

# THE PRANK THAT FAILED

By G. H. Mowat

**M**ANY years ago there came to the University of New Brunswick, a country boy from a farm. In those days it was unusual for farmers' sons to go to college, as the expense was prohibitive, but this youth had somehow managed to overcome that obstacle.

Some of the more sophisticated students, who came from city homes and had been brought up in the prosperous but narrow environment of the Victorian era, resented the presence of this country boy in the class rooms. They were amused by his tall angular appearance and his ill fitting homespun suit. What did a boy from a farm need a college education for anyway? But the pleasant old farms of the Maritimes have produced many able men. It was a life of peace and plenty. They lived almost entirely off the land and the work, though hard, gave them strength and endurance, patience and resourcefulness. Ready money was scarce and there was little cash that could be expended on fashionable clothes or luxuries or books. This phase of farm life, however, was quite unknown to the superior young students of the University and they resented his presence still more when it became evident that this country boy could far surpass them in his work and invariably made the highest marks on examination papers. They tried to think up some prank which could be used to make him definitely understand their own superiority.

One day they discovered that he was in the habit of attending services at the Cathedral on Sunday. This gave them an idea. They told him that if he belonged to the Anglican Church it was his duty to call on the Bishop. It was a college rule. This was not true but the crafty young aristocrats thought that the tall lanky lad in his homespun suit would feel so awkward and out of place in the rarer atmosphere of the Bishop's residence that the embarrassment of the situation would undoubtedly put him in his proper place.

Now Bishop Medley was a very prominent person in the Province. Renowned for his wisdom and learning, he had come from England to be the first Bishop of the diocese. With great zeal and energy he had promoted the building of the beautiful Cathedral in Fredericton, arousing the interest and enthusiasm of the people to undertake this great work, and wealthy friends in England had contributed generously with gifts and money. He was also noted for his large and valuable library of which he was very proud.

One day when his Lordship was working in his study, the country boy from the college was ushered in but at the door he stopped spellbound, not from embarrassment, for he did not notice the Bishop, all he could see were the shelves of books. Books all around the room reaching from the floor to the ceiling. Never had he seen so many books. All he could say was, "Books! How wonderful to live with all these beautiful books."

The Bishop looked at him but failed to notice the cut of the homespun suit as he was expected to do. What he saw was the eager, upturned face so expressive of strength and intelligence and lost in admiration of his treasured library. Instantly he realized that it was no ordinary youth who had come to see him. Placing a hand on the lad's shoulder, he said, "My boy, as long as you stay in Fredericton this library is at your disposal. You may come here whenever you wish and stay as long as you like and read all the books you want."

The college prank had failed in its purpose but from that hour began a lifelong friendship. The boy availed himself of the invitation and the Bishop's residence became to him a second home. Bishop and Mrs. Medley followed his career with loving pride and keen interest.

All through his college course and later when he became head of the Fredericton High School. Later still he went to be president of Upper Canada College. They rejoiced greatly when eventually they realized that his name had become famous throughout Canada as a noted educationalist. Later still he was called to England and finally his name was known through the entire Empire as the organizer of the Rhodes scholarships and finally he was knighted, for that country boy was Sir George Parkin. After the good Bishop's death and when Mrs. Medley was a very old lady she still loved to tell the tale of his achievements, but her dearest memory was of the tall lanky boy in the homespun suit, who used to lie sprawled on the hearth rug by the study fire reading the Bishop's books.