Anyone who has fished for a generation or more ought to have something to say however inefficient he may be. He will have had much experience; and this is necessary if you are to describe so varied a pursuit as angling, where the possibilities are so many that some incidents only repeat themselves once or twice in a lifetime. The factors which go to make up success or failure are so numerous that until you have been through the same incident often you usually misjudge it. You do not assign the right cause. You are continually making wonderful discoveries which you think will revolutionize the pursuit and prevent you from ever coming home empty.

Summer on the Test. By J. W. Hills, 1924

Introduction

The term, soft hackled fly, is used generically throughout this book, and applies to a class of wingless, sub-aqueous flies, the hackles of which come mostly from birds such as partridge, woodcock, grouse, snipe and starling.

No dry fly fisherman has challenged me to write it. It is being written because the soft hackled fly and the mending method of fishing it, outlined in the book, are rarely, if ever, discussed in magazines or in angling literature published in America.

The author has never seen the soft hackled fly used by any other fisherman. This observation has been made on many of the finest and most famous trout waters of the country. And although mending is now popular with some steelhead fishermen in the west, it is not generally used by trout fishermen using the sunk fly.

The soft hackled fly is not to be easily found in even the best-stocked fly shops in the country. Yet, the flies are easy and quick to tie from easily obtainable materials. And the mending method of fishing the fly is so simple that a beginner can learn it immediately...and a dry fly purist, depending on how dry he is, a little longer.

The book is also written for many of the older, dry fly fishermen

I have met who embraced the sport late in life. In a three day fishing school in Vermont, Colorado or Montana, these men learned to fish dry, but lost a great deal of fishing fun by not learning how to fish a sunk fly downstream.

Because the soft hackled fly is nymph-like, the book may help to show practiced and would-be nymph fishermen a new way to fish their favorite nymph patterns, or to try the soft hackled flies instead. The instructions here eliminate the need for the average fly fisherman to be an amateur entymologist. He need not know the difference between a stone fly nymph and a small mayfly nymph. He can forget emergence dates, fly sex, and maturity or immaturity. And he can travel from one stream to another, east or west, and enjoy the sport as it was meant to be enjoyed in the beginning...without cult, ritual and mystery.

Because history is important and interesting to many fly fishermen, the book also traces the evolution of the soft hackled fly in angling literature. The repead discoveries of the mention of them in the most highly regarded books on fly fishing is quite remarkable. Yes, even in the first English word written about fly fishing, a soft hackled fly, the Donne fly of Sister Berners, is the first of twelve in her list.

With so noble a beginning, it is the purpose of this book, to restore the soft hackle to its rightful place.

Chapter I

I saw my first soft hackled flies some fifteen years ago in Paul H. Young's tackles shop in Detroit, Michigan. The flies were simple, yet extremely attractive; drab, yet enticing. The slender bodies were of silk floss in any of three colors; orange, yellow and olive green. At the head of each fly was a partridge hackle, wound very sparsely around the hook. Lying there together, mixed in the box, the flies looked alive and natural and very much like real inseacts, due mostly to the minute, freckled markings on every parbule of the partridge hackles.

Young called the flies, "P.H.Y. Partridge spiders". His catalog advertised the flies saying, "Fished like a nymph. This is one of the best all around wet flies I ever used. Fish down and across stream, and take trout. Hackles lay back along the hook when wet, and crawl or work in the current."

That advertising message, written by one of the great bamboo rod makers of America seemed too simple, too pat. Yet the flies excited me and appealed to some facet of my fishing makeup, and I went out of the store with six of them; two orange, two yellow and two green.

I didn't know then, that these simple, two part flies would, in a short time, shape my whole fishing future and becomethe nucleus of a sunk fly fishing method that would exclude every other kind of fly.

It is the object of this book to show how, and perhaps, why, this happened.

To retrace one's fishing steps to the present time or state of the art can be at once, pleasant and enlightening, difficult and even embarrassing. One is affected first by locale and the easily available water, and by the successes or failures recorded on this water either by the fisherman, himself, or by his friend or strangers he happens to meet at the water's edge. The fickle fisherman will discard a certain lure, bait or fly pattern or fishing style as soon as he finds something else more successful, or more appealing to his inner senses.

Once addited to fly only, he moves laterally or horizontally from wet only to dry only, or nymphing most of the time to dry some of the time, or from big, shiny streamer only to nymph only, or from day fishing to night fishing. In most movements, he seeks to catch more fish or bigger fish, but finally he seeks a personal satisfaction doing what, to him, elevates him with the pleasure he's looking for. This is why the fisherman always wears the same old hat, or torn vest. Why he prefers his bamboo rod to a glass one. Why he'd rather cast a silk line instead of a plastic one. Why he sticks with one fly or kind of fly or method instead of some other. Or even why he prefers to fish, in solitude, an obviously less fruitful stretch of water on his favorite river, instead of jamming up with the other fishermen in the popular pool or run just around the bend.

So it was with my own fishing evolution. It started on the west side of Cleveland, in the late 30's, at least 150 miles from the nearest trout stream. True, I had Lake Erie a few blocks from home, and I can remember first, fishing with a hand line and trolley for perch and pike, as they swarmed the breakwalls and piers in search of food. Huge schools of white bass also scourged the shallows chasing madly anything that moved. They came in right up the beaches, boiling the surface. The school moved across the water in one large mass and it was easy to catch a bushel basked full of them with a bait casting road and multiple winding reel. This was more fun than still fishing for perch or pike. The favorite lure for the white bass wasaa piece of white cloth, a quarter of an inch wide and about an inch long. The piece of cloth was stuck on to a smallish hook and two or three or even four of these were tied on to a four or five foot piece of gut. The gut was attached to a small section of broom handle with screw eyes on either end, one for the casting line and the other for the gut.

The broom handle was the plug and supplied the weight you needed for the cast and it kept the "flies" up on the surface during the retrieve. You threw that plug right in the middle of the school and worked it back in jumps and jerks. The white bass went madeafter it, chasingthe white pieces of cloth, hooking themselves, fighting to get off, unhooking themselves, so that another could grab it before it was finally retrieved. Three fish, up to 10 inches long, were frequently caught at one time. And you could see it all.

Not all of the white bass fishermen used the pieces of cloth. Some used a real fly, a small white or yellow streamer type made from plain chicken feathers. I don't think they were any more effective than the cloth, but once I saw them, I knew I had to try them.

The flies were available from a barber, Glen Buckel, who had a shop on Detroit Avenue, just west of the neighborhood I lived in. I rode over there on my bike the first chance I got.

The shop was small with a large window on each side of the door. One window had a display of fly tying materials; packages of hackles, tinsels, hooks, furs chenille, paired wing quills and other fly tying materials. The other windo had a framed large card on which was attached all the materials required for a dry Quill Gordon. The finished Gordon was also stuck to the card, and I wondered how a feather, piece of quill and slips of yellow wood duck could be turned into such a beautiful work of art.

Inside, framed colored prints of trout, salmon and fishing scenes hung on the wall. Black and white photos showed a smiling Glen and other fishing friends standing near streams and fishing in them. Two barber chairs were on the left, and if, as customers sat in the, theycould look to the other wall, where hung long, glass cases filled with trout flies, bass flies and even fully dressed salmon flies.

Glen Buckel had no customers and was bent over a vise on a table in the back of the room. Here, too, were the cabinets and closts which

contained huge stocks of fly tying materials. Rod cases, sections of bamboo rods in various stages of completion leaned in a corner of the room, for I found out later, Glen made bamboo rods from raw cane.

At that point, I was 16 or 17, I know now that I felt the first major romantic experience of my life. It was love at first sight. It is hard to say and difficult to explain what and how I was in love with. For I had never before seen a trout fly, a trout, a trout stream or read a single word about them.

Glen didn't pay too much attention to me and went right on tying the flies. Feeling like an intruder, I inched closer to him. He was watting for me to speak first. I don't know why, but I felt embarrased. I started asking silly, elementary questions about fly tying and fly fishing. Like any professional's attidtued towards the rank beginner, Glen was so bored, he couldn't answer. I got nothing out of him except the suggestion to visit the main branch of the public library in downtown Cleveland where I could find all the information I wanted on fly tying and fly fishing.

Before I left the shop, however, I bought fifteen or twenty cents worth of hooks and white and yellow chicken feathers for the white bass flies, and started a hobby that has been a real and important part of my life for more than 30 years.

My first tyings were terrible. I had no vise, no hackle pliers, no thread bobbin. I fashioned a vise from a pair of square nosed pliers, put the hook in the jaws and wrapped a stout rubber band arou d a the handles.

I made a pair of hackle pliers from a piece of coat hanger, and from the same material, I invented my own thread bobbin, which I still use today. My mother supplied thread and flosses from her crocheting and sewing basket.

I couldn't figure out how to get the hackle fibres to stand out perpendicular to the hook shank as they did on Glen's flies. I thought each fibre was tied in separately. I couldn't tie a half hitch. The tinsel wouldn't lay flat. It was frustrating and I was getting nowhere.

There was nothing left to do but take Glen's advice and head for the library. Over a period of a year, I read every book on fly tying and fly fishing the library had to offer. I would take home for seven days at a time, books by Halford, Skues, LaBranche, Hewitt, Hills, Bergman, Knight and many others. In one of the British books, I saw photographs of the Test River and of the Village of Stockbridge on that river and the Grosvener Hotel, where fly fishers met to fish this great stream. How easy it was for me to read these books. What fascination they held for me! How unexplainable that a kid from the west side of Cleveland, without a single fly fishing friend or relative; without ever having seen a trout stream, would spend teen age days and nights reading about a subject so remote and trying to tie flies for trout in streams still unseen and unfished.

Armer with the knowledge I was getting from the books, I visited Glen more and more. He warmed up gradually for it was obvious I was as enthusiastic a pupil as he had ever encountered. I would show him the flies

I tied and he would show me where and how I made the mistakes. He taught me the right way to set and tie wings, to make half hitches, to wind hackles around the shank, and to handle tinsels. He talked with me like a streamside brother. He told me of the great trout streams in northern Michigan where he had come from originally and where he spent two weeks every year on vacation. He spoke of trout streams near Kane, Pennsylvania. These were the closest to Cleveland, he said.

The more he talked, the more I knew that soon I would have to fish one of these rivers, to be baptised or married forever because the courtship had gone on long enough.

So, in the spring of 1938, I made plans to fish the streams near Kane. I had been working at odd jobs around the neighborhood, cleaning a bakery, selling newspapers and whatever. I had enough money to buy a pair of boots, a fly rod and reel, and I had enough left for the Greyhound bus ride to Kane and back and room and board for the weekend. And I had my own flies.

