The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1826-1846, A Social and Bibliographical Evaluation, by Harold Smith. Halifax: Dalhousie University, School of Library Service, 1974. xii, 100 p. (Occasional paper, 8), paper, \$2.00

Mr. Harold Smith's dissertation and bibliography on the S.D.U.K. was originally submitted as a partial requirement for the Master's degree in Library and Information Studies at the University of London in 1972, and is now published as an Occasional Paper by the School of Library Service at Dalhousie University, 1974.

The author's assiduity in collecting information about the Society, its founders, history, publications, and achievements is in the best tradition of library reference service. The bibliography is selective but adequate; the appendices supply titles and facsimile title pages of the various series of S.D.U.K. publications, the Society's Royal Charter and By-laws, the Proceedings for 1828, and the address of the Central Committee in winding up the affairs of the Society in 1846. Here, then, are brought together all the data needed for a lively, informative monograph on the subject.

It seems a pity, therefore, that Mr. Smith did not decide to abandon the thesis form, assimilate his material omitting peripheral matter, and present it as a unified, readable introductory essay to the bibliography and appendices. As it stands, it has all the rigidity, not to say aridity, of the typical academic dissertation — five blocks of information in as many chapters (with inevitable repetition and a good deal of extraneous matter) and a summing up at the end, gathering together and further elucidating points already made.

Mr. Smith rightly insists that the Society cannot be properly understood merely as an educational or publishing venture; it must be seen in relation to the social, economic and political movements of the two decades in which it operated. Judged from this point of view, its impact on the working class for whom its publications were intended was minimal. Its founder, Lord Brougham, the publisher Charles Knight, and their colleagues on the London Central Committee, were far removed from the stark realities of working-class life in the period from 1826 to 1846. It was their quixotic belief that by providing self-help to workers in the form of cheap but authoritative books on scientific and related subjects (excluding religion and politics), they could prevent social unrest. Reading would take the place of agitation. With great energy, devotion, and dispatch, the Society produced scores of "useful" and "entertaining" volumes on a great variety of subjects from differential calculus to Mrs. Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada*.

Liaison was established with the Mechanics' Institutes, but the direction of the Society was imposed from above with little or no attempt to cultivate the grass roots. Its periodical publications — the *Quarterly Journal of Education* (1831-35), the *Penny Magazine* (1832-45), and the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1833-46) — had a wide vogue, but the Society foundered on an overly ambitious *Biographical Dictionary* (half a century before the *DNB*) which never got beyond the letter 'A'.

Since labour radicalism, which attracted the brightest minds among the working class, was anathema to the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, its seed fell largely on fallow ground. What it did accomplish was a revolution in British publishing methods, starting an avalanche of inexpensive books of surprisingly high standard within the reach of everyone.

H.P. Gundy

(After retiring as Queen's University Librarian, Mr. Gundy became Professor of English Language and Literature, Editor of *Queen's Quarterly*, Associate Director and General Editor of McGill-Queen's University Press — and seemed to enjoy this killing load! Now retired and living in Toronto, he is Chairman of the Publications Committee, Bibliographical Society of Canada, and Editor of *Historical Kingston*.)

Canadian Reference Sources; Supplement, edited by Dorothy E. Ryder. Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1975. 1, 121 p., \$7.00.

Canadian Reference Sources; Supplement, although one year late in its anticipated date of publication, fulfils the plan of updating and expanding the 1973 *Selective Guide*. Listing new works and editions up to Dec., 1973, the content of the *Supplement* has been broadened to include a few personal bibliographies, material dealing with areas smaller than the provinces, and several new subject areas.

In format and organization, the *Supplement* continues the guidelines set out in the *Selective Guide*. Over 700 items are listed; of these, some 49 (6%) are later editions of titles first mentioned in the *Guide*. The five main groups — GR, General reference works; HA, History and allied subjects; HU, Humanities; SC, Science; and SS, Social science — are maintained, and, with two exceptions (Heraldry in HA and Philosophy in HU), each major sub-category of the first edition is represented in the *Supplement*. Expansion of the first edition appears in the SC, Science group, which lists 112 entries (15% of the *Supplement*, 10% of the *Guide*). New sub-categories appearing in the *Supplement* are likewise in the SC group: Astronomy, Building, and Mathematics. Greatly enlarged also are two sub-categories in the SS, Social science group: Geography, which lists 44 entries under the new heading, "Historical Atlases," and Law, with its expanded section on "Laws, Statutes" and its new section, "Search Books." Other useful additions appearing in the *Supplement* are listings of indexes to general periodicals, and of social registers, or blue books.

Non-Canadian imprints listed in the *Supplement* are few and of very definite value to Canadian reference collections. Where the title does not indicate the degree of relevance to Canadian interests, as in *Dictionary Catalogue of the History of the Americas* (New York Public Library), this information is provided in the annotation: "some 300 pages on Canada and further bibliographies on each of the provinces and on Indians and Eskimos."

It is hoped that the publication policy currently adopted for *Canadian Reference Sources* will be maintained. With the advance notices provided in both the *Guide* and the first *Supplement*, with the kind of intermediate updating which appeared in the July/August, 1973 issue of *Canadian Library Journal*, and with the regular publication of supplements, ready access to retrospective and current Canadian reference sources will be available.

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