

MAGAZINE SECTION  
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**THE WORLD'S FISH COUNTRY**

UNLIKE the automobilist, the golfer, the lawn-tennis man or even the yachtsman, the angler must follow his pursuit in loneliness. Fish don't grow amidst crowds. Therefore the non-fishing world does not begin to realize how big a sport it has grown to be—numbering more adherents than auto-mobiling and golf and yachting put together.

And with all this growth no new countries have been opened to the angler. To-day, as it was when angling first became important enough to have its rules and literature, the only fishing countries that hold standard game fish are the lands of the northwest of Europe and the continent of North America, meaning primarily the United States.

With the exception of the grand salmon streams of Scotland, northern England, Ireland and Norway, the fishing of Europe is growing less, even in spite of the rigorous fish laws that make it as much a crime to poach a fish as to knock down a man and rob him of his purse.

The trout of the Thames has become a memory, perpetuated only by ghastly plaster casts in fishing inns and by annual rumors of the presence of a monstrous survivor in one of the upper pools. Izaak Walton's Itchen has more fingerlings than "good fish if I can only hold him." The great fifty and sixty pound pike of merry England has vanished with the mail-coach, and a ten-pound fish is worthy nowadays of honorable mention. The brook trout is becoming more and more hybridized with the brown trout in the effort to keep up a supply.

Germany, which was the English angler's paradise once, when every clear, cold fountain-head of river was alive with leaping beauties of crimson brook trout, is replacing these game creatures more and more by the commercially valuable brown trout—big, gluttonous and sluggish. Germans are only just beginning to learn angling. The rod and reel still interests sportsmen there as novelties. Germans go abroad with nets to draw in trout and pike and never dream that it is anything but excellent and pure sport.

Now the German is learning, but it is probable that long before he arrives as a nation at the art of fly-fishing, the fishes that take the fly properly will be extinct in his land—replaced by commercial varieties. Fish culture in Germany, though it has advanced to a wonderful grade of efficiency, does not consider sport. It is all done for the increase of marketable fish.

The Frenchman, who fishes with rod and line more than the German does, is not a true angler either. Indeed, the only true sportsmen-fishermen in the world are the English-speaking people and the North American Indians.

Malays, South Sea Islanders, Hawaiians, Chinese and other Asiatic fish, but we angle. Africans can't even fish. South Americans kill their fish with bows and arrows. We and the "Injun" are the only artists—going abroad with artist's tools, built exquisitely from bark canoe to gaff-hook, to find and lure and land the good fish.

And since we are the only simon-pure article in sportsmen-fishers, our fish culture, although carefully calculated to enrich the country commercially, is permeated by the red blood of sportsmanship. The burly brown trout is proscribed by State and Federal authorities in almost all places where he might interfere with My Lord, the Salmo Fontinalis. There is loud outcry almost everywhere against the carp, great in girth, easy to rear, profitable to sell, for the carp eats the spawn of game fish. Our streams and lakes are becoming Edens sacred to the best of the leaping fighters—spotted, square-tail trout, small-mouth black bass and the royal master of all the pikes, the maskinonge.

Ever, as the game fishes of old Europe dwindle in numbers, breed or size, ours grow. Soon we will actually have more good fishing in the United States than there was when it was a wilderness. By the time the German and the Frenchman have become a nation of anglers, for whom no fish is good unless he shows himself when he is hooked, fighting with shaking head and snapping jaws in mid-air as well as in the water, they will have to seek the United States for their sport, just as single steamship from the other side nowadays that doesn't bring at least one Englishman who has journeyed westward with the one purpose of fishing for American ouananiche, sea trout, brook trout, black bass or lunge.

Uncle Sam is hatching them out for all comers by the million. In the



persons of many thousand employees, ranging in grade from college professors to net-haulers, he sits in forty-six hatcheries, scattered from Maine to Southern California, and rears the dainty things from transparent globules of eggs of fingerling size, when they are sent darning and jumping into the streams.

