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<i>Earthquake Risk and Its Abatement in California:</i> HARRY O. WOOD	195	<i>Reports:</i> <i>The Ella Sachs Plotz Foundation for the Advance- ment of Scientific Investigation</i>	215
<i>The Role of Aerobic Phosphorylation in the Pasteur Effect:</i> DR. MARVIN J. JOHNSON	200	<i>Special Articles:</i> <i>The Prevention by Alpha-Tocopherol of "Cod Liver Oil Muscular Dystrophy" in the Rabbit:</i> DR. C. G. MACKENZIE, DR. JULIA B. MACKENZIE and PRO- FESSOR E. V. MCCOLLUM. <i>The Apparent Effect of Tyrothrycin on Streptococcus Hemolyticus in the Rhinopharynx of Carriers:</i> DR. EMANUEL B. SCHOENBACH, DR. JOHN F. ENDERS and PROFESSOR J. HOWARD MUELLER. <i>Development of Homeo- thermy in Birds:</i> PROFESSOR ALEXIS L. ROMANOFF	216
<i>Obituary:</i> <i>George Ellett Coghill:</i> PROFESSOR C. JUDSON HER- RICK. <i>Harry Milton Wegforth:</i> W. C. CRANDALL. <i>Recent Deaths</i>	202	<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i> <i>An A. C. Operated Electronic Inductarium:</i> A. B. CULLEN, JR.	219
<i>Scientific Events:</i> <i>Field Work in Geology in Canada; The American Coordinating Committee on Corrosion; Report of the Subcommittee on Education for Service of the American Mathematical Society and the Mathe- matical Association of America; Election to Beit Memorial Fellowships; Representation by Institu- tions at the Marine Biological Laboratory; The Chicago Meeting of the Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology</i>	204	<i>Science News</i>	6
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	207		
<i>Discussion:</i> <i>The Interpretation of Experimental Four-Fold Tables:</i> DR. R. A. FISHER. <i>Electrical Activity of Acetylcholine:</i> DR. R. BEUTNER and PROFESSOR T. CUNLIFFE BARNES. <i>The Determination of Thiamin by the Yeast Fermentation Method:</i> DR. ALFRED S. SCHULTZ, DR. LAWRENCE ATKIN and DR. CHARLES N. FREY. <i>Control of Red Spider by Phthalic Gly- ceryl Alkyd Resin:</i> DR. P. A. ARK and DR. C. M. TOMPKINS. <i>A Bird List:</i> RICHARD H. POUGH	210		
<i>Scientific Books:</i> <i>Zoology:</i> PROFESSOR WILLIAM K. GREGORY. <i>Sym- bolic Logic:</i> PROFESSOR SAUNDERS MACLANE	213		

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EARTHQUAKE RISK AND ITS ABATEMENT IN CALIFORNIA

By HARRY O. WOOD

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LONG experience has made it certain that the occur-
rence of earthquakes in and near California, and the
attendant risk that there is from this cause, are matters
not well understood by a vast majority of people both
inside the state and beyond its borders. For the most
part non-residents overestimate and residents under-
estimate the risk here from earth shocks. In both re-
spects so general a want of understanding is disadvan-
tageous to the region. From every point of view the
situation calls for clarification.

Manifestly there is some risk—of death, injury and
loss of property—in every actively seismic region
where very small earthquakes are frequent, somewhat

larger ones numerous, with the occurrence of shocks
of small destructiveness every year or two on the aver-
age, and moderate, large and great earthquakes at
longer and longer intervals. California is such a
region.¹ How great is this risk, and how is it spread?
What can be done to abate it?

Although the following discussion necessarily deals
specifically with California and the immediately neigh-
boring region, the general conclusions reached apply
also to seismic regions elsewhere, including some other
districts in the United States.

¹ See "Destructive and Near-destructive Earthquakes in
California and Western Nevada," U. S. Coast and Geo-
detic Survey, Special Publication No. 191.