

THE ART OF TONALA

By PERCY GRENVILLE HOLMS

Tonala crowns a hilltop eight miles East of the City of Guadalajara and looks down upon Guadalajara with disdain, for Tonala was a city when Guadalajara was naught.

When the Spanish conquerors came Westward, it was the Tonalteco tribe who halted them so definitely that they came to terms and made a treaty with Queen Juchipil, the white Indian woman who ruled at Tonala, thence governing a vast domain that stretched clear to the Pacific Ocean.

Even now, the Indians of Tonala can recount the story of the fight their ancestors made; even now these Indians are doughty fighters, but their sombre eyes lift rarely from their pottery, upon which they trace strange lines, never the same, yet always similar. It is an art with them as old as the high hills, from which they get their clay and from the earth of which they mix their vivid colors.

And this pottery conveys to you something that is archaic; that comes out of an unutterably long past: that strikes in your own heart a sense of the dim times when you too were a potter and a painter, a hunter and a fisher, and a sewer with needles of bone.

Now it is small this village, and so the potters are not many. All the more is their work to be prized as something rare.

Always the ware has been beautiful, but crude, full of the imperfections that early man had no power to discern. Then there came amongst these Indians a white hill woman from a far country, but with a spirit kindred to their own, and she laid down the law in this and that, so that the pottery

took perfect shape, so that the colors came to blend, so that the ware became precious indeed.

The Indians say of her only that she has brought out what was truly ever in them. They do not say she taught them, but that she has brought them back to the time when they made perfect forms and ennobled them with colors of heaven and earth. Yet they pay tribute to her and her word with them is always a law to be followed.

So these rounded forms, always with flowing lines of grace, have been perfected without cut or pinhole in their clay, and their colors are without smear or blemish.

This is not porcelain, nor Sevres, nor Chinese blue, but you must see the pottery of Tonala to know what the Indian of Mexico can do and is doing. It is doubtful if in all Latin America such ware is being produced today, and the name of the Village of Tonala deserves to be famous.

The sun falls down below the hump back of Tequila mountain, till the outline of Guadalajara on the plain grows dim, as if no city sat there, and the painters upon clay still bend, far into the night, over the forms that they constantly revolve against their breasts, while their brushes of dogs hair pick out line upon line unerringly. It is work, but far more it is art, engrossing these Indians in the night. In the morning, when it is cool, some of them will jog trot into civilization with their "huacales" (crates of basket work) full of pottery packed in fragrant grass, and few of the buyers of their wares will know whence they came or that the people who made them once also made history.

