

GENERAL SCIENCE

Subtle "Book Burning"

Government is abandoning how-to-do-it books, among others, published with Federal money. They are expected, however, to appear in private bookstores at higher prices.

This is the first of an exclusive series on development that affects every reader. These articles report what is happening to popular and useful books from Government departments that have been obtainable from the Government Printing Office.

► THERE IS a subtle "book burning" under way in Washington. Informative and inexpensive books, published by the Government for the public, are being withdrawn from further publication, or being re-edited.

Principal targets are the how-to-do-it books. A few have already been discarded and more can be expected to disappear from Federal book stores. They can be expected, however, to turn up again at the book stores of private publishers, at higher prices.

One of the Government Printing Office's how-to-do-it books, a best seller for 24 years, is now in its death throes. "Care and Repair of the House," which had a profitable and record-breaking sales in 1954 of 33,500 copies, will not be reprinted.

The book is being discarded because "it seems to be competitive with privately published books," and because it deals with a subject that is now considered "hardly appropriate with the fields of the Department of Commerce," Donald R. Burgess, director of the Department's office of publications management, told SCIENCE SERVICE.

The Department of Commerce has the final say on what material written by its staff is to be published by the GPO.

Mr. Burgess explained that the do-it-yourself market has expanded in recent years and there are many "good" privately published books available. He said that there is a "trend" to take the Government out of competition with private industry, where private firms are doing the job.

Until 1950, when the 204-page, 60-cent do-it-yourself guide was completely revised, it had sold 175,000 copies. Since its revision, it has sold more than 114,600 copies. Its sales have steadily increased since it was first published in 1931.

But "Care and Repair of the House" will not be lost to the public. McGraw-Hill, New York publishers, are planning to publish a completely revised, lengthened, and heavily illustrated edition of it to sell for "\$3.95 or more."

Steve Gibson Scheaffer, a technical book editor at McGraw-Hill who is responsible for the revision of the book, told SCIENCE SERVICE that it was being re-edited under contract by the late Mrs. Louise D. C. Nobel, a former employee of the National Bureau of Standards who died on March

11, 1955. Mrs. Nobel had helped revise the 1931 Government edition in 1950. Mr. Scheaffer said that three-fourths of the Government book had been re-worked, and that the New York publishers were "certainly interested in publishing it if there is a possibility for completing it."

The book was originally written by Vincent B. Phelan, a former National Bureau of Standards employee, who is now retired and living in Santa Barbara, Calif. When Mr. Phelan was notified by SCIENCE SERVICE that his work was being discarded, he said that "the public deserves a better break than this."

"There is nothing like it on the market," the author stated. "Its reprinting should not be stopped. The book's sales record speaks for itself and there is certainly a continued demand for it here in the West."

Mr. Phelan said that it was still "up-to-date" and that it had been revised with the help of the Bureau's experts and with the addition of many new illustrations.

At present, only several hundred copies of the book are left in Government stock. When they run out, the plates will be put in storage and, unless the Department of Commerce requests the GPO to reissue the book within two years, the plates will be destroyed.

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AERONAUTICS

Heat Waves Direct New Missile to Its Target

► THE LATEST in guided missiles hunts down its target with heat waves. The target's own warmth cues the projectile in.

Such a missile might lock on to isolated objects, ships at sea or planes in the air. With an atomic warhead, it might search out and dive into the industrial heart of a city.

Missiles that seek out objects by infrared or heat waves are reported to have been tested at the Woomera Rocket Range in Australia, and the United States is working on its own version, details of which are kept a carefully guarded military secret.

Though the electronics is complicated, the principle is simple. Metals and other building materials act as partial black bodies absorbing heat from the sun and become hotter than their environment. Ships become hotter than the sea and cities hotter than the surrounding countryside. The missile detects this tell-tale heat concentration.

A modified "snooperscope" might provide directional guidance for the missile. This device can convert invisible infrared radiation to a visible image. A person can see objects lit by infrared in a completely darkened room through such a "snooperscope." The old "sniperscope" version was used in Korean war night fighting.

Experts report that Britain has been conducting experiments with an infrared guided missile for some time. De Havilland Aircraft Company worked up the model tested in Australia.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1955



UP AND AWAY—The McDonnell XV-1 convertiplane, which can take off like a helicopter and fly like a conventional plane, is shown during the flight in which it completed the world's first helicopter-to-airplane conversion. (See SNL, Feb. 19, p. 114.)