My mother worried about the trip. To her it was an odessy to the ends of the earth. I was going alone and I didn't know a soul in Kane. How would I get to the rivers from tonw ? Where would I stay and what would I eat? I told her I could take care of myself. I could hitch hike to the streams or walk if I had to.

The bus left Cleveland late in the evening. I never slept a wink, and by dawn I could see the purple black outlines of the low altitude mountains in north central Pennsylavania. All that I read about and dreamed about was going to come true. Or was it? I couldn't cast, I couldn't make the dry fly float. I couldn't wadge because the rocks in the streams were too slippery and I went into the icy spring water more than once. In the British books that I read earlier, I saw the patterns of the Butcher and the Alexandra. These flies were such killers that they were outlawed on many British streams. I had tied many of these for the Kane trip and tried them over and over, but nothing came to hem. I haven't used them since.

I can't remember if I caught a single fish during that weekend, but I can remember seeing some small trout in a basket of another fisherman and their beauty of form and color convinced me that the baptismal was worth it. The mountains, the clear water and pure air also helped to entrance me.

Back in Cleveland later, I was fishing Rocky River with ringed-eyed flies and spinners. Now, at least, I was stuck to a fly rod. The river divides Cleveland from Lakewood and runs through Metropolitan Park. I don't know what the condition of the river is at the present time, but back then it was quite clear and delightful, with some rapids and slow pools and many sharp bends against small cliffs of shale. As its name implies, there were many rocks in the river which split the currents and his some very nice black bass.

A fast retireve was necessary to keep the spinner blade turning in the slower water, and I learned the figure "8" left hand retrieve. After a while, I learned to read the water, and would move from one pool to another looking for places that resembled the previous striking place.

During this time, I was also using live helgramites on the fly rod. The river was fu,l of them and they could be caught by upsetting rocks in the faster current against a piece of netting held by yourself or a friend below. Once obtained, the helgramite could be secured to the hook with a small rubber band slipped over his abdomen. The helgramites were as mean as the bass were. With their powerful pinchers at their heads, they would grap onto your finger or onto the lip of the bass that you caught using the helgramite, if it wasn't already in his stomach.

The fly and spinner combination on a fly rod followed me into the army in 1942, and I was using them with great success for rainbow on the San Gabriel River, near Los Angeles where I was stationed for a time. In that same river, I was fishing a wooly worm, which was becoming popular on the west coast. The ringed-eyed fly and spinner combination has almost disappeared from American trout fishing, due perhaps to considerable fly-only legislation, yet in the early forties, it was a very popular way to fish. One could buy the flies separately and attach them to his own spinners, or buy the fly-spinner cominations. These flies were very colorful and almost always had some red in them. Today, most fly material catalogs do not even list ringed-eyed hooks.

In December of 1943, the Army gave me passage on a crowded troop ship to England and moved me and our fighter control squadron to a small village right on the banks of the Hampshire Avon. I did not fish that river as the trout season was still closed, but I ghillied one day in February for a titled gentleman who owned salmon fishing right and helped him land a 20 lb salmon he had taken on spinning gear.

In April, our squadron moved to an airfield at Andover, just 7 or 8 miles from Stockbridge, and the Test River. What a coincidence! What a stroke of fate! As soon as it was possible, I was on a bus to the village and that fabled river.

The hotel was there, just as in the photographs I had seen earlier in the British angling books. The Test, not far from the hotel, ran smooth and evenly, with long weeds, limpid as hair, obscuring the white lime bottom. The river seemed to flow as if one large glass mass, with little difference in depth from one bank to the other. Close, you could look right through it, but a few steps back and the smooth, even surface turned into a shining mirror that reflected the sky and the trees and the birds.

Looking into the river, I felt the fishing temptation as I had never felt it before and hurried back to the hotel. I found out soon enough, the entire river was private from beginning to estuary, except that the Leckford club up stream might permit a GI to fish on its four miles of water. And it was true! I met the club secretary the same day and he informed me that due to the war, the club members were not able to get to the river in any number and that American soldiers were invited to fish the river in their absence.

American soliders were invited to fish the river, in their absence. Permission grated, the visitor had to abide by club rules: dry fly only umpsteam to rising trout or grayling; beat fishing on the number assigned for the day or evening; fish ing from the bank only with no wading; and killing of all fish caught.

The secretary told me I could come whenever I wanted. All I had to do was to report to Mr. Bains, the river keeper, at his small cottage near the middle beat.

I had brought no equipment from America, and so purchased an 8 foot, two piece rod from a tackle shop in Andover. I had not much choice in selection because it was the only rod in the store. The joints were of the Hardy spiral lockfast type and the windings, close spaced the whole length of the rod in typical British fashion. The action was medium, much like American rods.

Mr. Bains was anice, older man, taciturn, yet friendly. He offered me one of the club rods, with Hardy reel and touble tapered silk line, but the rod felt top heavy. It was about 10 feet long. He could sense I was anxious to try my own, new rod and lent me a reel and line and knotted silk worm leader. I had my own drys from Glen Buckel. Mr. Bains thought they were well tied, but too large for the river. He gave me a small tin box with several Test patterns in it: olives, iron blues, orange and ginger quills and the Welshman's buttons, in 12's, 14's and 16's.

The Leckford water of the Test was about four miles long. It was divided into ten beats, the same number as the membership of the club. Beat numbers were makred on stakes driven into the bank on both sides of the river. Crossing the river meant walking back to one of the bridges because there was no wading and one fished dry shod. Bains took me to my beat and explained that I was not to fish until I saw a trout rise.

Benches were placed along every beat so the fisherman could sit on them and watch the water for the rising fish. No wonder the English call this, "the contemplative sport".

I sat and waited, my eyes glued to the river. After a short time, I began to see swallows buzzing the surface of the river, dipping down here and there for the first flies of the hatch. Then the rises started, slowly at first, then faster, until I could see a half dozen fish feeding immediately above and below me. I tried the closest fish. He rose and I struck, but too fast. Another try on another fish and I lipped the fish, losing the fly. After a few more tries, I finally got one, a fish of about a pound and a half. I was starting to throw more slack, to give the fly a longer, natural float before any drag occurred. It seemed better to wait a second to set the hook after you saw the rise, than to strike immediately. I fished out my whole beat and raised many fish, but I only caught one other slightly larger than the first.

These two fish, on my first day on the Test, were the largest I ever caught in about 7 years of fishing. Reading now, about how difficult it is to catch Test trout, because of their "education" and wariness, the clear slow water, their selectivity and aversion to drag, I think I did quite well.

I continued to fish the Test through May and the first part of June. I learned to srike slowly, to stalk the fish from a low position on one knee, and to throw slack. I caught many "brace" of brown trout and a few grayling, a fish the Test fly fisher disdains and calls "gray bob". The largest fish I saw there was caught by another gentleman on a different beat from mine. I helped net the fish after the man fought it for some 25 minutes on a size 16 organge quill. The fish wieghed one ounce less than 5 pounds.

The way the British fish the Test and other chalk streams i a good example of many fishermen doing their own thing in their own way. Most Americans would not agree with the system, and there are and have been some British fishermen and writers who thought the dry fly only rules were all wet and proved it. Now, these rules have been modified, I understand, and some clubs have succumbed to limited sunk fly fishing upstream.

Writing these pages, I am reminded of the generosity of the members of the Leckford Club. I don't think I fully appreciated the privelege of fishing the Test when I was so young. Mr. Bains has departed, and as I suspect sadly, so have many of the fine gentlemen I

met there during that troubled year. But, it's always sad to reflect on good times and good friends.

Chapter II

After the war, I pursued a colledge education in my home state of Ohio. I built my first bamboo rod and was tying more and more flies. I saw Glen less and less, but on our first meeting, I told him about fishing the Test, and I though I saw a tear in his eye.

Fishing came during spring and summer breaks which I would hitch hike from Cleveland to Grayling or Baldwin, Michigan.

I had returned to wet fly fishing mostly with bucktails in the early part of the year and small, winged wet patterns later on. I always carried dry flies with me, in case a hatch came on, but looking back on it, I can rember very few first rate hatches during daylight hours.

What a difference from the British way and the American. Here I was sharing the river with wrom fishermen, spin fishermen, egg fishermen and other fly fishermen. They came and went in front of you upstream and down. The animosity was always the greater, the coarser the tackle and style. I feel that most American fly fishermen would like to fish finer or with dry fly only, but that on all-systems rivers, they must compete with the live bait or hardware fisherman, and so resort to large bucktails. One rarely sees good, healthy hatches on these rivers and even when they do occur, the fish do not seem to feed on the insects.

After college, I never moved far from the midwestern metropolitan areas of Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago, and for a time was limited to opening days and weekends on the Au Sauble, Pere Marquette, Little Manistee, the Boardman and other rivers in Michigan. With fly only, either bucktail or wet fly, I was catching my fair shre of the regular sized fish in these rivers, planters or natural spawners, but rarely would put into a 20 inch fish.

Yet, big trout were in these rivers and local fly fishers caught them regularly. Their secret was night fishing with big, non'descript hair and feather flies, dry or wet. Fred Koernke, was one of these local fishermen. He lived in Lovells, Michigan, on the north branch of the Au Sauble. He, too, was from Cleveland, but gave up the city life to spend more time on a trout stream. He and his wife operated "the Pines" restaurant, and every evening after closing, Fred was on one of the branches of the Au Sauble or some of the smaller creeks not too far from home. He rarely fished during the day time.

The restaurant was a kind of meeting place for many locals of the area. Fred sold flies, rods and reels. Two six pound nocturnal browns were mounted on the wall. I would guess he caught several fish of that size every fishing season.

I fished the north branch quite a lot because it had no canoe traffic on it and because it was fly only. I ate every meal I possibly could in his restaurant and would often drive 40 miles out of my way, hoping he would invite me with him on one of his evening's sojurns. For a while I felt a non-resident like myself might get an invitation to the white house easier than being invited to one of Fred's hotspots, but he finally did offer and I gladly accepted.

We left the restaurant about 9 p.m. and drove for about 1/2 hour in a downstream direction. At the end of a long pole fence, he stopped and turned intl a small rutted road. We parked and walke about aqquarter of a mile towards the river. There was still enough daylight left to see our way over the rotted tree stumps and tall spreading ferns. The river below was quite fast and its sound came to you before you could see it. We clambered down the steep bank and sat on a felled trunk of a large tree. Now, we waited. We were waiting, Fred said, to hear the first sounds of the whip-poor-will. He kept looking up into the waning sky for the first signs of the "Caddis" hatch. Misnamed in Michigan, the "Caddis" hatch is really the hatch of the large, burrowing May fly. These flies will have a wing span of about two inches. The nymphs of the species are called wigglers and are large enough to be impaled on a hook as live bait. No other hatch in Michigan causes so much excitment amoung fly fishermen. Every trout in the river will gorge themselves on these fliers, and it is during this time that fish of over 5 and 6 pounds are taken. The fly rarey by comes

off before dark.

