

REVIVING LOST INDIAN ART

At the time of the Spanish conquest, some four hundred years ago, there were about 20,000 Indians living in some seventy pueblos, or settlements, in New Mexico and the Southwest. In each of the seventy pueblos there was a distinctive type of pottery, made by the women, the symbols of the Indian religion furnishing the basic decorative elements. In the combination of these elements, however, there was an unlimited opportunity for the developments of different designs, which were handed down from mother to daughter, and the copyright, as it were, was not infringed upon by the women of other families in the same pueblo, or by those of other pueblos. Thirty years ago, the pueblo art of pottery making and decoration seemed on the point of becoming a lost art, due probably to that deadening effect which a race of considerably higher culture has upon a less advanced one.

When, in 1907, the School of American Research was established at Santa Fe by the Archaeological Institute of America, the manual labor on the buildings was done by the men from the pueblo of San Ildefonso. Thousands of broken potsherds were dug up in the course of clearing away ruins and digging trenches for foundations, etc. The symbolism of these broken sherds stirred the memories of many of the older men and, when shown at their home pueblo, the very old men and women kindled a vivid enthusiasm in the younger Indians. The American School began a revival campaign along definite lines and, by the discreet offer of certain prizes and by encouragement and help in the sale of finished products, it has come to pass that, to-day, the San Ildefonso people are independent of crop failures, in fact, make as much money on their ceramics as they do on farm products; but, best of all, ceramic art at this pueblo has come back nearly to the high artistic level of centuries ago.

In 1923, members of the American School began the same sort of revival at the pueblo of Zia, on the Jemez River, some twenty-five miles from Bernalillo and, already, the pottery there has risen from a somewhat degraded type to a well

mixed, finely baked and beautifully decorated ware which commands respect and a good price to go with it. The attempt, in 1924, to revive pottery making at Jemez, Pueblo, very nearly failed. Some of the oldest women were able to explain to the girls what they remembered about the art, or, as they remembered it from having been told by their grandmothers. There were thousands of broken sherds covered with the old Jemez designs. The main tradition, however, regarding the superior excellence of the Jemez wares was that it was due to the fact that the firing of the pottery was done only in kilns fed with dried animal manure. When everything was ready to begin work an old woman called attention to the tradition that forbade the burning of manure in the pueblo from the middle of June until early the next spring. The native priest was appealed to, but he would not lift the ban. But, last summer, there were at least six exhibitors with beautiful pottery, fired in the good old traditional way.

When one thinks of vases and pottery, ancient Greek and mediaeval Chinese and Japanese ware comes first into mind. But nowhere has there ever been any better black and white ware made than was made in our own Southwest, hundreds of years ago, and ware almost as good and quite as beautiful is now coming back into its own. Our pueblo ceramics, that lost art, is being revived.—*New York Herald-Tribune*.