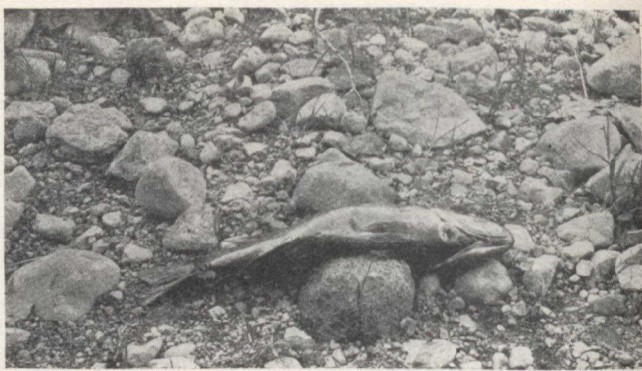




This rare picture shows a Black Bass Guarding Spawn, which she does for a period of two weeks.



Female Bass showing Spawning Mark. It is always the female, never the male, which Guards the Spawn.

## The Black Bass

MEMORIES OF THE GAMEY SMALL-MOUTH

By BONNYCASTLE DALE, with Photographs by the Author

THE LEGEND OF THE AHZEGUN AND OF ITS STRANGE MARKINGS.

ONCE, while seated on the shelving rocks that lined a little stream, a swift dark stream roaring on its way to join the clear, deep waters of Lake Superior, the Ojibwan guide beside me, Gebwaunuhse in his guttural native tongue (Hawk interpreting in ours), told me after many probing questions, this legend of his people:

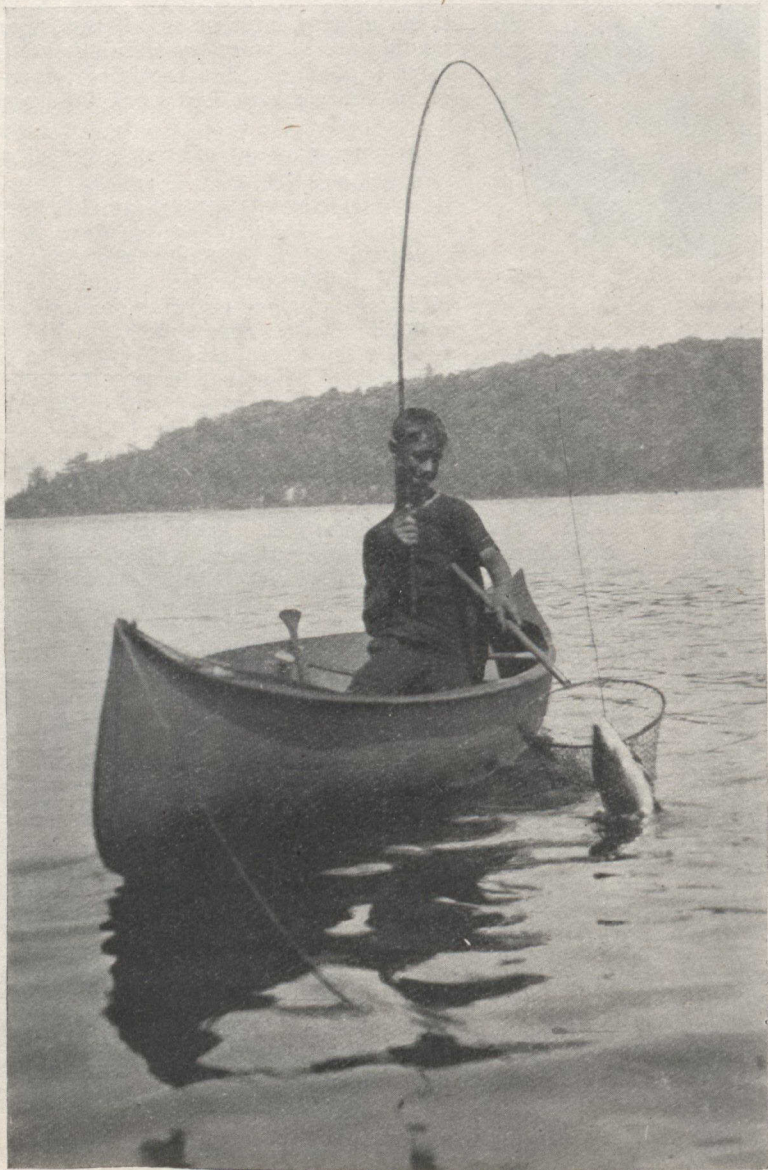
"Of how Wabbomeene, an Ojibwan maiden, the daughter of a great chief, was captured by the invading Mohawks. Pining for the tents of her people, she called to Sheesheb—the wild-duck—to fly swiftly and bring her lover to rescue her; calling often to the wild-geese wing-

ing their wedge-shaped flight southward, and wringing her hands in anguish to Chitchiskewa—the plover—darting south to the hunting grounds of her tribe. Once, while she waded in midstream, peering over the nets of vines and moosewood that guided the fishes into the shallow spearing grounds, she saw an Ahzegun—the bass—caught in the tangle of the vines. Carefully she lifted him, tore the river-wound weeds from its shining sides, bore it ashore to a tiny pool and fed and petted this captive of a captive. Then she tamed it, and with a clam shell scratched on its pearly side the outline of an Eagle, a Black-snake and a Turtle, then a Heron—the name of the lake of her captivity—and the totems of the Mohawks and the Ojibways. She wrapped the shell in birch-bark and bound it, with many a strand of her own black hair, to the gleaming side of the bass. Ahzegun sped south, through many a lake and river, through mighty deeps and brawling shallows, until he reached the fishing grounds of the Ojibways. Here he found the brave he sought, working in the rapids. Then he leaped high in the air, falling into the canoe beside him. Swiftly the fisherman cut the bands of hair that bound him, took the message from him and lo! Ahzegun—the bass—was marked from head to tail where the black tresses of the maiden had enfolded him."

However this may be, we know the small-mouth is beautifully marked by black bands that stripe its shining side. The fish taken in the shallow upper reaches of our rivers are lighter in colouring and less deeply marked. Those caught in the deep waters at the bends and in the mouths of the rivers, are so black that at first sight the bands are scarcely visible, but once the hard fighting fish is landed in the net and laid on the bottom of the boat, its colour pales as its life passes away—pales from a rich brownish green, through all the intermediate shades of olive and of green, until it lies, a heavily black-barred fish of a sickly yellow shade.

A very wise provision of Nature causes this fish to assume this chameleon-like power of assimilating itself to its surroundings. Watch it in a clear stream, and it will be found upon close observation that its colour exactly suits its surroundings, making it much easier for this family to approach, or to be approached by, the food that it catches alive. Again, they may be seen, taken from the log-crowded bend of a river, when they are absolutely black all over. How easily possible for this dark object to remain unseen in the depths, while the fish it preys on passes on to its end.

I have several times been amused at the untiring obstinacy and the lack of learning or instinct displayed by these fishes. We have lowered a glass jar well filled with clear water, containing a dozen or two live minnows, over



Netting a Five-Pounder.