The light was fading fast now, and the whip-poor-wills were answering themselves up and down the river. Then, in the remaining lifght of the sky, through the trees, we saw the first "caddis" flies winging their way up stream. Fred said it was time go get in. He put me in just a few feet down from the tree trunk and he went down stream some 50 yards.

It was pitch black from the surface of the river to the tops of the trees, but you could hear the trout sucking in the "caddis" here and there. How accutely my hearing had become! Robbed of sight, I was listening with an inner ear. I started casting to the sounds, having made sure I was far enough in the river to clear the bank cast. Immediately, I had a strike, the sound from the rise to the artificial louder and more vociferous than the regular suckings of the spent naturals. I landed the fish about 10 inches, and started in again. I was telling myself where were the 7 and 8 inches I normally caught in water like this during the daylight hours, when I heard quite a large commotion in the vicinty of my fly and set the hook again. I had a good fish on this time, but the line went slack.

I brought the line in to check the fly and turned on my flyshlight. The fly was gone . I shined the light onto the water and there were no more "caddis". Now, I could see Fred's light moving up and down on the bank and I got out to join him. He didn't do much better than I did and we walked back silently dodging the rotted tree stumps and brushing the tall ferns with our thighs.

The experience is typical of trying to fish the "caddis hatch in Michigan. The non-resident angler, limited to a weekend or a couple of days now and then, doesn't stand a chance of being there when the flies are really on. It is a hit and miss proposition, like much other daylight dry fly fishing, and if he cannot be there every day or every evening for a period of two or three weeks, the dry fly only angler will find only few moments in his fishing lifetime when all the conditions are ideal enough to produce hatches for the floating fly.

This is why the "locals" do so well, and there is no cometing with them.

I have tried other night fishing on the Au Sauble, the Perpr Marquette and other rivers in Michigan. And I have cought fish over the 20 inch mark, not many, but on theze waters, this is the only way to get big fish. But there is so much for the sight to enjoy when fishing in daylight, that much of what I fish for seems to be gone, once the whipppoor-wills begin their answering service.

Chapter III

It was on the same water, the north branch of the Au Sauble, that I first tried Young's partridge spiders. I started fishing the fly the same way I fished winged wets and bucktails. In slower water, I would jerk the fly in its down stream course, and in faster water, I would let it drift freely. I alsways threw a fairly tight line so that I could feel the strike even when I couldn't see the fly or the swirl of the fish. The fly performed well from the start, but gradually I noticed an increase in the amount of action when the fly was drifting freely in any kind of water. The longer the natural, free running drift, the better the results.

With a tight line, the fly would run down without drag for a short time, then start to cross over to my side as the line bellied in the current. I did not like that part of the cast and was trying to change it. I wanted longer, natural drifts and started throwing a slick line with "S's" in the cast, much like I did for the Test trout with the dry fly. This kep the fly "over there" longer in the eddies or pockets or flats I red as good holding water.

Instead of casting straight across, I started casting up a little, moving the rod tip toward my bank to keep the line tight to signal the strike, then moving the rod tip toward the other bank as the line and the fly passed my level in their down stream phase of the trip. To lengthen the amount of free drift, when the cast was sepnt, I would let out line, the amount governed by the speed of the water.

Of the three colors, the green, yellow and orange, I and the fish were hurting for the orange. If I fished strange water anywhere, I always started out with this color, and would try the others if it didn't work after a half hours' fishing. I believe, however, that the three colors pretty well represent almost all the colors of insect life, nymph or emerging fly, one might find on any stream in the country.

I was so enamored of these partridge hackle flies, that gradually my fly box contained nothing but them in three colors and in sizes from 8 to 14. My own tyings of them became even more slender and sparse than the first ones I bought from Young.

I gave up fishing all streamers or bucktails in daylight hours and rarely tied and used any more wet flies with any wings on them whatsoever.

My confidence in the soft hackled fly gained each time I went out. I could follow other fly fishermen down the river who would fish a nice stretch of water without a single rise, and take fish right at their backs. When they asked what I used, I would tell them and they would act puzzled. They never heard of the fly. Then I would give them a couple and invariably they would say "is that all there's to them?"

I would fish the fly any time of day on any water, and was surprised to see it take trout even during a hatch. Normally, the arrival of a hatch usually means the end to wet fly or nymph fishing. Not so with these soft hackels. Without knowing what fly was on the water, I would use the yellow bodies fly when the natural insect was very light or yellow, the orange bodied fly when the natural was reddish or brown, and the green bodied one when the natural

was blue or dun or any other dark shade.

With a floating line, the fly was just below the surface of the water. I could see the rise in the form of a swirl or bulge in the water, but I really didn't have to see it, because I could feel it as well. This was what I really liked about the soft hackled system.

The classic upstream nymph fishing method requires keen eyesight watching for a'brown shadow" , or "wink", a bulge, a tightening of the line or leader or some other mysterious, intuitive message. But, I believe a blind man could successfullyhfish my flies in the manner described.

So, after 20 years of fly fishing, wet fly and dry, upstream and down, American and England, I had come back to a simple, two-part fly, body and game bird hackles, and a fishing system that was easy and productive, satisfying and esthetic.

During the next five years, however, it was to get even better. Here's why. I discovered other soft hackled flies besides those mad3with partridge feathers. I started fishing western streams with fast, shallow riffles, even more suitable to the soft hackled fly; I began to fish for steelhead" and I read Jock Scott's book, "Greased Line Fishing for Salmon".

Chapter IV

In 1968, my work as a free lance industrial photographer took me to western Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. I had never seen or fished the famous rivers in those states before: the Wind, Madison, Yellowstone, Rock Creek Gallatin, Snake and others. The fisherman, on first seeing these rivers is awed by their size and speed, the clarity of the water, the openess of the valleys through which the streams run and the breathtaking beauty of the mountains all around.

Most of these rivers can be described as long riffles from source to end. The rivers run "flat", just barely skimming th earth's surface, except for canyons where fishing is almost impossible. There is much free or open water to fish. There is a great deal of fly only water, and there are relatively few fishermen. In addition, the average trout will be 6 or 7 inches longer than the average from the midwest or east, and a four pound brown or rainbow barely raises an eyebrow.

I have been lucky enough, since 1968, to find work in those states and great fishing pleasure, on many streams at least twice every year. On these trips, I have fished the soft hackled fly almost exclusively, but I must admit trying out such local "western" tyings as the Bitch Creek, Montana Nymph and wooly worms. These are big, ugly, weighted flies, most of which represent the prevalent stone fly nymph or even the helgramite. Casting them is difficult and unenjoyable. Most fishermen there cast them upstream, roll them

down on the bottom like a worm and set the hook when the line stops moving in the current. This is not my preferred way of fishing the fly, so I stuck with the soft hackles and imprved the method of fishing them after I read "Greased Line Fishing for Salmon".

In this book, first published in 1935 and just recently re-issued, Jock Scott, the author, tells how A.H.E. Wood landed 3,490 salmon from 1913 to 1934 on a Scottish river using small, slimly dressed flies and a greased, floating line.

Mr. Wood's method of "mending" the line to increase the natural float or drift of the fly was exactly what I was looking for to eliminate drag or bellying of the line, and still permit me to fish downstream and to feel the rise without the necessity of seeing it.

With this method, the fisherman can fish the fly in a natural manner, the fly traveling very near the surface and presenting a side view of itself to the fish.

With the soft hackled fly, the method is deadly for trout.

So what is mending? It is the lifting or raising of the troublesome, or dragging part of the line and turning it upstream or down, without really moving the fly. To accomplish the upstream or downstream mend, you must use a floating line. You must learn to throwna slack line. I do this by throwing the line high, waiting until it is fully extended, then drawing back on it while it is still suspended, so that it falls to the water in loose "s" curves. The beginning fly fisherman, who hasen't yet learned how to throw a tight, straight line, can learn to mend immediately.

Most small rivers will require an upstream mend because there is usually more fast water between the fisherman and the fly. But on large rivers, the angler may find much slow water between him and the fly, and this situation requires a downstream mend.

If the water is all in a "sheet", that is the same velocity from bank to bank, then mending is not required.

Mending the line either up or down is like turing the pages of a precious book. From the bottom. The pages should not be corkscrewed, but rather turned all at once, stiff and lifted over. The rod should be held high, but parallel to the water. There is no need to mend too much line. In most cases, a ten or fifteen foot mend is all that is required. With a high, floating line, this will not be too difficult.

As the line continues downstream, the angler muck keep on mending, as long as drag occurs, until the cast is fished out. To help in the process, lead the line with the rod in its downstream journey and hold it high so that the mend will come easy.

With the soft hackled fly and the mending method, hooking the fish is almost automatic. First, the rise, or swirl, or splash or bulge will occur where the fly is and the action will be relayed to the angler. He will know what to do after this.

It has always seemed to me that dry fly fishing is considered

the higher art of trout fishing and wet fly the lower, because there seems to be more to do about the dry fly. In dry fly fishing, there is the floating line and the natural float. There is the finer leader, the greater stalking, the better knowledge of the fly on the water and the exact imitation. More art and more science, hence greater pleasure? Maybe? But, the soft hackled fly fished with a floating line, and mended upstream and down, with fine terminal tackle gives the most sophisticated dry fly fisherman plenty to do in the arts and science departments, and a lot more to feel in the fun department.

There is plenty of proof. The soft hackled fly tempts the trout a great deal more of the time. It tempts bigger trout. And it rouses the rapacity of the most lethargic trout to cause him to charge from a great distance or depth. That's why the take when fishing these flies is powerful and extremely physical.

In dry fly fishing, the trout with no real urgency reaches for the fly, if it is straight over his head, but it is the fisherman who sets the hook into the fish, and the battle between fish and fisherman ensues. With the soft hackled fly, the trout throws caution to the wind, because he's not afraid to move under the water and speeds to the fly with urgency, setting it into itself. The contact is more violent and forceful, because it was the trout's decision and not the fisherman's.

Upstream fishing with a weighted or unweighted nymph can be compared in the same way. The fisherman watches for the slightest hesitancy of the line or leader, or hint in the water, and tightens the line to set the

hook, feeling nothing until that has been accomplished.

Chapter V

What is it about the soft hackled fly that has led a fisherman like myself to give up entirely the use of all other sunk flies in fishing for trout. What special appeal does it have? What does it represent or imitate, if anything, at all. What makes it so universal that sometimes if fishes just as well during a hatch, as without one; and fishes well on most trout streams of the country.

Earlier British writers, by the score, (as the reader will see in the next chapter) praised the soft hackles. They were included in many lists of killing flies as general flies, meaning that they had no counterparts in insect life. It was a good fly, they said, but they didn't know why.

