

COMIC YORKSHIRE FLY

By ERIC HORSFALL TURNER, January 1976

A MUSEMENT in fly-fishing for wild trout came to a youthful angler, with his plentiful fly dressing, during the early part of the last war. His doctor persuaded him that they should join for fly-fishing on the top Derwent, above Scarborough, in mid-June of 1940. It was the hope that mayflies would be about in plenty at that time. Then, after the end of the fishing in the morning, only a few small trout had been taken on small dry flies and put back. None of the mayflies had come at that time.

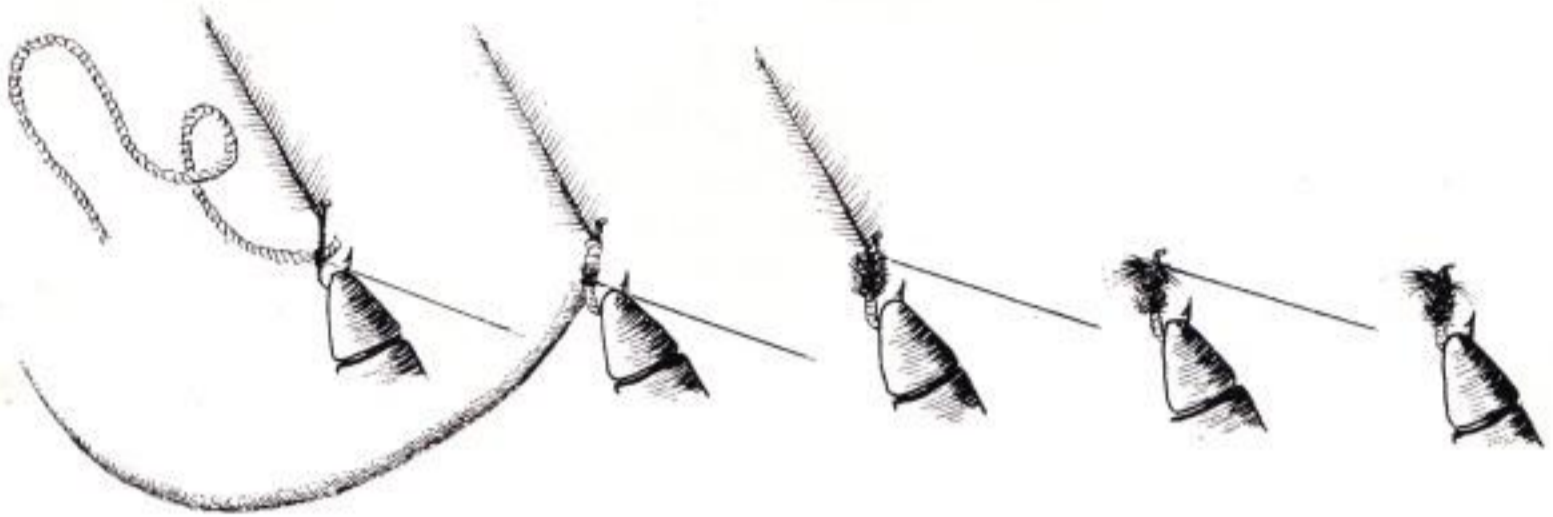
After massive drinks and good lunch at the local hotel, the doctor insisted that they should walk down to the near section of the stream where there were vast trees on the east side. He contended that dapping for the trout could be interesting from beneath the trees, under the massive sunshine. They soon crawled below the trees and lay flat to be out of vision of any trout. Several trout of small size were soon visible, with no inclination to set the flies over them. Then, immediately below, a large trout of 1½ lb. was seen to move up and down, with its chasing away of any smaller trout that came near his area below the bank. He showed no rises at drifting natural flies, despite his move upwards to get close examination of one or two types.

The youthful angler then pulled out a coin and suggested, "Heads you take him, tails I do!". The doctor agreed and, in seconds, was the "head" after the spin of the coin. Over the next hour he tried five or six different flies over the large trout. Despite one or two moves to examine the one or two flies, there was no take. This infuriated the doctor and he decided to move back to the hotel for his tea.

The resting angler then started his own fly-fishing. It was not long before a beetle dropped into the water from a tree above. The large trout came up and grabbed it firmly. The next move of the angler was full examination of his large box of flies. None resembled the natural beetle that had been seen on its drop from the tree, but there was one fly in the box that made him think. It was massively winged and was given to him a year before by a friend who had been fishing in Norway. The only merit was the peacock body. It showed some resemblance to the taken beetle. In no time the long wings and most of the hackle were cut off.

The large trout came within reach after a few minutes, and the angler had sucked the fly in his mouth to make it drop below the surface as the earlier natural one had done. In a second or two, after its gentle drop, it was taken firmly by the trout. There was a long fight, with no means of using the net from some 8 ft. above the water surface. Then, as time moved on, the trout went slack and was carefully pulled up on the high bank. It gave the doctor a vast shock when the angler soon arrived for his tea and showed the trout in hand.

This interesting incident came to a youthful angler with his lack of interest in dapping. He soon dressed several reasonable imitations of the natural beetle, after catching and examining a few of the naturals before releasing them to trout benefit. His move was to cast them at long distance upstream towards trout risers. It was a simple conclusion that the main line and leader should be greased to stay floating, with the named artificial beetle sinking only an inch or two and being allowed to drift downstream without any pull of the line. It was soon taken, time and again, by trout of good size.



Dressing of the Beetle on a No. 10 hook. Black silk for tying, thick yellow silk for the back end and the main body—the main body covered up by the big peacock section tied on after yellow thickening of the body. The head is wound reasonable with black silk, before it is cut off; and then hardening “sticky” put on. A specimen is in the Club house.

(Drawn by: Eric Horsfall Turner)

Two important points soon showed. One was the tail dressing of that fly. The first experiment was with a red back end. It was taken quite often with such dressing, but in no time it was found that a yellow back end got far more takes. This could well be the tendency of trout to take olive flies of all types. The other point was the method of strike. It was found, time and again, that a firm strike was essential as soon as a slight check was seen on the floating leader.

Interest in fishing with this type of fly soon moved away when compared with the fascinating experiments with dry flies of various types. The remaining advantage came when several dry flies were not touched by the plentiful risers. The sight of a rise by a trout of good size resulted in taking off any useless fly and putting on the beetle. In no time, on many occasions, it was firmly taken. Once the trout was killed, the angler had a special scoop gadget and pushed it right down the dead trout. The pulling out produced a large number of natural fly the trout had taken.

The next move was clip-off of the beetle and replacement of a fly—dry fly in the main—similar to those shown after the scoop out. In no time this fly was taken by several risers. The only sad fact was that most of them were small, to be returned to the water for their increase in size over coming years. This has shown much interest to a number of fly fishermen in the Yorkshire area.

The effective quality of the beetle is not known in the South African world of fly-fishing. The only amusing comment may be that of the ancient Alfred North Whitehead, “The greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of invention!”. All experiments are interesting and worthwhile in the world of game fishing.

(We much appreciate this article from Mr. Eric Horsfall Turner, who was “the youthful angler”, then 35 years of age and Town Clerk of Scarborough, Yorkshire. He had been trout fishing and fly tying since he was seven years old.—Ed.)