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<i>The American Association for the Advancement of Science:</i>	
<i>Earth Structure and Earth Origin:</i> PROFESSOR KIRTLEY F. MATHER	65
<i>Obituary:</i>	
<i>Edwin Herbert Hall:</i> PROFESSOR P. W. BRIDGMAN..	70
<i>Scientific Events:</i>	
<i>The First High-powered Radio Station without Static; Grants of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis; The Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Division; The American Institute of the City of New York and the American Association for the Advancement of Science; Awards of the American Society of Civil Engineers; Scientific Research under the Federal Government</i>	72
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	75
<i>Discussion:</i>	
<i>Undertow:</i> DR. F. P. SHEPARD and E. C. LAFOND. <i>Survival of the Tropical Rat Flea in United States:</i> DR. ROBERT L. ROUDABUSH. <i>Rediscovery of the Rhizocephalan Peltogaster Paguri on the North American Coast:</i> PROFESSOR EDWARD G. REINHARD. <i>Nomenclature of Gonad-stimulating Hormones of Placental Origin:</i> DR. E. B. ASTWOOD and DR. R. O. GREEP	78
<i>Scientific Books:</i>	
<i>Crystal Physics:</i> DR. HANS VONR. JAFFE. <i>Insects of Subtropical Fruits:</i> DR. RALPH H. SMITH	81
<i>Special Articles:</i>	
<i>An Estimate of the Maximum Value for the Molecular Weight of the Tobacco Mosaic Virus Protein:</i>	
PROFESSOR VERNON L. FRAMPTON and DR. A. M. SAUM. <i>Relation between the Increase in Opacity of Yeast Suspensions during Glucose Metabolism and Stimulation:</i> DR. THEODORE J. B. STIER, M. ISABEL NEWTON and HERBERT SPRINCE. <i>The Use of Purified Thrombin as an Hemostatic Agent:</i> DR. W. H. SEEGERs and OTHERS. <i>Isolation of Crystalline Heterotrypsin from Beef Pancreas:</i> DR. KLAUS HOFMANN and DR. MAX BERGMANN	84
<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i>	
<i>Method for "Fixing Ice Crystal Patterns" in Frozen Products:</i> DR. J. G. WOODROOF. <i>A New Apparatus and Method for Training the Rat in Auditory Discrimination Problems:</i> W. A. HUNTER and PROFESSOR L. A. PENNINGTON	87
<i>Science News</i>	6

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EARTH STRUCTURE AND EARTH ORIGIN¹

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In his book "The Solar System and Its Origin,"² Henry Norris Russell presents a critique of the several theories of earth origin, which may fairly be taken as representative of the attitude of most astronomers toward this problem, responsibility for the solution of which they share with geologists. Full consideration is given to the planetesimal hypothesis of Chamberlin and Moulton and to the modifications of that hypothesis which have been proposed by Jeffreys and Jeans. The obstacles which forbid whole-hearted acceptance of any one of these hypotheses are forcefully presented. The conclusion is frankly stated "that no one can yet say how our system originated in detail."

It is nevertheless apparent that the most hopeful

¹ Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section E, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Richmond meeting, December 28, 1938.

² New York, 1935.

line of research leads toward some hypothesis of origin during an encounter between the sun and another heavenly body. In other words, the fundamental principle of the planetesimal hypothesis is accepted. Future investigators are most likely to work toward the discovery of the particular modification of that hypothesis which will best fit the facts now known or to be ascertained.

Commenting specifically upon the planetesimal and tidal theories, Professor Russell states: "It is here that the two theories part company—the planetesimal supposing that the existing planets were formed mainly by the slow agglomeration of small cold bodies, and the tidal that they were all once liquid and have picked up much less matter in later times. This difference, while very important to the geologist, is really rather small from the standpoint of the astronomer."³

³ *Loc. cit.*, p. 102.

Science

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