Even G.E.M. Skues, who led the revolt against the use of dry fly only on southern British chalk streams, apparently did not know why. In his "Way of a Trout with a Fly", first published in 1921, he said, "Fished directly upstream, a wet fly (whether winged or not), which is hackled with a stiff cock's hackle, has thrown away one of its chief advantages, the mobility of the hackle. In fact, one might be inclined to think that, if a hackle were not needed to break the fall or to suggest life, such a fly might best be dressed wtthout a hackle. A hen's hackle, or a small bird's hackle, would respond to every movement of the current, and would thus suggest an appearance of life in action, which is very fascinating. The Yorkshire hackles and Stewart's famous trio of 'spiders,' so called, are based on this theory. What these flies really represent cannot always be certainly predicated.

Doubtless the hackles in some cases suggest the wings and legs of hatched-out insects, drowning or drowned and tumbled by the current, and in others they suggest some nondescript, struggling subaqueous creature. In either case the mobility suggests life."

"Life" of what order or class of insects...emphemera (mayfly) or trichoptera (caddis)?

My answer to this question when I was working on this part of the book in 1972, was the ephemera.

I was convinced the soft hackled fly suggested any of the four types of nymphs or their duns of the mayfly family...the order of insects generally considered to be of the most interest to fly fishermen. In the order there are: 1. flat or clinging nymphs such as the March Brown; 2. swimming nymphs such as the pale evening dun; 3. crwling nymphs such as the blue-winged olive; and 4. burrowing nymphs such as the wiggler of the large Michigan May fly.

The various nymphs prefer different kinds of bottoms from mud to sand to stone to large flat rocks, and bottoms with weeds and without. The shapes of the nymphs differe considerably; some long and slender, some short and fat and some wide and flattened. Some rivers can actually produce all four kinds in a very few feet, and it has been observed by many fishing writers that two and three or more different kinds of nymphs can be hatching from the same water simultaneously.

This hatching occurs, entomologists say, when the nymphs swallows

water or air; or both to expand its muscles and split the outer skin along the top of the thorax. This can happen on the surface or underneath, in which case the new dun elevates to the surface in some sort of gas balloon which keeps him dry. At this point, we have an unwet or dry dun actually submerged! I believed this was the reason why the sunk soft hackled fly was taken so well during a hatch.

All of the above, as I said, was written during the latter months of 1972. Since that time, however, I have read, "Nymphs" by Ernest Schwiebert, published in 1973.

Leafing through the pages of this book and admiring the beautiful, color plates of various nymphs, enlarged four times, I came across the plate of caddis pupae. I was struck by what I saw...the green, gold, yellow, brown and orange of the slender bodies; the small drooping wings; and the long floppy, hanging legs extending beyond the ends of the bodies! "These are soft hackles", I thought...the closest thing I ever saw in print of a living nymph, to the soft hackle flies I had been using so well for so long.

Hungrily, I read through the three chapters on the caddis and mirerocaddis. Schwiebert said there were hundreds of species of the insects and that they were to be found just about anywhere. He believed them to be the "most numerous of the aquatic insects extant in American trout water, making their availability factor relatively high".

In this observation, Schwiebert agreed with J. R. Harris, "An Angler's Entomology", first published in England in 1952, who said, "Caddis-Flies, Sedge-flies, or as they are often called in Ireland, Rails, form numerically the largest of the three main groups of water flies. They belong to the order Trichoptera.

"...Caddis-flies differewidely in their development from both stone flies and ephemeroptans in one obvious respect. The two latter orders pass from the egg to a larval stage and then to a winged stage. But caddis-flies pass from the egg to the larval and then through a pupal stage before they assume a winged form."

Not only were there more of them, (caddis flies), Schwiebert said, but that they were more hardy than the mayfly class and less susceptible to pollution and pesticides. He also hinted that the caddis s is better fished as a shallow sunk fly than as a dry, because the dry was difficult to imitate as a fluttering insect on or above the water and that it was easier to imitate the swimming pupae, which were more easily caught by the trout.

Almost all of the artificial caddis pupae in his chapters are tied with partridge, grouse and similar bird, soft hackles. And Mr. Schwiebert pays respect to the earlier British, and British North Country angling writers who wrote about them more than 100 years ago.

After seeing his paintings of the caddis pupae and reading his clear and sane sentences about them, I knew I had to ammend my own

thinking about what the soft hackle flies do, in fact, imitate, and thank him for being "crazy" enough to write a book like that.

Ephemera or Trichoptera? Or both?

With so many different may fly nymphs and their duns; and now with so angry different caddis pupae in the water at the same time, it seems impossible to imitate any specific one when fishing the sunk fly. This is why I have never used or belived in the hard bodied nymphs, the flattened imitations or rubber molded ones. Any attempt to imitate any specific nymph or dun, would seem to limit the appeal to the trout by the exact imitation. This is the basic difference between dry fly fishing and sunk fly fishing. It is a very different kind of ball game. Fishing on top, the angler wants the exact imitation because he can see what fly is up. Fishing under the surface, the angler wants the barest resemblance to the dozens of different kinds of nymphs or pupae, because he can never see or know what is really happening down there.

Any sunk fly, to be good, must transform itself in the water into something alive, something suggestive and moving, something that looks good to eat. Such a fly looks different in the water than it does out of it. The best way to demonstrate this is to look at the soft hackled fly dry, then wet it and take another look.

The transformation is amazing!

The soft partridge or snipe or starling feather with its tapered barbules, mold themselves agains the body with the tips away and toward the tail of the fly. There is a natural lump or thorax created at the front

of the fly, by reason of the tapering of the barbules, the thicker and closer to the stem of the feather than at the tips.

Floating naturally down stream, with no movement from the fisherman, these barbules close in and out, squirm against the body of the fly, and react in a lifelike way to every little kind of pressure.

Without wings, the fly has no top or bottom, and will look the same to the fish no matter what side is up. Frequently, a trout caught on the fly will have the hook in his top lip with the bend point up instead of down.

The soft hackled fly also can be described as not anymph still, not a dun yet; not a pupae still, not an adult caddis yet. The hackle barbules are really too long and too soft and too many to represent the six legs of the nymph. The hackle barbule could suggest dun wings just as they are cracking open during emergence. On the caddis pupae, they definitely could suggest the longer legs, and drooping wings. They might even suggest the mature fly, fluttering on top the surface.

On any soft hackled fly, it is obvious, however, that the hackle is everything. It must do all the work to make the fly so successful. To prove or disprove this, some day, I'm going to fish the fly with hackle only. The reader will have to wait to hear the results of this experiment.

Chapter VI

One gets a particular delight in finding the mention of his peculiar way of fishing; his favorite fly or group of flies; his most beloved river; or anything about the subject of fly fishing akin to him; in angling literature. The more often one sees the reference, the more he knows he is on the right track himself. He can say, "see, so and so has said it and it must be right". The older the literary reference, the more excited and elated is the beholder. The more revered or popular or championed is the writer, the more convinced is the reader. It is the search for the agreement that causes this and it is true not only in fishing, but in other sports, as well.

When I first started fishing the soft hackled fly, I didn't know what deep and oppulent water I was wading in. First, I thought Young invented the fly, as he, was accredited with the invention of the Strawman nymph and the midge rod. Dumb me! No one invents flies or styles, they are evolved, developed, borrowed, adopted, adapted or stolen. I know that now, because from the earliest known work on angling to some of the most recent there is frequent mention, yes, even whole books, of an on the soft hackle.

In fact, a search reveals so much mention and attention to it, that I have been puzzled why this small group of flies hasn't prospered more in American than I have been able to find knowledge of, specially since we are a country of predominant wet fly fishers.

Besides the mention found in "Nymphs", by Ernest Schwiebert, already written about in the last chapter, the other newest reference is found in "Quill Gordon", by John McDonald, 1972. It is about the oldest reference found in, "The Treatise of Fishing with an Angle", Dame Juliana Berners, 1496. Through some of the most assiduous angling research I have ever encountered, McDonald takes apart the 12 flies described in the Treatise, unscrambles the middle English jargon of the period and recreates the flies so that they can then be painted and reproduced in this beautiful book.

He says, "In the present stage of knowledge, secure conclusions cannot be made on several critical points. In instances where it is impossible to render a logically strong judgement between choices, we present our first choice as the most likely, and alternatives as possible but less likely. The alternatives are offered in the illustrations and the table of our dressings.

"Now look at the flies and our argument for the dressing of each."

Using the language of the treatise, he describes the first fly in the list, "The donne flye the body of the donne wool and the wingis of the pertryche (partridge) italics mine." He asks the first question; does "dun" imply an insect or color or material? He thinks it a color. He asks the second question; was the partridge a wing or body feather? He thinks it a wing feather. He asks the third question; was the feather hackled round the hook or tied upright? He thinks it unhackled.

Addition A ---1---

John Waller Hills, "A History of Fly Fishing for Trout", first published in 1921, however, thought the Donne Fly to be exactly the same as the Partridge and orange as it is dressed today in England, as it was dressed by Paul Young in Michigan and as it is dressed in this book. Hills thought the fly to be an imitation of the February Red, a stonefly? He says, in modernized spelling, "February Red. This is the Treatise's 'dun fly, the body of dun wool and the wings of the partridge.' That is the dressing in 1496. It is the same today. The Partridge and Orange, dressed with a partridge hackle and a body of orange silk, is the imitation most commonly used between the Tweed and the Trent and kills hundreds of trout every year. So that fly has not changed at all in four centuries and a quarter. There have of course been innumerable dressings during the period, and the fly has been given various names. Markham called it the Lesser Dun Fly, dressed with dun wool and partridge hackle; and Cotton the Red Brown, dressed with a body of red brown dog's fur and wings of light mallard. Chetham, not in his book but in the remarkable list of flies in the appendix, calls it the Prime Dun, with a body of fox cub's down spun on ash-coloured silk and wings from a starling's quill feather. Bowlker called it the Red Fly, and dressed it with a red squirrel's fur body, a red hackle and dark mallard wings: Aldam exactly like the Treatise, mahogany silk and partridge hackle. And so on

to modern times, when it is dressed with a body of orange silk and hackled either with partridge, grouse, or woodcock, according to the fancy of the writer. It is the same fly throughout. There can be no doubt about the identification. It is the first fly given in the list in the Treatise and it is the first fly which greets the fisherman when the inhospitable winter is over. The earliest French list also gives a fly not dissimilar for the month of April: body of red silk, head green, and wings from a red hen."

