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## Science Books

Authors of varied background and quality write for the large and growing market for popular science books. The knowledgeable reader can select books that meet his own criteria, but other buyers—adults looking for a suitable present for a child, librarians who must purchase books in all fields, and teachers who cannot be expert in science or any other specialized area—have difficulty in discriminating between the good and the bad. For the past 10 years the AAAS has been trying to help some of these book buyers select accurate, interesting, informative books about science—its history, problems, research frontiers, applications, and personalities. The technique has been to publish guide-books containing brief evaluative descriptions of science books intended for student and general use. A measure of the welcome extended to these guide-books is the fact that since 1955 over 700,000 copies of the several editions have been distributed to librarians, teachers, students, and other interested persons.

The outpouring of popular science books extends from the very good to the very bad. Some contain errors of fact. One book for children stated several times that light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per minute (instead of per second). Such gross errors of fact may be merely stupid and not very harmful, but other books more seriously misrepresent science by presenting it as solely a bag of magic tricks, or distort major principles and concepts—for example, in distinguishing between birds and animals as the two great groups of life forms. A few are potentially dangerous. One—inspired perhaps by some Charles Addams character—gives to its 13- to 16-year-old readers a number of recipes for making fireworks from such ingredients as potassium chlorate and sulfur, an explosive combination that commercial manufacturers of fireworks in England and a number of U.S. cities are not allowed to mix, store, transport, or discharge.

Fortunately, there is also much good popular science literature. To continue to help librarians and teachers to distinguish the good from the bad, the AAAS is now starting to publish a quarterly review entitled *Science Books* that is available by subscription. With the generous assistance of many scientists and some science librarians who serve as reviewers, we hope to provide those who buy books for school and general library use with critical and reliable judgments concerning quality, content, and appropriate age level of the new books shortly after they appear.

For long, perhaps as far back as A.D. 100 when the Library of Pantainos in the Athenian Agora displayed the inscription "No book shall be taken out for we have sworn it," the cynics have described libraries as places to *keep* books. Librarians chafe under this canard; they want good books to circulate and to be read. National Library Week, the last week in April, will focus attention on the value of reading as a constructive year-round activity for students and literate adults. Among all the specially designated days and weeks that crowd the annual calendar, this is one of the most widely and divergently supported. Many individuals and groups will have an opportunity to join in this concerted effort to encourage lifetime reading habits, to increase the use of libraries, and to expand and improve the nation's reading and library resources. We hope that *Science Books* will be a continuing contribution to the attainment of these objectives.

—DAEL WOLFLE