

Most of the buildings have since been destroyed by fire or tumbled into pieces by decay, but the old foundation, walls, and dams remain, and untold tons of tanbark and sawdust still cover the beds of the abandoned mill ponds knee deep, all of it in a perfect state of preservation, as I happen to know from wading the stream last summer. Nevertheless, the brook continues fairly stocked with small trout, despite the supplementary fact that it has been unmercifully fished ever since the memorial days of the "Mountain Miller," fifty fingerlings per rod being not unusual now for a day's catch. Besides, at no time within my recollection have there been less than three sawdust-producing mills on this stream at once, so that it may be asserted that its waters have not been normally clear for a century. Where the current is rapid and the water broken by ledges and boulders, the presence of the sawdust is scarcely perceptible, but at mill-tails, and in the basins above the dams, it accumulates in quantity and remains, becoming water soaked and sinking to the bottom.

Obviously, in localities where the entire bottom is imbedded by sawdust, fish can neither spawn nor feed; but it happens that such deposits do not form on their breeding places, nor is the area of their foraging ground appreciably diminished by their presence. Even in the half-emptied and now useless ponds, the current constantly scours out a central channel through the sawdust, leaving the bottom clear and pebbly; so that, in fact, these local beds are of no more detriment to the fish than so many submerged logs. The trout can range far and wide without encountering them at all. Yet, strange to say—that is, it must seem strange to those persons who take it for granted that sawdust kills fish—the most likely places for the larger trout are these self-same pebbly channels in the old ponds, along whose edges, despite a hundred freshets and ice-shoves, the persistent sawdust and tanbark lie in wind-rows so deep that the wader feels as if he were going to sink out of sight whenever he puts his foot into the yielding mass, every movement of which stirs up a broadening efflorescence which spreads for rods away, distributing itself throughout the stream.

From these sawdust beds I can always fish out three or four good trout with a cautious fly, and at certain times the surface is fairly dimpled with breaking fish, which presumably are after larvae and insects which the sawdust has harboured, though careful investigation might discover other inducements for their congregating there.

In passing I would remark that this Mill Brook is fed by seven lateral brooklets, which tumble into it from the adjacent hillsides at intervals between dams, and are so effectually protected by overgrowth that they must always serve as prolific breeding places, secure from predatory birds and small boys, as well as places of refuge to trout which wish to escape the sawdust of the main stream. I have seen trout streams, especially in the pine barrens of Northern Wisconsin and Michigan, which were by no means as favoured as this Mill Brook, the current being comparatively sluggish, and not so capable of purging itself of sawdust; yet I know of few trout streams in any lumber region where its denizens cannot avoid the sawdust if they will, by withdrawing to the headquarters or lateral tributaries, provided fishways are supplied to enable them to surmount the dams where the accumulations chiefly occur. What I remark as most singular in the Mill Brook is, that the trout gather most where the sawdust is thickest, both on old mill sites and on sites where mills are running now. I take my best trout right from under the flume of a whiptock factory and sawmill, where the refuse is dumped as fast as it forms.

But I recall to mind a still more striking example of the innocuousness of sawdust. There are in Hampshire county, Massachusetts, a series of three large natural reservoirs, varying from half a mile to two miles in length, which for fifty years have abounded in pickerel, perch, eels, and bullheads.

It is said that they originally contained trout, but the water is dark and discolored