed. The man who is a bully behind your back is a sneak before your face. In both cases he is a coward.

"Mr. Sinard brought me in here as his witness," he at length replied with hesitation. "I have nothing to say."

"Witness of what?" rejoined Varny sharply.

Bavard looked at his companion, who, finding that the situation was getting awkward, took upon himself to explain:

"To come to the point at once, my friend,

I will tell you in one word what brought us here. On our way home, our conversation turning on politics, Bavard accused you of being a bureaucrat, and I made him come into your presence to hear from your own lips a denial of the charge."

"Accused me of being a bureaucrat?" roared Varny, pacing the room two or three times in towering anger, "and he dares come to me for an explanation? In my own house? Bavard, out of my presence, this moment. I knew you were a miserable gossip, but I never dreamed you had so much impudence. Off with you and never dare set foot on my premises again."

Bavard was a big man, physically a match for Varny, but he was so awed by the latter's voice and look, that he rose foolishly out of his seat! walked stealthily to the door, with his cap dangling in his hand, and stepped out with the hang-dog air of a whipped booby. Once, however, on the dark stair-case outside, he was in character again. His face assumed a hideous expression of anger and hate. Shaking his finger at the lighted window, he muttered the words *infamous bureaucrat*, and vowed revenge. Vengeance being a passion, for the purpose of vengeance a viper is often more dangerous than a tiger. Bavard was a viper.

During the altercation, Sinard appeared uncomfortable, probably reflecting that as he was the instrument of introducing Bavard in the house, he was amenable to the same treatment as he received for the insult which he had offered. He was even about rising to take his leave, when Varny, who had recovered his composure a little, walked up to him, and said in a quiet tone:

"You see that I would not give that beggar any explanation. He may think me a bureaucrat or not, as he pleases. But for you, the case is different. We can reason together. You are always a Papineau man, of course."

"Always," was the proud answer.

"Ready to follow him anywhere?"

"Yes, anywhere."

"Well, it is just here that we differ. I admire Papineau. I respect him. But I would not blindly follow him. I would blindly follow no man."

"Papineau is the greatest man in Canada. Hurrah for Papineau!"

The cry was uttered snappishly and almost aggressively. Sinard was evidently not much of a debater, and seemed almost anxious to drive his opponent into saying something disagreeable. But Varny kept cool.

"Papineau shares the fate of all prominent men. He is overrated by his friends and underrated by his enemies. I would try to adopt a fairer estimate of him. As a parliamentarian, he is in his *role*; as long as he remains there, I will support him. If he steps out of it, let him bear the consequences. I for one will not follow him."

This declaration aroused Sinard:

"Ha! ha! you are showing your colours. Come speak out. Patriot or bureaucrat, which are you?"

"I told you before that I answer no such point-blank question. Patriot and bureaucrat