In the past eleven years the United States hatcheries have distributed more than nine billions of eggs, fingerlings, yearlings and adult fish. Of these, 337,000,000 were salmon. There were 30,000,000 of brook trout, and also as many millions of the other varieties, such as rainbow, cutthroat, Loch Leven and golden trout. Almost two millions were the young of that crimson-eyed, dauntless fighter, the small-mouth black bass, who is so brave that it is lucky he doesn't reach the weight of a tarpon, for if he did he would eat up the boat of the angler who hooks him.

So now a man can go into the forests of Maine and "lam it into" the great togue, with a record of thirty-two pounds, or the speckled trout that run ten pounds and more in weight. He can go to New Hampshire and fish for the Sunapee Lake trout, the saibling, whose weight rivals that of the Maine trout.

Everywhere along the tier of the northern States trout in a dozen game varieties rise in pools and eddies. And from the far north to the south, where the waters are too warm for trout, the black bass leaps savagely at fly, spoon or bait, from Florida where the large mouth grows to be fifteen and more pounds in weight to the cold lake waters where the small mouth reaches five and more pounds in size, and every ounce the ounce of a warrior.

But the king of all in size—and the most tempting of all fishes except the salmon to the foreign angler on that account—is that truly and uniquely and exclusively American fish, Lacinius maskinongue, the maskinonge, muscallonge, mascallonge, muskinnonge, muskellinge, or what else they may name him in his thousands of miles of water-home.

He is the Indian fish—the great pike that Hiawatha caught. His pursuit is fraught with that dark, almost apprehensive uncertainty that comes from fishing in black waters for things of unknown size. The maskinonge that comes to the hook may turn out to be fifteen pounds heavy, and he may turn out to weigh seventy or even eighty. There is never a swarthy Indian of lake and forest in maskinonge land who will not have a tale to tell of a maskinonge that weighed an even hundred.

The fish that come to hook every day, if they do not weigh that, weigh enough in all conscience, for forty-pounders are common, and enough sixty-pounders are caught every season to establish that as a veracious maximum weight.

That fifteen or forty or sixty pounds of weight is lust and muscle and ferocity and deadly fear in one long, snakey, quivering bundle from the big tail to the crocodilian snout. The feathered hook behind the silent canoe, trolled behind the silent angler, goes jumping across the lake or glitters in the air, with an olive-barred streak behind it. The snakey shape flashes through the air and flashes back into the water almost in the moment that it takes to carry the message "a fish!" from the hand and eye of the angler to his brain. And before the bubbles cease ascending where the fighter vanished, a pair of lean, tooth-fringed jaws protrude again, and out comes a wicked head, shaken from side to side as a terrier shakes a rat. That is the time the spoon is tested. If it holds, the maskinonge begins his water and aerial tumbling, for which he has been famous ever since the first Indian caught the first maskinonge with the first bone hook dressed with feather and deer hair.

The black bass holds the top line in the mysterious scale of excellences into which the sportsman-fisherman separates the game fishes. But oh! for the broken water, a dashing canoe running almost gunwales under, a silent, magnificent, dirty Indian in the stern, and a maskinonge of parts and weight tearing away in front of the bow, ripping the waters exactly as a buzz-saw rips through a plank. Men have been frightened enough by that tearing flight to drop the rod. Fastened to the end of a hand line, a good maskinonge will turn a canoe and move it through the water at no slow gait.

Hooked in broken water, under a waterfall, with rapids below, he will show the angler that he is well named indeed when he is called the shark of fresh water.

And when he is forced near the boat at last, he meets an end worthy of his ferocious appearance. The maskinonge fishers carry a chunk of wood instead of a gaff-hook. They call it the headache stick, and when the lunge is alongside, down it comes on his flat skull with all the power of a supple forearm. Then it is "give him line," for the stricken lunge goes into a flurry like a whale, speeding off in a great circle and putting off one last wildly desperate fight before he can be boated.