In the same chapter of this book, Hills divided the work of all fly tiers and fly fishing writers into three groups: "fancy flies", "general flies", and "actual copy". He says, "Of course these three schools merge into each other. A fly can be more or less general, or it can be on the borderland of fancy and general, or of general and individual. Take the Partridge and Orange as an example. It is fished in the north all the year round, and may be called a fancy fly. But it is possibly the best imitation of the February Red, and when so used it is specific. And besides the February Red it also kills as an imitation of the nymph of the Blue Winged Olive, and as such is general."

Describing further the characteristics of the "fancy flies", Hills says, "They have many redoubtable advocates, drawn in modern times cheifly from Scotland. Stewart pinned his faith to his three famous hackles, his black, red and dun spider. No doubt each of those could with a little laxity, be identified with a specific insect; but he did not set out

to imitate such, and chose his flies with an eye rather to weather and water. This, in fact, is the feature which distinguishes this school: more attention is paid to light, to the clearness of the water, and to the sky, than to the insect. Stewart has many followers to this day."

His alternative two shows a fly very similar to the partridge hackled flies in this work, and this makes me feel good. But, because of my interest in the soft hackle, I should disagree with him and think it should be first choice. But I don't.

Here's why. When I saw the first trout flies in Glen Buckel's parber=shop window and later when I tried to tie the same flies, I thought the hackle barbules were tied in under and around the hook individually or in small groups of individual barbules. Needless to say, it was impossible to make them stand straight out like they did on Glen's flies. I had read no books and seen no instructions, so I didn't know the barbules splayed out as the hackle was wound around the shank of the hook. One day soon after, Glen was showing me some very nice hackles and wound one around his finger. It was like magic, the light went on as the separate barbules spread round and round his finger."

So it is possible, Berners was as dumb as I was and knew not this amazing characteristic of a simple hackle. (A)

It is quite possible the first soft hackled fly was used in America around 1832, not by an American, but by an Englishman. In "The Angler's Souvenir", P. Fisher, Esq., London, 1835, the author and two fishing pals are imbibing ale, sherry and port at the Rye-House in London.

"Simpson----'have you ever seen any American books on Angling, Fisher'?

"Fisher----'No, I do not think there are any published. Brother

Johathon * is not yet sufficiently civilised to produce anything original on the art. There is good trout fishing in America, and the streams which are all free, are much less fished than in our Island, "from the small number of gentlemen", as an American writer says, "who are leisure to give their time to it".

Later, "Simpson---'A gentleman of the name of Vigne, a member of Lincoln's Inn*, took a trip to America about three years ago, during the long vacation, and enjoyed a few days' fly-fishing in Pennsylvania. He had some fair sport in the Juniat, one of the tributaries of the Susquehannah. The trout were from halp a pound to three pounds in weight; and in a little more than two hours' fishing he caught about six dozen. He mentions the red-hackle as the best fly that an angler can throw in Spring Creek.

"Fisher---'The red-hackle is deadly on all waters, though not at all times. It is one of my three types for the colour of flies. The red, black and grouse hackle are with ;me standards'".

The red hackle as dressed then must have been a red cock's hackle with an orange silk body. It could have been the partridge and orange because the fly has been known by many other names in the past. But dare I assume, since the grouse hackle was standard with one of these gentlemen, it might not have been tried by the one fortunate enough to visit America during that time.

* Brother Jonathon. A reference to brothers of the angling clan, not related by kinship or blood.

* Lincoln"s Inn. An inn in the small town of Lincoln, England.

One book devoted almost exclusively to just three soft hackled flies or "spiders", as the author called them, was "The Practical Angler", W. C. Stewart, first published in 1857. The book has a monumental lasting record in fly fishing literature for besides the first publication, it has been re-issued 19 times up until 1961. I think it is still in print at the present time. I don't think it is much read in America, although the spiders are described in "The Fly and the Fish", John Atherton, 1951, and "The Art of Tying the Wet Fly", James E. Eisenring and Vernon S. Hidy, 1941.

Stewart's three spiders are practically hackle only flies. The 1st is the black spider, a little brown tying silk on the shank and a small starling feather wound at the head and down slightly toward the bend. The second is the red spider, a little yellow silk on the shank and a small feather taken from the outside of the wing of the landrail. The third is the Dun spider, with no mention of the tying sil, or body, but listing a soft dun or ash colored feather taken from the outside of the wing of the dotteral. A small feather can be substituted from the inside of the wing of the starling.

(Many other writers have noticed the lack of the mention of a body material or color on the Dun spider. They infer the silk was left out. I believe Stewart never intended this fly to have any body at all, but to become the first hackle only fly in history.)

Stewart loved and praised similar hackles; mavis, grey plover, golden plover, partridge and grouse. He said, "Their superiority consists

in their much greater resemblance to the legs of an insect, and their extreme softness. So soft are they, that when a spider is made of one of them and placed in the water, the least motion will agitate and impart a singularly lifelike appearance to it, whereas it would have no effect upon a cock's hackle."

Stewart knew the value of the natural float and was one of the first fishing writer s to advocate fly fishing upstream. He was adamant about this as he was about his opinion of Francis Francis, a fine and popular British writer of the time, who intimated Scotch trout and Scotch fishermen were not so smart as the British. Stewart, the proud Scot, retorts in the book, "If Mr. Francis' views as to an exact imitation being necessary in English streams be correct, which we very much doubt, he will require to find some other reason for its being unneccessary in Scotland than this. In comparing the severity of the fishing in Scotch and English streams, it must be borne in mind that the former are, as a rule, open to the public, and that the latter, as a rule, are preserved, and fished only by a favoured few.

"We repudiate with scorn the bare idea that it requires less skill to catch a Scotch trout than an English one, or that the former in any way receives an inferior education as regards flies, etc., to his English Brother."

If Francis and Steard did not agree on the relative sophistry of the British trout and fishermen and Scottish trout and fishermen, they did agree

on the direction to take once they were in the stream. And Francis pays compliment to Stewart by including his spiders in the section, General Flies, in his own book, "A Book on Angling", 1867.

Francis also included the grouse hackle and partridge hackle in his general flies and said, "The last two flies will fill a basket on any mountain beck or trout burn in heather districts."

The older literary work most akin to this present one has to be T. E. Pritt's, "Yorkshire Trout Flies", 1885. In it, he listed 62 patterns of wet flies, most of them without wings and with hackles from the wings and bodies of such birds as golden plovers, dotterel, starling, woodcock, grouse, water hen, snipe, partridge, pheasants and jackdaws.

His fly, No. 28, had a body of yellow silk and a light feather from the back of a partridge for a hackle. His description of the fly reads, "a good killer almost any time during April". No. 32 is theorange partridge, the same as No. 28 but with an orange silk body. "These are practically the same flies and are very excellent killers."

Most of the flies in this book are included in Pritt's book except the thorax ones including the Tups which are described ina later chapter.

In another later and not so popular book, "An Angler's Basket", 1896, Pritt gives his reason for the wingless fly, "A hackled fly, as we dress it in the north, makes no attempt to imitate the shape of the winged insect; but if you will take a living fly and dip it under water you will find that, in all but the very strongly-winged flies, the shape goes irrevocably, though the color and size remain, and it is to these two points that the fly dresser's

attention should be direct in dressing flies for all rapid streams."

So it appears, the soft hackles were used extensively in Scotland and the border waters of the British Isles. "The stamp of origin is there, clearly recognizable to any student of trout flies," says W. H. Lawrie, "Scottish Trout Flies", 1966. "Deliberate restraint in the use of materials, the short, slender bodies, sparse hackle, spare wings, and a preference for the sober hues of mature, all accord with a national tradition in respect of frugality and modesty.

"...Tradionally, the trout fisher north of the bodder has always been concerned with the wet fly...the aim then was to simulate living insects---hatching flies, drowning flies, nymphs and larvae---in form, colour and size, and to do so in such a way that the popresentations would be readily submersible and swim well in the tumbling waters of fast-flowing rivers. It is this quality of submersibility which has governed trout-fly designs in Scotland as far back as can be traced."

Later, "The popular explanation offered to account for the hackled fly's comparative success in hard-fished waters is generally that it is much more lightly dressed than a winged pattern, and that, in consequence, trout are less likely to detect it artificiality".

If I have established origin, I should add that the early fishing Scots and Yorkshiremen were not too well healed gentlemen. According to Lawrie, they had to work for a living, and fish after the working was done. They observed the Sabbath, a custom still practiced on much Scottish water. We all know what "Scotch" means when not applied to that famous

beverage, so it seems natural these country fellows would use flies which were simple and cheap to make, of which the soft hackles are. I imagine most of the "locals" shot their own partridge and grouse and woodcock. Wings on flies have always been tricky to fly tiers, and if these fishing gentlemen thought the flies would catch fish without them, they would just as soon leave them off.

But what of the water where these flies prevailed and are still used today. Here is one description from the Lonsdale Libary, Volum II, "Trout Fishing From All Angles", Eric Tavener, 1933. "The typical hill-stream is made up of fast and broken water relieved by stretches where the current flows less rapidly and by smooth glides. Such are to found in Yorkshire, Devonshire, Wales, Scotland and elsewhere. The character of the rivers is for the most part rocky, the upper parts are boulder-strewn and the pace is often too impid to allow the hatching duns time to mature for flight before they are drowned in the rought water of the stickles. Although insects, water-prod and wind-borne, are plentiful, the duns which are able to ride out the rough water are not very numerous nor are the opportunities of using the dry fly."

During the 19th century, before the concrete codification of the dry fly, the soft hackled fly was not only popular in Scotland and border country, but also very much used all over England. A reference work by Lawrie, "English Trout Flies," 1967, shows that from more than 20 fly fishing authors, 16 of them included the grouse hackle and partridge hackle in their lists of the most killing patterns. One author like the fly so well, he tied it with 11 different colored bodies.

Why was the soft hackled fly so popular in England during the 19th century and why did the style lose favor in the current century? At that time, we here in America whre imitating British fishing styles and importing British flies and tackle, so why didn't the soft hackled fly make it to these shores in more numbers that it did?

The answer may be found in the writing of F. M. Halford. In two books, "Floating Flies and How to Dress Them", and "Dry-Fly Fisfhing in Theory and Practice", 1886 and 1889, Halford laid down the cornerstone of the exact imitation school of dry fly fishing.

About the dry fly and everything Halford stood for, J. W. Hills, "A Summer on the Test", 1924, said, "Wherever it (the dry fly) was introduced, it conquered. The sunk fly was swept away, beaten and ridiculed.

"...everyone thought it would rule for ever. Its advantages are so obvious. Its imaginative appeal is so powerful."

Under Halford's code, the fly fisherman cast only to a rising fish with a fly that was supposed to be the exact imitation, in color, size and form, of the natural insect the trout had just taken, [redacted] And the imitation had to float high and dry, with wings cocked, and to float without drag. The fly patterns were beautiful with rare, glossy cock hackles in all shades of dun, from light honey to dark blue andalusian and with bodies made up mostly of stripped quills or sil floss. There was considerable dyeing, too of hackles, wings and body materials in no less than 9 special dyes, in the

attempt to match the subtle hues of the chalk stream ephemera.

