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II.—BASKET-WORK OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ABORIGINES.

By OTIS T. MASON.

“Barbara de pictis veni *bascauda* Britannis,
Sed me jam mavult dicere Roma suum.”

—MARTIAL, xiv, 99.

The study of the minutest technique in the distribution of aboriginal arts is very necessary in making up our opinions on questions of Anthropology. The archæologist is frequently caused to halt in the reconstruction of ancient society by his ignorance of the arts of the savages around him. This is especially true of an art which had its culmination in savagery or barbarism, and which began to decline at the touch of civilization, or at least to give place to higher types of the same art. For the discussions of problems that have arisen in the past the data then in hand have been sufficient; but as the investigations of social progress become more intricate the demands for greater detail in the observation of anthropological phenomena around us is imperative.

I have lately had occasion to examine all the baskets in the National Museum, and the results of this research may not be uninteresting as a contribution to exact technology in an art which may be called *par excellence* a savage art.

In a basket there are several characteristics to be observed, which will enable us to make a classification of the objects themselves and to refer them to their several tribal manufacturers. These characteristics are the *material*, the *frame-work*, the *methods of weaving*, the *coiling or sewing*, the *decoration*, their *use*, &c.

The tool almost universally used in their manufacture is a bone awl or pricker and the makers are the women. Of the manipulation of the material previously to the weaving little is known.

In the drawings accompanying this paper the actual size of the specimens is indicated by a series of inch marks in the margin. The inches on the standard line are shown by spaces between dots. In order to indicate exactly the manner of weaving, a square, usually an inch in dimension, is taken from a portion of the surface wherein all the methods of manipulation occur. This square inch is enlarged sufficiently to make the structure comprehensible. This plan enables us to show form and ornamentation in the whole figure as well as the method of treatment in the enlarged inch.

