

THE LEVELING OF HODGSON'S SUMMER ISLAND

A ST. LAWRENCE RIVER STORY

By ARTHUR E. MCFARLANE

I HAD to go down the River to Captain Clamp's some day about the end of the week, anyway, to pick up my canoe. The cow that had used it as a landing-stage at Pleasure Island the Saturday before, had punched two neat souvenir foot-prints through the egg-shell cedar, and I had towed it across to the old skiff-builder's for repairs. When I heard of the Hodgson affair, I went for it that same evening.

Captain Joshua seemed to know all about it. And with him, sitting amid the work-bench shavings, like Job among his ashes, was the afflicted McKeown himself. The whole matter was being laid before me within the first five minutes.

"You see," explained the ancient constructor of pleasure-craft, "this here Hodgson was mean as a double-warped plank, right from the beginnin'. Ever sence they put up the hotel, and this part of the River begun to be turned into a summer place, the City crowd him and his wife belongs to,—their *set*, I reckon you'd call it,—has been pickin' up the islands hereabouts right and left. And Hodgson's wife and his two girls were at him from the start-off to get one, too. If he was mean, they were the everlastin', naggin' kind,—which, I reckon, is a way Providence has of evenin' things up.

"But, as far as that goes, Hodgson wanted to get an island and make a splurge with the rest, *himself*. Only he was the sort that wants to make their splurge *cheap*. And he knowed that old Fields, over there on the Point, owned them 'Three Sisters'; and bein' land-poor, and gettin' poorer all the time, he ought

to starve down to a good bargain, if only the man with the money held back long enough. So while Hodgson was out here about once a week lookin' hankerin' round, he couldn't get himself, nor his women couldn't drive him, to take anything offered in the *reg'lar* market. And he stood that home ding-dangin' for *one, two, and three* summers, just waitin' for poor Fields to get to the bottom of his meal-barr'li!

"And so it come that by this Spring, the 'Three Sisters' was the only islands not picked up. Then one mornin' about a month ago, he learned that Fields had parted with the two biggest. He was down here boilin', by the next train, and you'd 'a' thought by his talk and actions that the old feller had worked a *reg'lar do* on him.—Well, the only island left now was that little loaf-shaped half-acre, fringed about with dwarf ma'sh-grass like a tired-out growth of Galway whiskers. But it was a case of 'Hodgson's choice,' so to speak, and he had to have it. So he jewed Fields down to rock-bottom, and took it right there.

"But that island was rock-bottomed, too. And what's more, it was rock-topped, with a gambrel roof of fine old Laurentian onto it as well. And it would have to be levelled off before he could do anything with it at all. So he commenced castin' 'round to see how he could jew somebody on the levellin'. Well, just as it happened, he met up with Mr. McKeown here, who looks after the explosives for the Channel Deepenin' Company down yander at the Cut. And as soon as Mr. McKeown saw he wanted some