

Handicraft

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**“Those Who Refuse to Go Beyond Fact Rarely Get As Far As Fact” -
- - HUXLEY**

IF a census were taken of the amateur craftsmen and constructors in this country, who build things with their own hands, the result would be astonishing. There are, perhaps, few countries in which handicraft has reached such a wide development in the United States.

With many handicraftsmen their art is their hobby. Thus we have a banker who specializes in wood-working and building anything from a step-ladder to an elaborate, decorated radio cabinet. An eminent Eastern surgeon has a complete machine shop in the basement of his house, which he uses to turn out the fanciest metalcraft objects that you could wish to see. And these cases are by no means isolated. They are quite prevalent in the various strata of our population.

The scientific reason, if any be necessary, should be simple to understand. Men originally used their hands to toil. As civilization progressed, the use of the hands steadily decreased, as most people, particularly the “white collar brigade,” use their hands less and less, and only for extremely light tasks. The professional writer, who uses a pen; the business man, who uses his hands to sign checks and handle papers, all instinctively crave an outlet for the muscular energy of their hands. Little wonder then that in their recreation hours they get busy with tools and do arduous physical labor, for which the hands originally were made.

Aside from all this, there is the huge satisfaction that every man gets from building things himself. It is one thing to step into a store and buy an article, but quite another to make the self-same article yourself, after your own design

and after your own ideas. Even making a rather commonplace article—that is, providing it is made right—is a whole education in itself.

If, for instance, you are making an elaborate radio console for your living room, you will get more information on the subject than you could possibly get from the best text-books. You will, first of all, become familiar with the various tools necessary to fashion the wood, and if you own a woodworking lathe you will learn quite a good deal about the operation of operation of wood-turning and the tools to be used for this particular purpose. You will learn what it means to sandpaper, you will learn to recognize the different kinds of wood, and you will know the difference between green and kiln-dried variety of woods. You will soon know how to use glue, and what kind. You will study the various fillers, and, last but not least, you will get a thorough education in varnishes and paints, and the use of all of these.

All this may sound quite formidable, but it really is not, because what the handicraft worker once learns *he never forgets*, and if he has a knack for the thing at all, each subsequent article fashioned by his hands will only increase his appetite along these lines, and spur him on to greater and better things. Of course, you probably would not start in by building an elaborate radio cabinet. The chances are that at first you would make a simple article, such as a shoe-shining box, some wooden toy for the young hopeful, or other simple devices.

If, on the other hand, your ideas run along metalcraft, you will get an equally good education. You will soon learn the difference between cast and wrought iron, between tungsten steel and soft iron; you will know the exact angle at which you have to sharpen your drills to use in your drill press or in your speed lathe, and you will know how to treat the various metals, be they brass, aluminum, or iron. When it comes to finishing the metals, you have an endless variety of processes to choose from, and your adventures in this branch alone will be many and varied. You will make many discoveries that will delight you and bring you into fields of which you did not dream when you started to make even such a simple article as even a decorated, chased, old-fashioned jewel box for your wife.

In metal work, just now, wrought iron is in great vogue. Some of the most beautiful decorations for home use are actually fashioned from the lowly iron, and in some of the art shops you will find the most exquisite tables, gates for living rooms, floor and table lamps, screens, mirror frames, etc., with floral decorations. The flowers are usually made of wrought iron and decorated in silver, gold, or the modern rust and polychrome finish, now so much in vogue. It does not take a big factory to turn out such articles in the home. Quite the contrary, a good coal stove, or a blow torch, can be used to good advantage to fashion the various articles, welding together different parts, and making the most artistic decorations imaginable. Such articles fetch high prices in art stores, not because the intrinsic value of the articles may be high, but on account of the huge amount of labor that goes into them. For instance, making a wrought iron rose takes about three or four hours of labor, that is, just for a single flower. The decoration of it takes another half hour.

It is true that the art stores are not greatly worried about this, because most people will always stand ready to buy anything they see, but only those handicraftsmen, who fashion things with their own hands and can point with pride to an object, saying, "I made this myself," will know the real thrill and the genuine satisfaction of having labored to produce a beautiful result.

Mr. Hugo Gernsback speaks every Monday at 9 P. M. from Station WRNY on various scientific and radio subjects.