

laced, and your lines and rods in strict society form, and your outfit right enough that you could go up Fifth avenue in New York with it and be hailed as a leader among men. The first rude jolt comes when you see that the real fishermen are barefoot and are wading out into the muddy bottoms carrying clubs about three feet long, and that they are catching fish in that plebeian style of hitting a big fellow just back of the ears as soon as he is located in the mud where the water is falling away until his back sticks up far enough to show where he is. Well, it is all off. You recognize at the first glimpse that all the fish you catch in that Oklahoma rush will not crowd your basket and you snort out a few explosive adjectives, and then you awaken enough interest to watch. Without any good second it is the muddiest job I ever clapped eyes on, and I used to see the wagons flounder in the mud in the Pennsylvania oil country in the spring, and in the Illinois prairie mud when it was juicy before the good roads movement swept westward, and in various other places where they think they know what mud is. But you draw the water out of a mill pond where silt has been settling all over the bottom of the pond for years and then turn the population of the township into that mud and set them to chasing up and down the lake threshing the mud with clubs and tramping it in every direction, and the chocolate mass that is stirred up would make devils food cakes to supply the whole east end of North Carolina during a six weeks camp meeting season. Now you are aware that the bottom of the pond was not graded and rolled in the past, and in a minute a husky fisherman trips over an old log and falls his full length in the soup. He comes up looking more interesting than agreeable. The next fellow sinks in the mud in a soft spot, and when he wallows out he has a coat from about his elbows to his hair that is not a mate for the rest of him. The vast majority of the fishers from about the waist down look as though they were made of that old geography day matter that figures in the construction of the earth—land and water, and it is a proper mixture of land and water, too. As the water draws down the mixture is more amusing. The accidents are more frequent. It gets picturesque. You are disgusted at the event as far as fishing goes, but you realize that you could not have missed it for a quarter.

The dam has fish all right, and the fellows that have the spleen to wade in the mud and poke around in the mixture every now and then start one out. You can't see anything but a troubling of the muddy mixture. You could no more see a fish in that soupy dose than you could see a black cat down cellar at midnight. But you can see the surface disturbed a little, and then down comes the club, and perhaps the fisherman has a fish. Perhaps he has not. The fish does not always wait to be hit. It has its business to attend to also, and it wastes no time fooling around with these folks who are out only for fun. Every now and then some fellow makes a kill, and the fish floats up on the water and is grabbed up and tucked into the tow sack slung over the shoulder of the lucky fisherman. It may be as big as a whale or not much larger than a mosquito, for you can never

tell how big a fish is in the mixture of a mass of mud until you dig it out. In fact you are not always sure it is a fish. One of the most interesting varieties of fish in the waters of this section of the USA is the ancistrodon piscivorous which if you do not know how to talk latin to it you simply call a water moccasin. The water moccasin is a somewhat domestic fowl and he likes to live around mill ponds and places where men have made some improvements that he can crawl under. When the mill pond is drained he is there, evening clothes on, ready like an Irishman for a fight or a frolic. Not certain at the beginning just what your intentions are he is just as likely to start out on the theory that it is a fight and he is usually correct. But a crack with a club generally gets him out of the notion of fight, although not always. And when he does fight he never gives any imitations. He has German blood in him after he gets started. Tom Holder used to tell us about the moccasins that would grab hold of the rails he tried to kill them with, and Tom said those snakes would shake those rails and growl like a dog when they were pestered too much. I have to confess that Tom did not always handle truth with the mathematical precision we expect in dealing with columns of figures, and often he managed to work off on us some tales that perhaps were better because they were not too strictly accurate. Where would Baron Munchausen be if you put him on the witness stand and allowed a modern lawyer to cross question him, and hold him down to the things as he actually saw them? Or Homer, or any honest man when he is giving figures to the income tax assessor, or the folks who give out the weather reports or who originate information concerning the European war, or the virtues of the other political party? Tom had a lot of experience with fish. Down in Alabama where he lived after he went away from here the fish got so bad in the spring of the year when the rivers came up and flooded the low ground that after the water went down it left the ground so covered with fish that you had to farm that ground for sanitary precautions. Right away after the ground was dry enough you had to get in there with plows and plow the fish under and plant corn there and the farmers out on the hill country sued out an injunction against the lumber camps on the river for making corn so cheap that the real farmers could not raise corn in competition with them, and a great agricultural industry was threatened with extinction. The lumbermen on the river said they would quit making corn if the farmers would come down and remove the fish, and the farmers agreed to that, and that is what made the lower Alabama river valleys such remarkable farming country for miles back into the high ground.

No doubt Isaac Walton would not appreciate this kind of fishing that you do at the mill pond, for it lacks some of those quiet and reposeful features that he liked. Here around the mill dams are big trees, and tangles of undergrowth, and on the banks are slopes where a man can lie and smoke and dream and fish. But you don't lie on the ground when you fish at a drawn off mill pond. Probably a man lies less of a fishing expedition

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