

# Book Buying Booms to \$5.5 Billion

**A**BILITY to read is basic to education and to life. A prominent educator said recently "If a youngster doesn't learn to read well, he probably won't be doing very well in other subjects either."

A teacher who fails to help his or her pupils learn to enjoy reading has failed. The failure is compounded if young readers aren't also motivated to choose literature over pornography and information over misinformation. Such choices may not be easy to make.

The volume of reading material available is staggering to contemplate. When television, radio, telephones, computers and recorders are added as sources of information, a timid soul might be tempted to throw up his hands in exasperation and frustration.

It has been said that three-fourths of all information available to mankind has been developed in the last quarter-century, and the total amount is doubling every decade.

There are more than 1,100 book publishers in the United States who turn out nearly 50,000 book titles

annually, almost 1,000 a week.

Nobody can read that many, of course, but a magazine article reports that Americans spent about \$5.5 billion on books this year, 72 percent more than was spent in 1972. Part of that gain was due to inflation, but it also shows a tremendous gain in books sold.

Before radio and TV, many homes contained libraries — rooms whose walls were lined with shelves containing books accumulated by the families, sometimes for several generations.

The families depended upon newspapers for information (and most still do). For diversion or entertainment, they picked up a Saturday Evening Post at the corner drug or bought a Collier's from a neighbor boy trying to earn a bicycle.

Times and homes have changed considerably in the fast food, multiple car, electronic age. Not many have libraries now.

"Information on demand" companies that compile data on many subjects — medicine, law, government, products, etc. — are increasing in

number and growing in size. They maintain libraries on tape and microfilm, letting computers do the research, instead of humans.

This might be the only solution to paperwork that has government agencies, businesses, industries and many individuals snowed under.

Technology is available to extend similar services to homes and tie them into computers that also can help with the shopping and transfer funds electronically to pay bills.

Selected books, including the Bible, speeches and digests of information are available on tapes from commercial sources. One busy businessman plays such tapes as he drives to and from his office.

These devices may be able to cram more information into our heads in a short space of time, but they won't displace books.

Daniel J. Boorstin points out that books use no external energy sources, have fewest possible moving parts, require a minimal upkeep, are usable in any climate at any hour, should never become obsolete, and they ought to last indefinitely.