

THE GREAT SOUTH DRIFT

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO THOUGHT

BY HUBERT McBEAN JOHNSTON

"I TELL you there's no such word as 'can't,'" asserted Haliburton emphatically. "It *can* be done, and what's more, we've got to do it! This is November, and if we fail this time, it'll be impossible to get our logs through the mills before May. The only way is to have them sawed during the winter, and if we don't get them down there within two weeks, that's out of the question.

"Very well, then," said Murphy, in disgust; "it's up to you. Our first raft is spread along the Huron shore, clean from the mouth of the river at Point Edward up to where Kemsley's fish nets knocked it to pieces. To-day, here's a telegram from Forest saying that the second one is holding down the sand all around Kettle Point. It'll take a month in the spring to pull these two off, and if we pile up a third, we might as well quit the job at once; there'll be no profit in it."

The situation was an awkward one. Murphy and Haliburton had contracted for the re-building, lengthening, and widening of the St. Clair Canal at the foot of the St. Clair River. According to specifications, navigation must not be impeded. This meant that the great bulk of the work must either be put through late in the autumn after traffic suspended for the winter, or else very early in the spring before the season opened. The firm had meant to begin operations in December, and toward that end had secured timber limits up around the Georgian Bay on a tributary of the Moon River. It was their intention to divide the preparatory work between the months of December, and the following March and April. Navigation would then be closed down altogether.

A hot, dry summer, however, had frustrated all their plans. The little stream upon which they had counted to float their logs to the deeper waters of the Moon, had

fallen lower and lower, until in May, the month in which they had calculated to build their rafts, it was a mere dribble, incapable of floating even a single log. All summer it had remained at a low ebb, and it was well toward the end of September, before it rose to sufficient height to be of any use. As a result it became necessary to wait until early in March before operations could be started, and then push them through during that month and April. While they would not be nearly completed when navigation started, about the end of the latter month, they would at least be in such shape as to allow a clear passage for vessels. They would then be able to finish the work by the September following, within the time limit of the contract.

To accomplish this plan, it would be necessary to have their timber on the ground at a very early date. The only feasible method of attaining such an end would be to run their rafts from the mouth of the Moon late in the fall. This would give the Sarnia mills time to saw them through January and February.

Two attempts had already been made, and both had failed. Autumn gales were raging, and first one raft and then another had fallen foul of the nets which lined the Lake's lower shore, and had gone to pieces on the beach. The only thing left to do was to let them lie there until the spring following, and start out another raft in the meantime.

"Our two best foremen have fallen down on it," grunted Murphy. "If they can't do it, I don't know who can."

"I do," replied Haliburton. "How would young McNaughton, the time-keeper, answer?"

"I suppose he'd be better than no one," said Murphy doubtfully. "However, if you think he's any good, you'd better call him in and we can have a talk with him."