

HAPPINESS IS IN THE HANDS



BY RALPH ERSKINE

—oOo—

"Happiness is in your hands" is the slogan which appears on the cover of a catalog published by a certain tool company. This slogan is certainly true when applied to the satisfaction of making things with your hands. Almost everyone has a hobby of some sort; gardening, stamp collecting, woodworking—I suppose you might class golf, dancing and baseball as hobbies too, since Mr. Webster defines a hobby as "an occupation or interest to which one gives spare time."

When Marse Grant asked me to write an article on my hobby, I immediately enlisted the aid of Charles Ray to do the photography, since that is his hobby. Ray's reputation as a photographer and leading member of the Harvard Camera Club is well known, as can be seen by the accompanying photographs.

For the silver work, all the pieces illustrated were made by hand, which have not changed since men first began to work with metal. My tools consist of hand saws, silversmiths' hammers, files of various shapes, or "stakes" on which to hold the metal, and about the only concession to modern methods is an acetylene torch for heat. As soon as a design is decided upon, as in the case of the ivy leaf pin, it is transferred to sheet silver and cut out with a jeweler's saw. The pieces are put on the surface by means of a chaser's chisel and hammer. The leaf is then bent or "puckered" to the desired shape with the silversmith's hammer. After the "findings" or "fastenings" are attached and soldered to the back, the piece is "pickled" in sulphuric acid and then polished on a motor-driven buff. The last steps are to clean the piece in a sulphur solution to darken the impression and then the final polish is given out the highlights.

The jewelry illustrated, particularly the most difficult to make, the violin lapel-pin, which is only 2 3/4 inches long. Each separate part, such as the neck, scroll, tailpiece and body, was cut out of 22 gauge sheet silver and hard-soldered together before shaping and polishing. Other hobbies are remunerative in various ways besides relaxation and pleasure. Someone once told me that some of his most profitable business deals were closed on a golf links, so there is a profit in a hobby more than paying for yourself. Another friend of mine fishes flies, and undoubtedly shows a profit. In my own case, I am still operating "in the red" but it isn't unusual as hobbies go. However, if people continue to buy the things I produce, eventually I may amortize my investment. Whether that happens or not, one thing is sure; I will have had a lot of pleasure and experience in experimenting in an art which has been going on for a few thousand years.



Top photo shows Ralph Erskine, machine tender on No. 5 paper machine, using a jeweler's saw with which all jewelry shown below was cut. The saw blade is .008 inch thick and has 65 teeth to the inch. Below, the acorn earrings form a set with the oak leaf brooch with matching necklace. Lower left is a grape leaf brooch with matching necklace and earrings shaped like artists' palettes with brushes. (Photos by Dr. Charles Ray)