Halford's system and philosophy, although developed for the gin clear, slow gliding waters of the south of England, spread to the more turbulent and rambling rivers of the north and Scotland. Then, they took a longer, western trip to the United States. One of the first fly fishermen here to respond to the new wave was Theodore Gordon, later called, "The Halford of the U.S.A". In 1890. after writing to Halford, Grodon received a sampling of the exact imitation dry flies.

He found out they were not suited to our eastern trout streams; first in their inability to ride the rougher waters and second; because they imitated no real native insects.

In setting out to establish artificial flies which did imitate our own eastern water borne insects, Gordon did develop the Gordon and the Quill Gordon. But even these flies imitate not one, but a large number of flies found on the Beaverkill, the Au Sauble and Madison Rivers.

Interestingly enough, however, one can find one fly in Gordon"s final list, aptly named, "Quite Killing". The fly has no wings, just a partridge hackle wound over a light bluish dun body of fur or wool.

With Gordon, America was definitely on the dry fly bandwagon. Other fishing writers jumped on: George La Branche, "The Dry Fly and Fast Water", Emlyn M. Gill, "Practical Dry-Fly Fishing", and later Preston Jennings, Vincent C. Marinaro and Art Flick. By 1938, the soft hackled fly was almost unheard of in this country. That year,

Ray Bergman published, "Trout", an encyclppedic type of book, considered by many to be the "bible" for trout fishermen for years to come. The book contains plate after plate of heavily painted flies, all in a row, wings set so prettily on each fly. Of 385 wet flies shown and 18 or 20 odd nymphs, only one, the Grouse Spider even came close to the sober soft hackled flies of Stewart and Pritt; for Bergman's dressing called for either an orange floss or chenille body and a long crimson tail.

In addition to Schwiebert's "Nymphs", only one ~~American~~ American fishing writer has touched on the soft hackled fly in his book, "The Art of Tying the Wet Fly", James E. Leisenring, 1941. It could have been the war years which prevented the book from becoming more popular, because even though I started collecting fly fishing literature some time ago, I didn't know of the book until it was re-published in 1971.

Leisenring apparently admired the soft hackles, although some of his fly patterns do include wings. He was supposed to have a reputation for catching more and bigger fish than anyone else on the Pennsylvania Brodheads Creek and elsewhere, but from the lack of that kind of information in his bod; how he did it remained his secret.

I should also give "mending" credit to John Atherton, "The Fly and the Fish", 1951. Probably because Atherton was an avid salmon fisherman (he died on the banks of one of the great Maritime rivers), he had heard or read of greased line fishing and possibly even used the method for salmon and as he says in wet fly fishing for trout.

"The usual wet-fly technique is pretty much a cut-and-dried

a

affair. The angler casts his fly across, or across and downstream, and lets it swing around in the current, sometimes with movement imparted, sometimes 'dead'. In fishing with a tight line in this manner, the fly is apt to move too rapidly. For usually, after the cast is made, the pull of the current on the line and leader causes a downstream belly in the line. Then the fly is pulled downstream and whipped around in a manner resembling scarcely at all the action of underwater insect life.

"...To bring the fly slowly to the fish is a different matter entirely and requires a different method. If the angler can control the speed of his fly by the cast and the subsequent manipulation of rod and line, he has already made possible a more lifelike presentation. Fishing in the manner of greased-line salmon fishing, the line is cast across current or up and across, with enough slack to allow a free drift for some distance. This method has been described often but the reasons for its effectiveness have seldom been mentioned. It is not only the natural movement of the fly but the view of the fly by the fish that is greatly responsible for its success. For the fly is more apt to drift sideways in the current and the trout sees it from the side, where is is not only more noticeable but more attractive."

Just as Halford's dry-fly-only doctrine marched north and to America, the appeal and efficiency of the soft hackle moved south right into the bastion of the dry fly cult. Disgruntled angler-writers like Skues and John Waller Hills, both famous chalk stream men, and

early disciples of Halford, took to it with avidity once the sunken fly was no long prohibited on chalkstream waters.

Skues, in search of wet fly designs and styles, turned to a Scot, David Webster, "the Angler and the Loop Rod", 1885. These were mostly winged patterns, but Skues says, in "The way of a Trout with a Fly", "A soft-hackled fly adjusts itself easily to the action of the water, but a fly with stiff, staring, upright wings or hackles may easily cause such a distrubance in the water as to give proof of a bad entry. The lines, therefor, on which an artificial wet fly that is to be fishing against the stream in any way is built ought to be fine, like the lines of a yacht or swift boat, or high class motor, sloping backwards, so as to offer the least possible resistance to the current, and such resistance as there is should be elastic. The fly ought to be equal on both sides, so as to balance accurately and to swim smoothly, and any excess of bulk is to be deprecated." Rembamber my earlier comment on the soft hackled fly having no top or bottom!

Later, when Test anglers were permitted to fish nymphs upstream only, in certain seasons and at certain times of the day, Hills, "A Summer on the Test", 1946 edition, says, "One of the softest, most compressible, patterns is the partridge hackle, and, whether this be the reason or not, I consider it the best sunk fly on the Test. Its body, of silk, can be of many colours. I find the old Cumberland pattern, the orange partridge best; and next to that the red."

In a later book, "River Keeper", the story of William James Lunn, keeper of the water on the Test belonging to the Houghton Club, Hills tells of Lunn's experience with the soft hackle. "If anglers will cast their minds back they will recall that by 1917 both small spent spinners and underwater flies were well established: Mr. Skues had written Minor Tactics in 1910, and Halford had dressed spent spinners. So naturally Lunn next turned his attention to sunk patterns and over a series of years he evlolved his well-known partridge hackles. He did not invent this pattern; it is a very old north country fly and is actually mentioned in the year 1496 in the earliest list of flies in English. I do not know who brought partridge hackles to the Test. I, who had long known the partridge-and-orange on the Cumberland Eden, brought it to the Kennet in about the year 1912, but did not do much with it. It became firmly established at Stockbridge, and spread thence to many waters. It kills either floating, or awash, or sunk. However, let me go back to Lunn's share in its evolution. In 1916 he dressed the little red partridge hackle, No. 8 in the list, with a body of dark red silk, on a ooo hook; this, like the orange partridge, was a well-known pattern in common use in Yorkshire, but unknown, I believe, on the Test. This was the only partridge hackle tried for seven years; but in 1923 Lunn brought out his very good big orange partridge, No. 7, a different pattern with a different appeal. It has a body of bright orange artificial silk, ribbed with gold wire, and like all its tribe, it is hackled at the head only; tie it on a large hook, Lunn says No. 1, but I have used it up to No. 2 or 3.

It is invaluable for both trout and grayline, in all weathers and waters. I regard it as specially potent when you have risen but not pricked a fish on some imitation of the olive. But I have also know it taken by fish obviously smutting in still water on a breathless day. Those two, the little red partridge dressed very small, and the large orange dressed very big, are the best by far of all the partridges. I cannot recollect killing a fish on any intermediate size. Nor have I done much (though other anglers have) with Lunn's little yellow or little green partridge, Nos. 10 and 9 in the list, both tied on ooo hooks, also invented in 1923. Lunn considers they do well on those hot July days when trout are taking something which you cannot see.

"The partridge hackle of one kind or another is much the best under-water fly at Stockbridge, bettern than any other sunk fly or nymph. In fact, I believe it kills more than all under-water patterns put together. It has one immense advantage; ;being small and composed of a soft feather, it is easy to suck in. Lunn considers this very important. Trout, especially as the season gets on and they become fat and lazy, hardly open their mouths when taking a fly either real or unreal. They draw in a thread of water, the fly with it, expelling the water through their gills and retrining the fly. Once, watching a trout being fished for on a hot day in slow water, Lunn saw it attempt to suck in the angler's artificial, but fail to get it into its mouth as the fly did not pass its hardly ppened lips. Without moving, Lunn called out to the fisherman to put on a little red

partridge, and had the satisfaction of seeing this quietly drawn in and the trout hooked and landed. For myself I believe that far too little attention is paid to softtness of fibre and general collapsibility of a fly. When we miss or only scratch a fish on a mayfly tied with a feather with a stiff rib, this may be the cause. And certainly I hook better with the modern soft hackles than with the cock's feathers which were thought essential in the early days of the dry fly, and I fancy this difference exists even with the smallest ooo patterns."

Halford, Himself had something to say about the soft hackled fly. He was a firm believer, as has been many other fishermen before and after him, in autopsy to determin the trout's diet. In a chapter on the subject in "Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice", he says, "It has already been shown that by far the larger proportion of the contents of the stomach of a trout or grayling consists of larvae, nymphae, caddis, shrimps, &c., which are invariably in the middle and lower depths of the water, from which fact the inference must be drawn that the major part of their food is taken below the surface. At the first glance, a natural deduction from this would be, that the sunk fly would be more likely to tempt than the floating one. Very possibly many of the sparely dressed patterns used more generally in the north for wet-fly fishing are taken for some forms of larvae, or even in some cases water-beetles, and it has been confidently said by north country anglers of great experience, that an adept of their style could work sad havoc on some of the well-stocked shallows of the chalkstreams."

Chapter VII

It is very interesting to note that in, "The Fisherman's Handbook of Trout Flies", by Donald Du Bois, 1960, the soft partridge hackle is only the fifteenth most common hackle to be used on the 5939 patterns listed in that book. The grouse hackle is even lower. Both hackles are very near the bottom of the list.

The partridge hackle is called for in 82 patterns in the book, some of them including wings. The infrequency of the use of the partridge and other soft, game bird hackles, means, of course, the material is unpopular to fly tiers and to fly fishermen. I have shown, however, that before the development of the dry fly, these hackles were of the most popular on English and Scottish rivers.

The hackles are not hard to come by. Most fly tying material houses sell them, and they are very inexpensive compared to fancy rooster hackles. The amateur fly tier can almost always find a hunting friend who might supply him with these feathers from the birds shot during a hunt.

Since you will not be able to purchase freely, many of the soft hackled flies in this book, it is recommended that you tie your own. If you have never tied flies before, I urge you to start immediately. The practice is exhiliarating. It is romantic. It lifts you up when you are depressed and downhearted. It give joy and pleasure. Hospitals now know

of the theraputic value of fly tying. There is no closed season and the worse the weather outside, the better and more exciting inside.

Once you fall for it, you will go around with the picture of the hackles, silks, tinsels, furs, colored threads and finished flies in your mind and heart and you will feel good. It is one of the few good things left to do by oneslef, alone, in our present world of rush hours, deadlines, and group participation and activity.

