

## LAST WORDS

**A**RE we fated, from the very nature of the mechanical and neurotic influences at work in our civilization, to rear a generation wholly illiterate in the broadest and deepest sense of the term—unable to read with concentrated attention and comprehension, and strangers to the pleasures of enthusiastic and unforced reading of books of informational and literary value? It is the common complaint of English teachers that college students (not only freshmen, but upperclassmen—even seniors) can't read and don't read, and hence for the most part have inadequate vocabularies and are unable to write with correctness and ease. Sometimes the blame is put on faults of instruction, and textbooks have been devised to improve reading skills. But more often, and probably more justly, the responsibility for these inadequacies of students is placed on the whole social environment which discourages reading in the earliest years when habits are being formed and tastes developed, and more particularly on those alluring rivals to the book—the moving picture, the radio, television, picture magazines, "Comic Books."

But there is another aspect of the picture. What of the very great increase in America in the past twenty years of cheap editions of classics and the best of the modern books, the reprints often following fast upon the first editions? What of the Armed Forces Editions of good books that circulated in such large numbers among the troops abroad and that rivaled the Comic Books and cheap literature in multiple readings? What of the libraries filled with readers and borrowers (and quite as many young people among them as there were twenty years ago)?

Perhaps the illusion that there are fewer literate persons in the younger generation than heretofore has grown out of the recognition that the proportion of literacy is shockingly low among the total number of those going to college. While the number of book-loving and book-reading people in the country has probably not diminished, and indeed is by all signs on the increase, the great influx into the colleges of students whose main interest is in technical training or in the social and business prestige of a college degree, rather than in a truly liberal education, makes the university no longer the best measure of literacy in the community. The book stores and the libraries are better barometers of the reading public. The libraries are not empty.

—L. A. M.