EDITORIAL

LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS—SANS BRUIT

When "The Silent Spring" finally appeared, it proved to be anything but silent. is not surprising that its sensational and controversial aspects, so hysterically pointed ou in advance by reviewers, and so dramatically presented in the book, should arous apprehension in the general public. But it is unfortunate that so many critics have bee uncritical, and, by confusing the meritorious with the meretricious, have come clos to obscuring the merits of the book—for it does have merits. The author has done real service in bringing together in one place a great deal of information on the danger of improper use of pesticides, the necessity for regulating their distribution and applic tion, on the desirability of using biological control measures whenever possible, an above all, in emphasizing the need for research.

That these facts have long been recognized, that there have already been many law and regulations passed; that there is a tremendous amount of research on biologic control going on and even more being planned, that there are both professional an amateur agencies representing both "sides" sincerely, amicably and fruitfully workin together to achieve commonly desired goals—these points are not so clearly brought ou To stress the more sensational and relatively rare incidents of serious widespread dam age or of limited experiments, in such a way as to convey the impression that they a almost universal practices, omitting mention of or scarcely noting precautions take and benefits obtained, is hardly objective reporting.

The dramatic force of the presentation is such that many persons will overlook th fact that there is little if anything in it that is new or that has not already been pul lished, and that many of the references are not only quoted out of context, but are n original sources, are non-objective, and seem to be cited only to strengthen a stan apparently taken in advance of or regardless of contrary evidence. Whether an auth of a popular tract may have the right to do this in order to advance a point of vie that is obviously held with firm conviction is not being debated here. But to chara terize the book, as has been done, as one of the most important documents of our tim and a "must read" for every thoughtful person is just plain nonsense. Such statemen as these may help the sale of the book but they have tended to turn what might hav been thoughtful interest and reflective concern into hysteria and needlessly bitter co troversy. This, of course, next to censorship or suppression, is the best buildup a boo can have, and might be viewed with detached amusement were it not for the fact th hasty and ill-considered legislation, conceived under panic pressure, could result.

I am reminded at this point of two fairy tales. First, there was Chicken-Licken, wh went out to the woods one day and an acorn fell on her head. As she rushed bac toward home she met Hen-Len and screamed "the sky is falling, the sky is falling. must go and tell the king." They kept meeting more of their friends and spreadin the word, to Goose-Loose, Gander-Lander, Duck-Luck, and Drake-Lake, until th whole crowd was stampeding to tell the king the sky was falling. While in this sta of panic they became easy prey to an evil fox who gobbled them all up.

The other story is about the emperor's clothes. This emperor was rather naive, an some sharp-witted weavers sold him on a deal whereby they would make him son clothing out of cloth that had the unusual property of being invisible to anyone wh was incompetent or not fit for the position he held. Consequently the emperor an all his advisors were afraid to say they couldn't see any cloth, and the emperor wen unclothed in a ceremonial procession. Only a little boy had the courage to say "Wh he isn't wearing anything at all!"

Now, if Chicken-Licken had stopped to look up, she might have seen that the sky was not falling and she might not have spread panic among her friends, to their undoing. And if just one of the emperor's servants or advisers had had the courage to stand up and say "This is ridiculous," the emperor would have been spared considerable embarrassment. If we will take a moment to look around us we will see that the sky is not falling, there are leaves on our trees, there are birds in our parks and woods, there are fish in our streams, and also, what is important to most of us, there is food on our tables, there is clothing on our backs, and there is protection against malaria, encephalitis, and a multitude of other diseases.

Public impressions and private opinions notwithstanding, virtually all entomologists believe that there should be laws regulating the distribution, sale and use of insecticides, and there are such laws. They also agree that potentially dangerous pest control programs should not be undertaken without precaution against harm to wildlife, domestic animals, beneficial insects and to man, and that carefully drawn laws that take into account all of the interests involved are necessary. Reasonably large control programs, by proper adjustment to local conditions, including the biology of the pests involved and their parasites and predators, can usually be accomplished safely with respect to beneficial insects, wildlife, man, domestic animals and the overall effects, both temporary and continuing, on the environment and ecological relationships. Increasingly and without a tremendous fanfare, most programs of pest control are being carried out in this manner.

We might reflect here that the term "balance of nature" which is mentioned in the book with great emotion, is an expression for a condition which does not really exist, or, if it did, would be a most undesirable one for man to try to bring about and maintain. " 'Balance' implies a state in which no one part, element, factor or influence overweighs another, or is out of due proportion to the others" (Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms).

Thus, the defoliation of thousands of acres of forests shows nature out of balance in a most conspicuous manner, and an insect control program is an effort to restore it. It is difficult to view with equanimity what it would be like for a human being to exist in a state of balanced nature. The house fly with its load of disease organisms and the *Anopheles* mosquito and its quota of malarial parasites are as much a part of the natural balance as the warbler, the deer and the brook trout.

What I am trying to make clear is that nature herself holds no special regard for man. Like all other animals, man is constantly engaged in a life and death struggle for survival. His enemies outnumber him millions to one. The unique weapon which man has, and which he has used to accomplish his survival, is his mind, with the power of thinking. With this he has found ways to mitigate some of the adversities of nature which would otherwise overwhelm him. Man cannot be satisfied with mere passive coexistence with the destroyers of his food, shelter and clothing, and with the multitudinous flora and fauna of internal parasites and external predators which constitute his mortal enemies. He must take up arms against them, and like David, otherwise unprotected as he advanced naked and exposed to kill Goliath, he must be free to choose his weapons to suit the occasion and fit the circumstances.

With forests and crops consumed by caterpillars and locusts, and millions of people fighting for food or starving, with millions more suffering from malaria and other vector-borne diseases, there would not be, it is true, a silent spring. There would be the crackle of flames in the denuded forests and the roar of floods down the eroded hillsides, the whirring of wings and the clicking of jaws in the stripped grainfields, the cries of sick and hungry children . . . and the hoofbeats of horsemen—the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—War, Famine, Pestilence and Death.—D. L. C.