

## XXXII FISH AND FISHING STORIES.

The old time disciples of Izaak Walton were not provided with silver and nickel-plated reels, silk lines and silver jointed poles as the fishermen were in these flubdub days of fine things. Those who fished with hook and line had to put up with a hickory pole, a line half as big as your little finger, and hooks-if big fish were to be caught, large enough to pull in a small raft. "

On Maxinkuckee lake, boats or canoes made of sawed boards were not known. The water craft in use then were made out of medium sized poplar trees. They were made much the shape of the modern fancy canoes so numerous on that beautiful lake at the present time. They were rounded off at the ends to a sharp point, dressed at the sides and bottom, and

dug out with an ax and adz so as to leave the sides and bottom the proper thickness. We have seen many of these "dug outs" that were, really, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever." Oar locks and oars were not known here then. A long pole was used to propel the boat, especially in the rivers, and also in the lakes until deep water was reached, where a single paddle was substituted.

Spearing, or "gigging," as everybody then called it, was the favorite mode of fishing for many years. This kind of fishing had to be mostly done at night with a light made of shell bark from hickory trees carried in an iron holder on the front of the boat, or in hand by an assistant. The glare of the light seemed to blind the fish, and also enable the fishermen to see large fish at a considerable distance. It required a good deal of practice and excellent judgment as to how far away he was to hit a fish, even if he happened to be only a short distance from the boat. An inexperienced "gigger" was a good deal more apt to strike under or over, than to hit where he intended. An expert with the spear, however, seldom missed his aim, and before morning generally went to shore with as many fish as could be carried safely in the boat.

Among the most expert "giggers" was Charley Logan. If he got sight of a fish he seldom ever failed to take him in out of the wet. It was a common saying among the people in those days that, when he took his boat and "gig", and started out on the river or lake, the fish were so sure their last days had come that they actually jumped into the boat and gave up.

The lake and river was, at that period, as the saying was, full and running over with all kinds of the finest fish imaginable, such as grass pike, black, yellow and rock bass, river salmon, cat fish, besides all the different varieties still making these waters their home.

Seining was followed to considerable extent for many years. A company was formed and a seine over one hundred feet long was made, for use, mostly, in Maxinkuckee. It was a good deal of work to draw the seine, but the labor was generally rewarded with a barrel or two of fish at each drawing. It was more difficult to catch fish with a seine in the rivers than in the lakes, on account of the roots, logs and limbs. But fish were very plentiful in the deep holes, and it required but a short time to catch all that were needed for food, and that was all they were caught for, there being no sale for them. A great many fished with hook and line, generally using frogs for bait.

Another way of catching fish in the rivers was by building a fish trap from one bank to the other. One that is remembered was built across Yellow river below what was then called the "Shirley Ford." Several fishermen went up stream half or three-quarters of a mile, and with sticks and clubs drove the fish down into the trap, Among the lot caught the first drive were about forty pike, not one of which weighed less than five pounds, many of them would weigh as much as ten pounds, and a few of them even more than that.

Among the numerous varieties of fish that were caught at that time were fresh water eels. They were all the way from one to two and a half feet in length, and resembled a very large black snake. They had no fins or scales and propelled themselves through the water by a "wiggling"

motion, something like the movement of tadpoles. In dressing them the skin was peeled off, and they have been known to show signs of life for some time after that operation was performed, and it has been declared by those who professed to know, that pieces of eels placed in a frying pan to cook have been known to jump out into the fire, and this, it is believed, is how originated the expression, "out of the frying pan into the fire." The writer does not vouch for the truth of this statement, but if old Bill Jones was alive he would swear to it. This species of fish has become almost extinct. Only now and then one is caught, and a few years more and all will be gone.

The gar was another fish quite numerous then. There are still some left, but they have greatly decreased in numbers during the past half century. They are said to be the oldest species of fish now in existence, having come on down through the ages from the earliest times to the present. They are from one to five feet in length, and the body is covered with smooth enameled scales. arranged in oblique rows, and they are so hard that it is impossible to pierce them with a spear. This enamel is like that of teeth, and the scales contain the ordinary properties of bone structure. It has a long mouth or snout, the upper and lower jaw being provided with numerous fine teeth. They are beautiful fish, but are not fit to eat. They frequent shallow, reedy places, basking in the sun like the pike and devouring living prey with great voracity. They are often seen apparently sleeping on the surface of the water, and some have been picked up with dip nets and other fishing tackle on Maxinkuckee lake by fishermen passing near by in boats. In this way the writer caught one with a troll line a number of years ago that measured exactly four feet. A string was tied around his gills and fastened to the boat, and while still fishing without being anchored, the fish began to pull, and having succeeded in getting the boat in motion actually pulled it more than half a mile to the shore, as "witness my hand and seal this.... day of.... 189. .."