

CHAPTER X

Deep Water, Drinking Water, "Fire Water," and
the Water That Brings Forth Fish—The
Whale That Swallowed Jonah.

Water is a vital subject in Miami. Every Miamian is fighting for some kind of water. They seem to have every kind except the kind they want.

There is the matter of deep water. Deep water for Miami harbor has been the dream and the hope of Miamians since the day when Henry M. Flagler caused to be dredged from the Miami river to Cape Florida what was then thought to be a deep-water channel to the ocean, and put on steamers plying between Miami and Nassau and Miami and Key West. That was the beginning of the fight for deep

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water. The Miami Chamber of Commerce then took up the fight and finally succeeded in having the government dredge an eighteen-foot channel from the mainland to deep water, while the city dredged a channel through the bay to a municipal dock and a turning basin of the same depth of the government channel. But a channel of this depth does not satisfy the aspirations of the people of Miami, and an aggressive fight has been made to give Miami a deep water channel from the municipal docks to the ocean at a uniform depth of twenty-five feet.

There appears now to be at least a fair prospect for favorable government action on the matter of deep water for Miami harbor. The board of engineers of the government recently submitted a favorable report to Congress on the project of widening and deepening the ship canal and the channel from the canal to the city docks and recommended an appropriation of more than a million and a half dollars for the work, with an annual appropriation of

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twenty-five thousand dollars for maintenance. The engineers recommended a channel twenty-five feet deep at mean low water, five hundred feet wide from that depth in the ocean to the near outer ends of the jetties, three hundred feet wide through the entrance, reducing to two hundred feet wide across Biscayne Bay and following the route of the existing municipal channel. If Congress appropriates the money—and there's the rub—this will give Miami twenty-five feet of water from the jetties to the city docks, making it possible for Miami to accommodate the great coastwise ships which now pass the port without calling because of the lack of deep water. The deepening of the Miami harbor to accommodate ocean-going craft will unquestionably prove a strong factor in the further development of the city and the back country. It will probably make Miami one of the important ports of entry on the South Atlantic coast, and may favorably affect local freight rates.

Another kind of water the alert Miamians are

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fighting for is an adequate supply of pure drinking water. Though the city is surrounded by water, it seemed—for a while, at least—to be a case of “water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink.” The water they have been forced to drink there is an innocuous bevo, without life or kick, and they still take their water from a tilted bottle as though it were something good, though some improvement has been made in the brands. A number of deep wells have been sunk and the city is understood to be making a further effort to solve the problem through the means of a municipally-owned plant, to include new wells and a softening plant. It is said that when a Miamian goes North it is a hard matter to get him away from the water tank. He drinks good water as though it were wine—it is a new drink to him.

The absence of good drinking water in Miami may or may not have anything to do with the consumption of alcoholic “fire water” that flows in contradiction to the Eighteenth Amendment, but it is

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conceded even by the prohibitionists that Miami, in common with other towns, consumes its full quota of contraband wares. The man who wants "a little drink and lots of it" may have his choice of any of the popular brands and he need not suffer any great inconvenience in getting it. Miami is probably no better or no worse in this respect than other towns, though it may be said to have the advantage—or disadvantage, according to the point of view—over many towns on account of its being on the Atlantic seaboard and its close proximity to foreign ports. Its stock is secured largely from Bimini, Nassau and Havana. The contraband traffic, like everything else in Miami, is handled in a business-like manner. The price quoted is usually the foreign price plus ten dollars per case for brokerage fees. The bulk of the local trade is said to be in the hands of a local trust and this trust is controlled by one individual. This local monopoly is said to have a fleet of over forty boats and its operations extend far up the coast-

