



Floating Flies for Bass, 1873



It has been our practice for some time to publish brief accounts of floating fly fishing that predate the American writings of Theodore Gordon; such writings, as we have pointed out, suggest that floating flies, if not common in this country, were at least being experi-

mented with long before Gordon began writing about them at the turn of the century. Gordon, by most popular accounts, is given credit for being the "father" of dry fly fishing in America when actually he was part of an ongoing American experience with surface flies.

The following article is the earliest reference we have yet found to floating flies for bass. It appeared in Forest and Stream for December 4, 1873, and the author was F.L. King of Rochester, New York. His article was one of many letters published during the 1870s, 1880s, and even 1890s, when many people did not believe bass could be taken on flies. Note also his plea for moderation of harvest of fish.

I have read with increasing interest each article on this subject. I was astonished that such a question should ever suggest itself to a follower of Father Isaac. I have taken black bass from Canandaigua outlet and Genesee River for years with a fly, and I find that I have better success every year. Not by trolling as is the custom, in the St. Lawrence from a boat, but by casting from a boat or wading as the water will permit. Either I have become more experienced or as I have heard said in regard to trout, they have become educated

and will take a fly better from year to year if the waters are humanly fished. I have made it a practice to return to the water all small fish and I believe that I have been amply rewarded this year. I never had better fishing in these waters.

The hint that I have aided in the increase of this splendid fish seems insignificant; but if you will think for just a moment and see what the increase would be by returning fifty or one hundred of these fish to the water, you will not be surprised or wonder at my insinuation.

If all anglers would just keep this in mind, return all small fish to the water, there would be no danger of our lakes and rivers being depopulated.

A little care, and a little humanity on the part of the true angler would in a great degree make up for the wholesale slaughter of the pot-fisher. But never mind that, I have thrown aside my bass rod and tackle as a whole, with the exception of dressing my flies especially for bass. I tie my own flies as every angler should who wishes to drink in the whole enjoyment of angling.

In its place I have adopted my Conroy trout rod and trout tackle as a whole, and find that it gives me infinitely more pleasure than the heavier one.

Now in regard to flies; I have tried the scarlet ibis, grizzly king, and many others with some success, but none with the success that I have had with a brown one which I have made and named king fly.

In this locality I have taken them from the first of June to the first of October, with this same fly. I think it superior to any other for the reason that I have put others on the same cast and would in nine cases out of ten find them fast to this fly. Also I have taken off the other flies and put on just two of these and would take time after time two bass of a pound and a half or two pounds each at a single cast. That is what I call genuine sport. This fly might not do for other localities, but for these two that I have mentioned, I am certain it has no equal.

These magnificent fish seem to be very gamey here, giving almost as much play as a trout. It is seldom that I let my flies sink below the surface of the water. It is not necessary to with this fly, but the instant that it touches the water, if they are at all inclined, it is greedily taken, in fact I have seen them jump clear out of the water to seize the supposed prize. It looks too much like bait fishing to let them sink below the surface precisely as though it was really bait. When I bait fish I want to bait fish, and when I fly fish I want to fly fish.

Let it then be the aim of every true angler to exert all his influence to keep our lakes and rivers from being depopulated of this magnificent fish. If every angler will catch his fish artistically there need be no fear. If there can be no better laws, let what we have be enforced, and it will greatly aid us in our work.