8. In conclusion I should like to direct attention to the final statement of Mr. Sclater. Having made the (incorrect) supposition that the late-Tertiary group of the eared seals has been checked in its northward advance in the Atlantic by a connection of South America and Africa, he says that "all these facts, *with the one exception* of the supposed Atlantic barrier, would tend in favor of the *now generally accepted* doctrine that the principal masses of land and water are not of modern origin, but have existed mainly in their present shapes *throughout all ages.*" No less than three errors are contained in this single sentence, namely: 1. It is impossible to derive from the distribution of a group of Tertiary animals any conclusions as to the shapes of the principal continental masses *throughout all ages.* 2. This statement would hold for the Tertiary time only if we consider that the connection of South America and Africa, which is supposed by Mr. Sclater, is no important feature. Mr. Sclater admits that this Atlantic barrier forms an exception to the rule; but, I should say, such an exception throws the whole rule aside. 3. It may be that Mr. Sclater himself has accepted the 'doctrine' of the persistency of the continents, but I protest most vigorously against calling such a 'doctrine' *generally accepted.* A dogma (and this would be the proper name for it) that has been contradicted by students in zoogeography, such as Baur, Beddard, Neumayr, v. Ihering and others (and I should add, which is rejected by almost *all* geologists) cannot be regarded as 'generally accepted.'

The distribution of the Seals and Sirenians, it is true, has never been investigated from a scientific standpoint, but there are only a few distributional features which seem to be anomalous at first sight (Sirenia, Otariidæ), and even these may be explained readily. The Sirenia point to conditions existing in the beginning of the Tertiary period, and it is well known that this group existed in the Eocene epoch. The distribution of the Otariidæ is analogous to what has been called (improperly) 'bipolar' distribution. They represent the somewhat rare case of an Antarctic group of littoral animals which has crossed the tropics along the western coast of America and reached the northern Pacific. As to the latter fact I refer to a special paper published by me recently, which is especially devoted to this peculiarity of distribution.*

Arnold E. Ortmann.
Princeton University, June, 1897.

THE POTTER'S WHEEL IN AMERICA.

My neglect to mention the *Kabal*, pointed out in Mr. Mercer's letter (Science, p. 919), was not an oversight, but for two reasons: First, as he mentions, because the word with that meaning does not occur in the Maya dictionaries of the sixteenth century; and secondly, because the *Kabal* is not a potter's wheel in its results or in a technical sense.

This is shown in Mr. Mercer's own work, 'Hill Caves of Yucatan,' p. 77, where he quotes Captain Maler as saying that he 'had found no trace of the potter's wheel in the old specimens of pottery,' anywhere in Yucatan. Mr. Mercer brought no potsherds from ancient deposits to contradict this; and according to his own words the *Kabal*, as used to-day, does not give 'the regularity of outline' which is the artistic aim of the potter's wheel. (P. 164, note.)

D. G. Brinton.

SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE.

The Cambridge Natural History. Edited by S. F. Harmer, M.A., and A. E. Shipley, M.A. Vol. II., Flatworms, etc. Macmillan & Co. 1896. 8vo. Pp. xii+560, 257 figs.

Volume II. of the Cambridge Natural History, the third of the series to make its appearance, deals with those classes which are usually grouped together as Worms or Vermes, and Polyzoa. The different classes are treated by specialists whose names are familiar in connection with the subjects assigned to them. The work is shared by seven authors, as follows: Platyhelminthes and Mesozoa, by F.W. Gamble, pp. 1–96, Figs. 1–47; Nemertinea, by Lilian Sheldon, pp. 97–120, Figs. 48–61; Nemathelminthes and Chætognatha, by Arthur E. Shipley, pp. 121–194, Figs. 62–105; Rotifera, Gastrotricha and Kinorhyncha, by Marcus Hartog, pp. 195–238, Figs. 106–120; Archiannelida, Polychæta and Myzostomaria, by W. Blaxland Benham, pp. 239–344, Figs. 121–186; Oligo-

* Zool. Jahrb. Syst., Vol. 9, 1896, pp. 571–595.