For me, the art of tying is much like love. Frequently, when I haven't tied flies for some time, I am drawn by a tremendous urge to do it again, to return to the table; first to look at the materials, then to feel them and then to create a new fly or make one of the old familiar patterns.

I carry the art with me in a plastic sewing box during my photo assignments to St. Louis, Birmingham, Detroit, or wherever. On fishing trips, themselves, the kit is invaluable in duplicating some local pattern that's taking well, without which I might go fishless.

Anyone can do it. A couple of years ago I met a construction worker who wanted to take up fly fishing. He worked for many years as a mason and had hands like hams. He also wanted to tie his own flies, and I thought this would be my most difficult pupil. he would tear the silks and soft hackles apart before he could get them on the hook. Don't you believe it. The first evening, he was tying the simple partridge flies by himself. They looked fine and well proportioned. And they certainly would catch trout.

The equipment needs for tying soft hackles are small: a vise, scissors, an old hat pin, or new bodkin, a thread bobbin, and rubber tipped hackle pliers.

The material list includes: partridge hackles, brown and gray; grouse hackles, woodcock hackles, jackdaw neck; starling hackles and wings; snipe wings, narrow gold and silver tinsels; hooks; orange, yellow, green and puple silk floss; orange, yellow, green and red tying silk; hare's ears and mask, mole fur; peacock herl, blue dun hen hackles, head cement and liquid wax. Add pink fur or wool.

The dust cover of this book (or frontspiece) shows only 14 different soft hackled flies. These are the ones I have used, but there are many more in angling literature, or you might mix colors and materials for experimenting on your own waters.

Here are the receipies for the 14 flies. Hook sizes 10-16.

1. Partridge and orange

   body: Orange silk floss

   hackle: Brown partridge

2. Partridge and green

   body: Green silk floss

   Hackle: Gray partridge

3. Partridge and yellow

   body: Yellow silk floss

   hackle: Brown or gray partridge

4. Partridge and orange and fur thorax

body: 2/3's, orange silk floss

thorax: Black and brown hare's face

hackle: Brown partridge

5. Partridge and green and fur thorax

body: 2/3's, green silk floss

thorax: Black and brown hare's face

hackle: Gray partridge

6. Partridge and yellow and fur thorax

body: 2/3's, yellow silk floss

thorax: Light brown hare's face

hackle: Brown or gray partridge

7. Tups Indispensible

body: 2/3's, yellow silk floss

thorax: light pink

tail: four or five whisks blue dun hen

hackle: Blue dun hen (This is an often used British pattern. With a cock blue dun hackle, the fly is fished dry as a spinner. It is the only pattern in the book calling for poultry hackle. I have often thought it would be a better soft hackled fly if the hackle were dyed blue dun partridge, for more mobility and compressibility. The thorax design of this fly led me to develop my own partridge and thorax patterns, although Skues mentions having fished similar flies in "The way of the Trout wiht a Fly". The tups and the thorax patterns are obviously more meaty than the plain floss bodies, and some time will take better.

8. Iron blue dun

tail: Four or five whiskers white hen hackle

tag: Red tying silk

body: Mole's fur spun on the red tying silk

hackle: Very short jack daw

9. Snipe and purple

body: Purple silk floss

hackle: Small covert hackle from snipe wing (these are the very short feathers on the leading edge of the wings.

10. Pheasant tail

body: Longest herls of the center tail of a rooster pheasant wound on together with very thin copper wire.

hackle: Brown or gray partridge

tail: 2 or 3 whisks from the center tail feather of a rooster pheasant. (This fly is very common in England today, and when a Britisher says he is nymph fishing, he generally means he is fishing the pheasant tail only. There, however, the pattern does not use any hackle, but the thorax is built up with continued winding of the pheasant and copper wire. Some British tyers use the copper wire as the tying thread. The thin copper wire is not available from any fly tying material house I know of, but can be obtained from any small appliance repair shop.)

11. Snipe and yellow

body: Yellow silk floss

hackle: Small covert hackle from snipe wing

12. March brown spider

body: mixed hair from hares face

rib: narrow gold

hackle: Brown partridge

tying silk: orange

13. Grouse and orange

body: orange silk floss

hackle: Black and orange grouse hackle (It is very difficult to tell the difference between the grouse hackle and the woodcock hackle. They are both black and orange barred and either one could substitute for the other.

14. Starling and heri

body: Peacock heri

hackle: Small covert hackle from starling wing

The green, yellow and orange bodies are the more popular colors used in the soft hackled flies. But the patterns are listed in fly fishing literature with practically every color imaginable, as has already been pointed out. The soft hackle, itself, is the importnat part of the fly.

The bodies of these flies are very slim, the floss just barely covering the hook shank. In the smaller sizes, from 14 down, it is not necessary to use floss at all, but merely to wrap the tying silk around the shank. In all patterns, the tying silk should be the same color as that of the body, except the iron blue dun which requires the red. Fly heads

s

should be small and neat, permitting the fly quick entry into the stream.

From my experience, the best hooks for these flies are the medium to light wire sproat or limerick styles with tapered eye, short bend and small barb. Such a hook was the Allcock WS210 TDE, Best Hollow point sproat hooks, which are the ones used in this work. A few years ago, I was able to buy several hundred of these hooks, but I have not seen them available anywhere since then. I have since learned that the hooks were Allcocks second grade in that style and that they offered an even better grade! The best hooks for these flies available today come from England, and the name of the supplier is listed later.

You will have noted that there are two partridge hackle colors, the gray and the brown. When you order these from various material supply houses, you may receive them mixed or separate. The colors chosen for the patterns in this book are my own preference, but in actual use, I don't think it makes much difference, because the color differences are very slight.

For you who have not done any fly tying, I will list some reliable, quick responding businesses for tying equipment and supplies.

Buz"s, 805 W. Tulare Avenue, Visalia, California 93277

E. Hille, 815 Railway Street, P.O. Box 269, Williamsport, Pa 17701

Fireside Angler, P.O. Box 823, Melville, N. Y. 11746

Rangeley Region Sports Shop, 28 Main Street, Rangeley, Maine 04970

E. Veniard Ltd., Paramount Warehouses, 138 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, England CR4 8YG. This company sells the finest hooks available today for the flies in this book. They also handle Pearsalls Gossamer tying silks in every color imaginable, as well as matching silk flosses. It is the only company I know of to offer liquid wax. They also sell an already mixed pink fur dubbing for the Tups.

The most difficult part in tying any of these soft hackle flies is the handling or winding of the hackle itself. It is soft, small and fragile, and requires the use of rubber tipped hackle pliers. Even after making hundreds and hundreds of these flies, I still occasionally break off the hackle in the act of winding and have to start with a fresh one. In all ensuing tying instruction, winding is away from the tier. Back means toward the bend of the hook. Forward means toward the eye. The instructions will appear simple to advanced tiers and the photographs redundant. But I'm presuming some readers have never tied at all.

Step one. Mounting the tying thread. Fasten a hook in the vise and cover the point of the hook with jaws so the tying thread will not catch it. Hold the end of the thread in your left hand and the other in your right hand, at a 45° angle from bottom left to top right. (Figure A) Press the thread against the shank at the same angle and wind with your right hand back over the thread, in your left. Three or four turns should be enough to secure the thread. Cut off the short end and let the thread hang by itself and by it own weight on the bobbin.

Step two. Tying in and winding the silk floss. Use thin floss, or separate heavier floss with needle or bodkin point. The floss should be about 4 inches long. Hold the end of the floss in thumb and forefinger of left hand, and set them on top of the bend of the hook. (Figure B) Take the thread around and up through thumb and forefing, opening up the front parts of the fingers to permit the thread to penetrate between them. Now, pull the thread down on the back side of the hook over the floss and repeat the operation three or four times. (Figure C) When done properly, you will feel the tying thread moving down between your fingers. You can now remove the thumb and forefing and wind the thread forward toward the eye of the hook. Stop winding about 1/8 of an inch from the eye. (Figure D) Wind the floss toward the front of the hook, using your right hand to carry the floss over the top, and your left hand to bring it around the bottom. Catch the end of the floss at the same place alternately with your left and right hand, so as not to soil it. You should end up winding the floss in your left hand tight against the tying thread. Keep the floss taught in your left hand and wind the tying thread back toward the floss to catch it with two turns of the thread. Now change hands. Pass the floss to your right hand and the thread to your left. Change hands again. Wind the thread two or three times behind the floss and let the thread hang on its bobbin. Cut the floss flush to the hook shank by pressing scissor blades flat against the shank. Wind the thread forward leaving at least 1/16th of an inch bare.

Step three. Preparing the hackle. (Figure E) The color photo of ;the various small bird hackles shows these hackles as they are plucked from the skin with the soft down or fuzz still attached to the stem. This material must be stripped off and this can be easily done by holding the feather in the thumb and forefinger of the left hand and stripping the down with the same fingers of the right hand, first on one side and then the other. (Figure F) Now move your fingers on the feather right towards the tip of it and pull the fibres of the hackle down away from the others so they stand out perpendicular to the stem. (Figure G)

Step four. Tying in the hackle. Hold the bare stem of the hackle at a 45° angle against the side of the hook, with the natural curve of the feather towards the back. Wind the thread around the stem three ;or four times to secure it firmly, winding towards the front. (Figure H) Cut off the excess hackle stem.

