About 1925 words

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
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Introduction

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At core, the problem was that fishing authorities, with honorable exceptions, were dispensing advice uncluttered by sources. It was an old habit among writers on both sides of the Atlantic, and I mention it here because Vince Marinaro raised the subject with me. He had acknowledged his own debts and was not amused when his personal contributions were later borrowed without attribution.

Vince returned to original sources, natural and human. He collected local stream insects, had them identified by entomologists, and rethought the artificial fly from head to tail. Earlier American writers were of little help in this work because none had understood the limestone spring creeks. Marinaro referred to predecessors "like Hewitt and La Branche and Gill" as "legendary."

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quotation from Col. E.W. Harding, then drew from Skues, Halford, Mottram, Dunne, Ronalds, and more. Finding the right sources must have taken research, for an American in the 1940s.

A Modern Dry Code was not the first American work on flies that imitate natural insects. Jennings and Flick had both published before 1950; both knew Catskill trout and mayflies[1]; and both (in my opinion) tied excellent dry flies in the traditional design. This, however, was a subject on which Vince did not agree, as I learned when he went through a manuscript of my first book. The Halfordian (and Catskill) dry fly was, for him, merely a wet fly adapted to float -- a purpose for which the design was not suited. With this background you will understand Marinaro's meaning when, in the pages that follow, he regrets that G.E.M. Skues did not "emancipate" the floating fly as he did the wet.

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There was yet another discovery, if one uses the term in a sense made popular by European explorers of new lands. Marinaro put limestone spring creeks on the American angler's map. It required a "brand of fly-fishing ... never observed or exploited

before my time," he writes. He must have worked out the chalk-stream method by reading, for he would not fish the River Itchen till years later.

There are spring creeks west of the Great Plains which are, today, in better condition than either the Pennsylvania limestoners or the English chalk streams. There are tailwater fisheries that provide the same kind of fishing, and more of it, without sources in springs. The American fly-fishing boom of recent years has focused on such fertile streams. In them we catch rising fish, or try to catch them, by matching the hatch. It involves stalking a visible quarry, rather than waiting for something mysterious to happen in the depths. The people who are drawn to fly-fishing in the first place are often especially drawn to this particular kind -- but we were not aware of that, before 1950.

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Few people have proved more thoroughly than Vincent Marinaro that fly-fishing is an intellectual passion. He taught himself to make horsehair lines, using an authentic gadget found at a flea market. He reconstructed the old British North-Country flies, taking pains to find authentic materials. (Who else had dotterel feathers?)

His passions had nothing to do with price or prestige. I heard him express admiration for a few books, a cock's cape with silver-colored hackles, some old Hardy silk lines, one or two Partridge hooks, good double-barreled shotguns, a rod by Tom

Maxwell, and a pair of hackle pliers. "That's the only good pair of hackle pliers I ever saw," he said.

The list of things he did not like was longer but expressed with equal frankness, if one asked. He held conventional wisdom in such disregard that some interlocutors found him unsettling. In addition to Halfordian dry flies, he had no time for:

- Rivers (or grouse coverts) with lots of people in them.
- Writers who attract crowds by publicizing individual streams.
- Anglers who fail to respect their prey. "Fishing is a blood sport," he said, and certain obligations come with it.
- Some prestigious bamboo rods, especially if they had stiff butts or soft middles.
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It was easy to know when Vince was not pleased, and as the years went on, he increasingly objected to overwhelming trout with modern technology. You may be sure that I did not "pollute the water" (his term) with plastic rods when we went fishing together.

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