Comments and Communications

The 1950 Silly Season

PART of an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* for November 18, 1950, entitled "The 1950 Silly Season Looks Unusually Silly," is here quoted:

One of the most astonishing episodes of the summer idiot's delight was the effort of American scientists to suppress a book, Worlds in Collision, by Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky. The scientists did succeed in forcing the Macmillan Company to withdraw the book, according to Doctor Velikovsky, by threatening to boycott Macmillan textbooks. Fortunately, another publisher, Doubleday and Company, took over the publication of the book, which is still going great guns. Doctor Velikovsky's offense seems to be that he writes better than most scientists and in his book expounds a theory of astronomical activity which differs widely from orthodox theories. . . .

So the orthodox scientists, forgetting about Galileo, and the long, woeful struggle of scientists, or even pseudo-scientists, to be free of dogma, acted like the authoritarians with whom they are continually in conflict. In the course of the struggle they managed to get an able book editor out of a job which he had had for many years, and the effect on the sale of the book was probably just the opposite of what the misguided book burners hoped for.

Fortunately for the publishing business, specialists in other fields are less easily hexed than astronomers. Otherwise professors of history might take an attitude toward the publishers of Forever Amber as stuffy as that of the scientists toward Doctor Velikovsky, his reversible sun and his capering comet. But seriously, not even a silly season ought to excuse scientists for book burning. After all, they are always the chief victims of this kind of intolerance.

We need recall only in outline the extraordinary events that attended publication of *World in Collision* last spring. First *Harper's,* then two other magazines with wide distribution, printed advance summaries of the sensational book, with impressive appraisals of the author and his "scholarly" product. *Reader's Digest* prefaced its short version with the estimate, by a literary critic, that Velikovsky's creation might well attain the distinction of Darwin's *Origin of Species.* The publisher then advertised the book as a scientific contribution, listing it in the Macmillan spring catalogue under the heading "Science," along with new books in several scientific fields. This obvious build-up of a best seller by an old and reputable publishing house brought strong protest from many of Macmillan's authors, who felt that the advertising methods violated the publisher's clear responsibility to them. Within a short time the Velikovsky book was taken over by another publisher.

First, a newspaper columnist and, later, the *Saturday Evening Post* accused "the scientists" of "ganging up" on Velikovsky and Macmillan, with unworthy motives and the use of strong-arm methods. According to the confident diagnosis in the *Post* editorial, the motives ranged from base jealousy of Velikovsky's superiority (!) as a writer to blind dogma that would curtail freedom of expression on scientific subjects. At least by implication, scientists as a group were held guilty of collusion in unworthy behavior.

Doubtless there will be differences of opinion in selecting the most conspicuous exhibit from "the 1950 silly season." The *Post* editorial quoted above may prove to be a strong contender.

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Inaccurate Report

I SHOULD like to call to your attention that the report in SCIENCE (**113**, 341 [1951]) on the isolation of a new compound, TPN, is incorrect, due, no doubt to an erroneous newspaper report that appeared in the New York *Times* on February 2. The *Times* science reporter got the story quite wrong.

What was isolated in this laboratory was not TPN (which has been known for years) but a new enzyme which needs TPN for activity. The enzyme seems to play an important role in the biological assimilation of carbon dioxide by animals and plants and, probably, in photosynthesis (S. Ochoa, J. B. Veiga Salles, and P. J. Ortiz, *J. Biol. Chem.*, **187**, 863 [1950]). When the enzyme is added, together with TPN, to chloroplast preparations from green spinach leaves, in the presence of pyruvic acid and CO_2, and the mixture is illuminated, pyruvic acid takes up CO_2 and is converted to malic acid. Thus a photochemical assimilation of CO_2 has been obtained in a cell-free system. A report of these experiments, carried out in collaboration with Wolf Vishniac, will shortly appear in *Nature.*

I would appreciate it very much if you would take the necessary steps to have the report in SCIENCE properly corrected at the earliest possible time. Also, please note that my name was misspelled.

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The Significance of pH, Ion Activities, and Membrane Potentials in Colloidal Systems

IN A recent paper in this journal Jenny *et al.* (*1*) have presented a new theory to explain the cause of the potential that arises across an electrically-charged colloidal membrane separating two solutions of different salt activities. They assume that the relative diffusion rates of, e.g., K^+ and Cl^- for a KCl solution are affected by the immobile charges in the membrane, the potential which arises across the membrane being