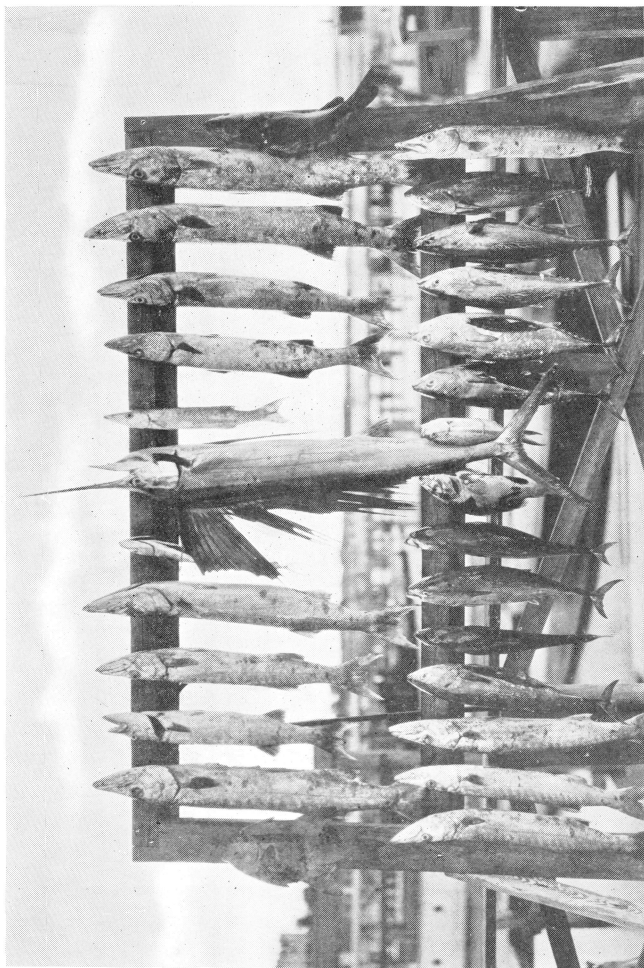
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line. The organization works with the smoothness of a political machine, as was aptly illustrated when a big clean-up of the bootlegging raiders was announced. Forty-two Federal agents, direct from Washington, were despatched to Miami to handle the situation. The net result of the forty-two men's work was the confiscation of thirteen bottles of liquor! There are a few non-union or free lance bootleggers who do plain and fancy bootlegging independent of the local trust, and oddly enough the few arrests made are usually from among this class. The waters of ocean, bay and river afford the Miami bootlegger peculiar opportunities for smuggling. The lower bay, in particular, is literally a-swarm with small fishing boats, the cargoes of which may be fish—or Old Irish.

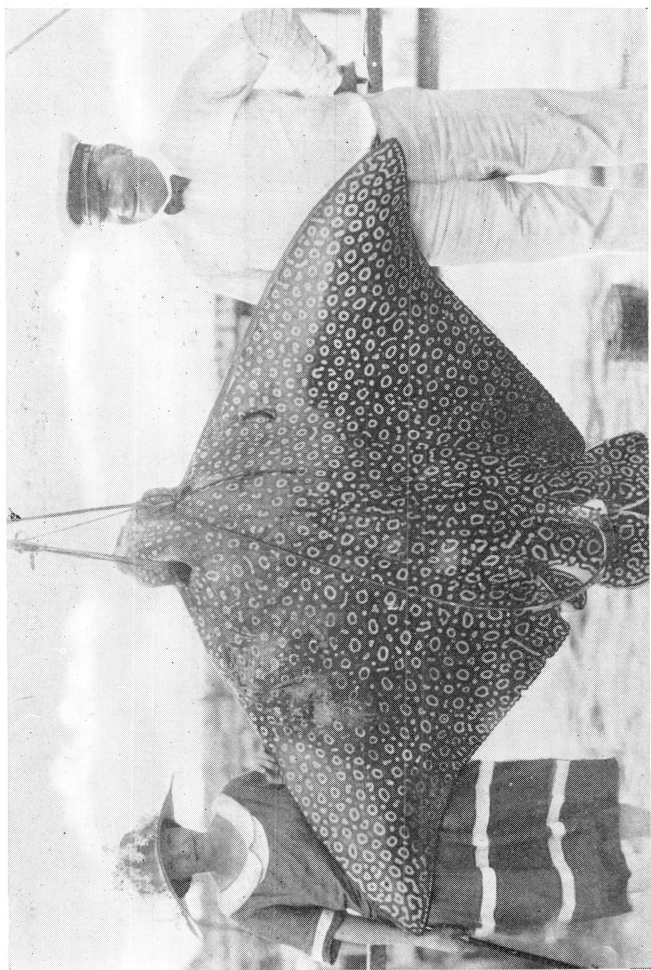
Many who follow fishing as a means of livelihood often handle contraband as a side-line—or maybe the fishing is the side-line. Anyway, there is money in fishing for fish as well as for customers.