Step five. Winding the hackle. Grab the tip of the hackle with the rubber tipped hackle pliers. Try to get as many of the end fibres in the jaws as you can together with the center stem. Pull ;the hackle upright with the pliers so they are perpendicular to the hook. (Figure I) This is rather delicate because the fibres may break or pull out of the jaws as you apply tension. If they pull out, grab them again with the plier jaws lower down on the stem of the hackle. Now start to wind the hackle around the hook shank. Keep the pliers even as you go around so the hackle will wind on its axis. The hackle fibres will want to stick together, so as you wind with your right hand, separate the fibres wi

with the other to spring them out. Go around one and one half times, or twice, but make sure the pliers are in a down position when you finish. (Figure J) Pull the pliers and the remainder of the hackle towards the back and wind the tying thread back through the hackle making sure to catch the stem hanging in the pliers. (Figure K) Now wind the thread forward and let it hang on its bobbin. Reach in under the hook with the scissors and cut off the hackle stem. (Figure L)

Step 6. Finishing the head. The best finish for any kind of fly tying is the whip finish. Professionals use it and so do advanced amateurs. It is neat, fast and fool proof, and doesnt require head cement. It is difficult to explain and just as hard to show in art work or photos. If you will place your fingers in the same positions as in the photos, chances are you will learn it. Pick up the thread in your left hand about 8 inches from the hook and lift the thread so it is on the same plane as the fise. (Figsre M) Keep the thread taut in your left hand throughout the remaining steps. Place the two first fingers of your right hand in back of and over the thread, with the palm down. (Figure N) Now twist the two fingers forward, spreading them apart slightly. You should have turned your hand over so now the palm is up. Now you have hal a knot between your right hand and your left. Pull on your left hand and follow the tension until the half know is pulled against the head of the hook, but keeping the right hand two fingers spread apart. (Figure P) The thread in your right hand should be laying across

the middle of the first joint of your forefinger and right in the crease of the first joint of your forefinger and right in the crease of the first joint of your second finger, and they will be behind the hook. (Figure P) Move the second finger up under the first one, keeping the thread tight over the middle of the first joint and wind the thread around the back side of the hook. As you do this, you will feel the tension shift from your forefinger to the second finger. (Figure Q) Come around until your fingers are in the same position as when you first twisted them over. Before you go around the second time, pull the second finger back away from the forefinger so you will feel the thread again right in the crease of the first joint. Go around three or four more times in the same manner and stop at the top of the last turn. Your fingers will again be behind the hook. Place the third finger of your right hand against the thread on the back side of the hook. (Figure R) Pull the thread with your left hand and you will feel the knot tighten around your first two fingers. Tilt the two fingers toward you, taking pressure off the second finger. Pull it back out of the knot and catch the loop in your thumb and forefinger. Continue to pull the thread with your left hand and guide the loop downward toward the tip of the head, keeping the third finger aginst the knot on the back. (Figure S) Now cut the thread close up under the head.

I must confess that I tied flies for many years using half hitches

to finish and that is wasn't so long ago that Les Reinke of Abercrombie Fitch in Chicago taught me the whip finish in the back room of the angling department in that store.

The foregoing steps are for any of the floss and hackle flies in the book or any others you might like to try. You might experiment with short, soft hackles you might be able to obtain from other birds in your area such as bob white or quail, waterfowl and pheasants although most of the hackles on these birds are too large for these flies. The Tups Indispensible and other flies with fur thorax call for the extra step of spinning the fur on the tying thread and winding it in before you wind on the hackle.

There are many ways to spin fur on thread, but the easiest, I think, is to do it right on the tying thread hanging on its bobbin. This would be at the end of step two, after you have wound the floss just two thrids of the way up the shank. You will need liquid wax and the hare's face.

Coat two inches of the thread with liquid wax by dipping a bodkin into the wax and applying it to the thread. Cut some fur from the hare's face using the scissor blades flat. (Figure T) Lift the scissors with the fur on the blades and dump the fur on your thigh or on the fly tying table. (Figure U) The fur should be about 1/8 of an inch across and about 3/4 of an inche long. Gingerly, lift the fur with your thumb and forefing and place it right agins the waxed tying thread. It will stick there. (Figure V) Now with your thumb and forefinger pinch the fur and tying thread together and roll them between your fingers. (Figure W) Wind the thread and fur around the hook towards the front. The fur thorax should not be

more than 1/8 of an inche wide even on a size 10 hook. (Figure X) If there is not enough fur, recoat more tying thread and add more. If there is too much, pinch the thread and fur with your thumb nail and strip it right down off the thread. Now complete the fly with the hackle and the whip finish.

Chapter VIII

The soft hackled flies are fished best in the kind of water most fly fishermen like best. It is the kind of water which has sufficient current speed to move the line rapdily down stream. It is the kind of water which will quickly whisk away a loose ify should it accidently fall into the river from your fly bos. Damn, you say, you can't reach it fast enough that the current hasn't already go it. The water speed is not that great, however, that wading downstream is difficult. Wading should be fairly easywwith sufficient pressure nudging you all the time and making it seem natural to be going that way instead of the other.

The right river for the soft hackled fly will be more rough surfaced than smooth or glass like. This means, of course, the water is running over rocks and stones, sunken trees or stumps and weed beds. It helps, too, if here and there you can see a larger outcropping either above or just below the surface.

The rough textured surface also means that where the fly is, the depth is not too great. I would not advertise the fly in more than four feet of water, the shallower the better, because the fly rarely sinks more than three or four inches.

Porductive water for the soft hackle fly is fairly straight and riffly, with long, gentle bends and flat, with little variance in depth from one side to the other. To the non-fisher, this kind of water looks too shallow. "There wouldn't bee any fish in there", they say. I find much of this kind of water ignored also by the average fly fisherman, who

seems to prefer deeper pools, the shallow water on their side and the deeper water on the other. Wading is relatively easy in this kind of situation and it is true that the fish tend to "hole up" in this kind of water. But so do the fishermen.

There are two such similar and beautiful pools or runs on the Madison, just inside the west entrance to the Park, called Barn Hole No. 1 and Barn Hole No. 2. They are very popular, because they are easily fished and they are close to West Yellowstone. Frequently, each pool might be occupied by two, three or four fishermen. However, there is a very, fast, choppy riffle just aboe No. 1 which nobody hardly ever fishes. There is a cable across this water on which Park rangers cross the river in some sort of spring releases or gravity driven chair. I start in above that cable and work down. The water here is very strong, and one can't wade it much over the knees. There is no time for mending, but you really don't need it. The water is quite broken up by medium sized boulders and its surprising how many big fish lay there.

On this stretch, I seldom fail to take a fish up to 15 inches with one of the soft hackles, preferably a Tups or one of the other thorax patterns, and I have missed rises inthere that really jar me.

One such fish, in October, 1973, I believe to have been in the 7 or 8 pound class, and in October when big browns and rainbow migrate up the Madison from Hebgen Lake, fish of that size can be found in this river. I was below the cable using the size twelve pheasant tail. I had worked the stretch down without any interest from a fish, when I had a powerful nip at the fly, but no real take. Whenver this happens, it is wise

not to move another step and not to change the casting length of the line. You may have put the fish down with the pricking or touching of the fly, but the second chance at an eager fish is worth the cast. My second cast was identical. The big fish came again and this time was hooked firmly. As with many steelhead I have caught on the fly, the big fish started diagonally down stream pulling line off the reel at incredible speed. My God! This Can't be! Not on a size 12 soft hackle. But it was all over in a flash. I reeled up looking anxiously for the broken line, leader or fly. I had the line...I had the leader and I had the fly. I was puzzled until I checked the fly; the very tip of the barb was gone, broken like a spider's single web by that big fish.

A happening like this raises interesting questions about what fish, particularly big fish, will eat or what they can see. Why will they attack such an obviously small piece of food when it would take several hundred of them to make even a small appetizer? How do they see such tiney artificials or real insects zipping by them in borken water? A. H. E. Wood said there was very little a salmon didn't see. And I'm not implying that big fish have lost their sight; as older humans lose theirs; I can only ask the questions; the answers if there are any, make the sport the more interesting and more challenging.

No 1. Barn Hole is just below the fast riffly strech I have been talking about. It is ideal for the soft hackle, but better for it during the months of September and October. On the evening of the same day I was broken

by the big fish, I landed and released two browns and a rainbow, between 18 and 20 inches, during 45 minutes of the finest and most exciting fishing I ever had in my life. It all happpended from 6:45 until 7:30. After releasing the first fish, the partridge and green soft hackle resembled hardly anything at all. It was then too dark to change. After the second fish, the floss was torn to shreds with just a couple of barbules of the partridge hackle still hanging on. After the third fish, the hook was practically bare, yet I think I could have taken another had not total darkness and nighttime cold settled on the river.

Most fishermen on the Barnhole No. 1, never fish enough of it. They start in at the the top, wade down a hundred feet or so and stop where the pool levels off into a 300 foot long broad shallow tail. Three years ago, I got my first 16 inch brown on the Madison with a soft hackle in that tail, barely over a foot deep, with half a dozen fishermen in and out of the water above watching in amazement.

The kind of water least suitable for the soft hackle is the multi-bend river with its deep, black pools, short, abrupt tails and fast lips. Pocket water like the Roaring Forks, at Aspen, even though it carries a large stock of trout, is not entirely conduscive to the soft hackle. Yet, the sister river to the Roaring Fork, the Frying Pan River, yields very well to the soft hackles. Similarly, the East River of the Gunnison responds to the soft hackle, but its more tumultuous, pockety, hard to wade cousing, Taylor Fork, givues up its trout reluctantly, to the soft feathered fly.

Many borad riffly stretches of the madison, in the Park and out

of it; the Gallatin, especially midway between West Yellowstone and Bozeman are beautiful rivers for these flies.

In Michigan, the 10 mile long, no-close season, fly-only stretch of the Pere Marquette works well all year long with these flies. Last spring, 1972, on April 10, with snow in the woods, and temperatures at or just above freezing, I took two small browns on soft hackles, while fihsing with larger flies before and after for steelhead.

There is some nice, riffly water on the Muskegon above Newaygo where good sized rainbows take the soft hackle very well. Of the Au Sauble system in Michigan, stretches of the North Brance come forth (where I first used the partridge hackle), while the South branch seems too sluggish, sandy and siltish. The main branch has much soft hackle water, especially in the lower stretches, but too much canoe traffic on a weekend to permit any fishing at all.

Further north, bhe Boardman, although beautiful and yielding big browns at night, has never been a good soft hackle river.

The best, most productive river I ever found for these flies is the Firehole in Yellowstone Park. The water I speak of is above the Canyon, but not so far up as where the geysers spew their hot steam. Here the river is quite broad and flat. The bottom is mixed gravel and rock with heavy weed beds rising and bending out of sand knolls. The current is steady, with a broken surface. In this water, rainbows respond to the flies, better than do the brown. I asked Pat Barnes, fly tackle shop proprietor and guide in West Yellowstone, why this was and he said the

browns were on the bottom while the rainbows ranged higher in the stream, accounting for the larger number of them caught on the shallow riding soft hackled flies.

The soft hackled fly on this water in August, September and even October is an amazing performer in these days of controlled and crowded fisheries with stocking generally falling short of the take. The Firehole, however, has to be filled to the brim with rainbown and brown, and it must have tremendous, sub-aqueous insect life for the soft hackles to work so well.

Schwiebert and Charles E. Brooks, "The Trout and The Stream," 1974, both say a good proportion of this life underwater is the pupae of the Caddis fly. [redacted]

Fish here are often seen tailing or bulging, an encouraging sign on any water for these flies. True, I have never taken a 16" fish on the Firehole, which is not the minimum legal taking size on this river and the Madison, but my average day's take does not fall far short of W. S. Stewart who said, "And he is not worthy of the name of angler who cannot, in any day of the month, when the water is clear, kill from fifteen to twenty pounds weight of trout in any country in the south of Scotland".

The firehole trout are fat with small heads, and average 13 or 14 inches in length. The soft hackle will take 25 to 40 of these per day, and though I have never weighed them, or kept any, their total weight must be more than Stewart's figure.