

All known meteor showers are related to comets. Tuttle's comet, last seen in 1862, is the parent of the millions of particles of cosmic dust that the earth meets in August. They broke from the comet some 40,000 years ago, Drs. Fred L. Whipple and Salah EL-Din Hamid of Harvard College Observatory have computed.

Most astronomers believe that at first meteor particles are close to or part of the parent comet. The cosmic dust then gradually strays behind or ahead of the comet, but keeps pretty close to the same path. Over a long period of time the particles become evenly distributed around the orbit, as is the case with the Perseids.

Thousand Year-Old Showers

Past records show that the Leonid shower has been seen in October or November for over 1,000 years, and the Lyrids have been spotted in April for over 2,500 years. The associated comets, 1866-I and 1861-II, were not, however, observed until the nineteenth century.

Especially bright meteors, those emitting sufficient light to cast shadows, are called fireballs. The few meteors that enter our atmosphere and penetrate to the ground are known as meteorites. Meteorites that have been spotted and picked up immediately after falling have not yet been identified with a meteor shower, and probably are from sporadic meteors.

As the tiny meteor particle rushes into the earth's atmosphere, it collides with air molecules. The impact is very violent because of the particle's great speed, and the atoms on the surface of the pin-head-sized particle are vaporized and spread out. These atoms, in turn, collide violently with other air molecules, mostly not in the direct path of the meteor itself.

These collisions break off electrons from the air molecules and the meteor atoms. They also make the meteor atoms luminous. Thus the meteor creates around itself a luminous cloud of its own atoms. It is this cloud we see as the shooting star. The meteor's atomic cloud is continually blown away and is being constantly renewed, until the original material is entirely used up, or, if the entering material is sufficient, until it falls to the ground as a meteorite.

Radar Spots Meteor's Trail

As the meteor with its atomic cloud moves on, it leaves behind a long trail of ions and electrons. The trail, originally less than an inch in diameter, may be rapidly disturbed by the high winds of the upper atmosphere, much like the trails left by jets are blown about lower in the atmosphere.

These ionization trails, though not visible, can be spotted by radar beams, since for a brief time they reflect radio waves back to their source just as a plane or ship does, providing the radio waves meet the trail at right angles.

Radio waves spot these trails regardless

of weather, and regardless of whether it is day or night. The narrow radio beams are much more sensitive than the eye and they can detect meteors much fainter than the eye can see. They have thus opened up a whole new field of meteor study, and led to the discovery of some daytime-only meteor showers that had previously gone undetected.

The spectroscope can spread out the meteor's light into a band that reveals what kinds of atoms or molecules are emitting its light. Since the meteor's passage is both brief and unexpected, these spectrograms are hard to get.

Dr. P. M. Millman of Ottawa, however, has succeeded in catching them. These spectrograms show that meteoric light is emitted by metallic atoms, especially atoms of iron, calcium, magnesium, manganese, chromium, aluminum, nickel and sodium.

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MATHEMATICS

Suggest Einstein Solution

► THE BASIS of the universe, including both matter and gravitation, is electromagnetism, Prof. Vaclav Hlavaty of Indiana University believes.

He has found mathematical proof that, if Einstein's new unified field theory is valid, an electromagnetic field is required for a universe which contains matter, and hence, gravitation.

Einstein's unified field theory attempts to explain the workings of the universe in one

AERONAUTICS

First Delta-Wing Trainer Makes Its Initial Flight

See Front Cover

► THE WORLD'S first delta-wing trainer has made its initial flight, the British government has revealed. The plane is a dual control version of the delta-wing research craft, and is designed to familiarize pilots with this type of aircraft.

It is expected that the Avro 707C trainer, shown on the cover of this week's SCIENCE NEWS LETTER, will make its first appearance at the Society of British Aircraft Constructors' display later this year. The trainer is powered by a Rolls Royce "Derwent" turbojet engine.

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set of laws. He proposed certain formulas to link all known physical phenomena, but did not attempt to solve his equations.

Prof. Hlavaty believes that it will now be possible to devise experiments to test the validity of Einstein's field theory. His solution, he says, reveals the route by which the conflict on what law or laws govern the universe can be resolved.

Because of its great success in predicting atomic behavior, most physicists today favor the quantum theory. This pictures the universe as made of discrete bundles, or quanta, of energy, the size of each such packet being proportional to the frequency of the radiation. Energy can thus vary only in multiples of this elementary quantum.

Because these quanta are so tiny, they can be dealt with only on the basis of large groups at one time. Such use of the statistics of chance in dealing with nature prompted Einstein's remark, "I cannot believe that God plays dice with the cosmos!"

The unified field theory pictures the universe as continuous and well-ordered, with equations of a single theory giving a complete description of gravitational, electrical and nuclear forces.

Prof. Hlavaty's solution of Einstein's theory shows that gravity is just another facet of electromagnetism; that it is electromagnetism that gives rise to matter and thus to gravity. He makes use of spinors, a mathematical tool also used in quantum mechanics, in arriving at his solution. Therefore, Prof. Hlavaty believes, the spinor theory will be the first arch of a possible bridge between the unified field and quantum concepts.

Prof. Hlavaty, a refugee from Communist Czechoslovakia, is an expert in the field of multi-dimensional geometry. He is a member of the Indiana University's Graduate Institute of Applied Mathematics.

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PROF. VACLAV HLAVATY—Shown on the blackboard is a portion of the equations used by Prof. Hlavaty to obtain solutions to formulas of Einstein's unified field theory.