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For fishing in Miami waters is a profitable business, as well as the finest of sports. The rankest amateur can catch a string of fish in the waters off Miami shores that will make him feel as important as George Harvey. Anyone capable of holding a casting rod or a hand-line is a potential fisherman. One tender-foot caught so many fish in a half day's time that he blistered his hands holding the line. It would take a catalogue to tell the names of the many varieties of fish that may be caught. More than six hundred varieties of food and game fish are to be found in the waters about Miami and southward among the keys. The kings of the game fish, tarpon, sailfish, merlin, king, tuna, dolphin, amberjack, sea trout, and barracuda, are found in large numbers. Many others are caught for eating, including mango-snapper, red snapper, sand perch, salt water trout, bluefish, squirrel fish, grunts, margarets, trigger-fish, queen-angel fish, yellow-tail jacks and sailor's choice. Man-eating sharks are often brought to bay, and the pecu-



A DAY'S CATCH



WHIP RAY FISH

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liar whip-ray is a frequent catch. The whip-ray is a deep sea monstrosity. The school boy who was asked by his teacher to describe the whip-ray said it had the mouth of the alligator, the wings of the bird, the legs of the rabbit, the eyes of the bull frog and the belly of a rat. The description seems fairly good.

Fish stories naturally are quite commonplace in Miami, and a fish that isn't at least two feet long isn't worth fooling with, much less story-telling about. Probably the biggest fish—certainly the biggest story—that ever came out of Miami was furnished by Captain Charles H. Thompson, of Miami. Captain Thompson, with the aid of a small army, took from the waters south of Miami in June, 1912, a monster of the sea that measured forty-five feet in length and weighed fifteen tons. No classification for this "whale of a fish" could be found in natural history. The genus or species is unknown, and scientists pronounced it the most remarkable

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zoological specimen known in history. It required thirty-nine hours to subdue the monster. It smashed a boat into thousands of pieces and crushed the rudder of a thirty-one ton yacht with a single swish of its tail. Five harpoon thrusts and one hundred and fifty large calibre rifle bullets only served to increase its fury, and it required five days to finally kill it. It was found to have swallowed an octopus weighing twelve hundred pounds and a black fish weighing four hundred pounds. Five hundred pounds of coral was also found in its stomach. Every undertaking establishment on the Florida East Coast gave up its supply of formaldehyde to preserve the monster, over nineteen barrels being used. Its hide was three inches thick, and its liver alone weighed seventeen hundred pounds.

The big fish was mounted by a taxidermist from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and exhibited over the country. Scientific authorities believe that the creature was an inhabitant of depths

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more than fifteen hundred feet below the surface, and that it was blown up by some subterranean or volcanic upheaval which injured its diving apparatus so that it was unable to return to its native haunts. Although the largest fish ever captured, scientists claim it was only a baby of its tribe and if it had lived to attain full growth it would have been two and one-half times as large. Bible students say that it is of the same specie as the whale that swallowed Jonah and that it makes plausible that story. A member of the Miami Anglers Club classified the monster as a giant bull fish. *Some bull.*