

CURRENT NOTES ON ANTHROPOLOGY (VIII.).

A SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

OF course, everybody knows what spelæology means—or perhaps there are one or two who do not, considering that the word was manufactured only last year. Its sponsor was M. E. A. Martel, a French scientist distinguished for his numerous and skillful explorations of caves for scientific purposes. In Greek *Speleus* means a cave, and 'spelæology' is the science of cave-hunting, as it was called by the English. A society has been formed in Paris with that as a specialty, concerning which the curious inquirer can learn more if he addresses M. Martel, No. 8. Rue Menard.

The subject is one richly deserving this kind of concentrated and special study. No localities preserve more perfectly the records of the past than caverns. In their darkness and silence, guarded by their massive walls, layer after layer of deposits have been strown by their occasional visitors, by inundations and by percolation. A stalagmitic floor, clean, hard and imperishable, seals the traces of every occupant in perfect preservation through all time. Some of the most important discoveries in geology and archæology are due to these conditions. I need but mention the labors of Lartet, Christy, Boyd Dawkins, and in this country of Cope and Mercer, to attest this.

But nowhere is ignorant excavation more fatal than in cave-deposits. There is a high science in their examination; and M. Martel has planned an admirable scheme to disseminate valuable instruction on this essential point.

A VALUABLE STUDY IN PRIMITIVE ART.

A STUDY in primitive art of the most satisfactory character has been lately published by the Royal Irish Academy. It is entitled 'The Decorative Art of British New Guinea: A Study in Papuan Ethnography,' by Alfred C. Haddon, M. A., Professor of Zoölogy in

the Royal College of Science, Dublin. The author approaches his topic with an extensive personal knowledge of it, and a thorough appreciation of its bearings on the leading questions of ethnology in general. The memoir is in large quarto, with twelve full-page plates and many cuts inserted in the text. Some of the designs are colored, and all are copied with fidelity and clearness. Their variety is astonishing, considering that we are dealing with the art of cannibalistic savages, and the sense of proportion and harmony often manifested is just and real. The rapid development of conventionalism is evident, and even in such primitive examples one soon loses the traits of the original design. This has often been commented on in American aboriginal art.

Professor Haddon corrects the impression which sometimes prevails, that art decoration, for itself, is unknown to savages. Art is related to ease; as he says, 'Art flourishes where food is abundant.' Another vital conclusion he expresses in these words: "The same processes operate on the art of decoration, whatever the subject, wherever the country, whenever the age, illustrating the essential solidarity of mankind." No truer words have been spoken on the subject, and ethnographers should learn them by heart.

In every respect the memoir is most creditable to the writer and to the institution which publishes it.

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JAMES EDWARD OLIVER.

ON March 27th, 1895, after an illness of ten weeks, died Professor J. E. Oliver, of Cornell University, universally honored and beloved.

For more than twenty years he has been at the head of the department of mathematics in this great institution.