

## CANADIAN PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

By W. J. DONALD, Ph.D.

### 1.—The Need.

Canadian governmental bodies, federal, provincial, and municipal, publish many very valuable public documents. The Canadian civil service contains among its numbers many very devoted and brilliant men whose work is extremely valuable and whose reports have great value for many private citizens and students of public affairs. Other reports are valuable because, though they are not what they ought to be, they are the best we have.

Canadian students of public affairs are greatly in need of a regularly published list of all these Canadian governmental documents of the Dominion, the Provinces and Canadian municipalities. Many citizens are not even aware that Governmental documents are regularly published, and most Canadians are quite ignorant of their value. Even when a person does want certain documents he is often unable to secure them, largely because he does not know where, when, or how they may be obtained. In vain, he goes to the average library, for the libraries are at best only partially supplied. In fact, the libraries are often in as unfortunate a position as the private citizen.

### 2.—Private Sources Inadequate.

At present, there are three chief sources of information respecting governmental publications: firstly, the lists of publications of particular administrative departments; secondly, the review of historical publications relating to Canada, and thirdly, the Blue Book supplement of the "New Statesman," published in England. The first appear from time to time on the front or back pages of all publications of the department or bureau, or, if the list is too large, it is published as a separate document. The Province of Saskatchewan has broken new ground by publishing monthly a booklet describing its general activities, and one may add that in recent years there has been published in the Canada Year Book a valuable list of public documents published annually by the Dominion Government.

But as this system of publishing lists of public documents has not been uniformly adopted and as it does not provide a central clearing house of information, it is quite inadequate.

The second source of information, the Review, published annually by the Library of the University of Toronto, attempts to list and review all books and publications relating to Canada. This, too, is deficient in that it is not sufficiently comprehensive. Not all federal documents are received for review and most provincial and all municipal documents escape notice. As many of the documents that are received are of technical rather than historical interest, they are practically, if not altogether, ignored. While the Annual is remarkably good and extremely valuable, all circumstances considered, obviously it cannot be a complete index of governmental publications. As it is published only once a year, the information it contains is usually belated. While the publication of a quarterly, by the University, would render bibliography more timely, the quarterly would probably be devoted to purely historical articles and bibliography. We must, therefore, look elsewhere than to this private source for a solution of this bibliographical problem. The third, the Blue Book Supplement, is similarly defective and for much the same reasons.

### 3.—A Governmental Duty.

As we have already pointed out, we cannot expect any private agency like the University of Toronto library, (which I think would be glad to be rid of what has now become a burden) to conduct this service. Likewise, a list published by a provincial library would be unsatisfactory since so far as citizens of other provinces are concerned, such a document

would be in a sense a private publication. No city library has the fund or the equipment for such a comprehensive enterprise. Furthermore, as we shall see, the scheme that should be adopted ought to include features which some Dominion agency would be best able to provide.

In this question, as in many others, Canada can learn from other countries. In England, P. S. King & Co., who deal in English public documents, publish a fairly comprehensive list. The United States has, however, accomplished the purpose in a much more satisfactory way, by publishing through the Library of Congress at Washington, a "Monthly Catalogue of United States Public Documents," and a "Monthly List of State Publications," which are sold to subscribers at \$1.10 and .50 respectively per year. This is the scheme which we believe the Canadian Government should adopt through the Parliamentary Library at Ottawa.

### 4.—Details of the Plan.

The American system should, however, be improved and extended in several details. In the first place, the Ottawa Library should make a supreme effort to collect and list every public document published in Canada. This is no small task, for municipal documents in particular, are very elusive, at least so the experience of such a library as the Municipal Reference Library of New York City, the best in the United States, shows. In this regard, the Canadian system would be in advance of the American which does not include Municipal documents.

Secondly, the list should be published each month with an index at the end of the year. Timely information is the most valuable. This would probably be warranted by the fact that only one series covering not only the federal and provincial, but also the municipal field would be published.

The additional service that would be rendered by working out an adequate classification of documents could hardly be exaggerated. Such a classification should not be finally determined upon until all interests concerned, leading libraries, heads of governmental departments, and the members of learned societies had been consulted. When this has been determined upon the books listed should have assigned to them in proper numbers, together with cross reference numbers. Such a scheme would be of incalculable value to librarians and catalogue departments. In fact, it might altogether take the place of a card catalogue system for Canadian public documents. Furthermore, an arrangement might be made by which all publications would have printed on them the proper number determined by the classification already adopted, so that a document might be assigned, as soon as it was received, to its proper place on the shelves.

How valuable the scheme suggested would be to librarians and students of public questions, is too obvious to need emphasis. Apart from this, however, the whole system of governmental publication would be of much more value than it is to-day. Instead of being the occasion of enormous waste of money, the documents would become virtually an educational institution; in fact, one of the most effective educators, because it would be efficiently organized.

### SAFETY FIRST.

According to a recent census taken among school children in Detroit it was found that out of 600 accidents 459 were caused directly or indirectly by automobiles. The automobile is a useful means of transportation but there is no reason why it should be a menace to child life, which it actually is becoming, not only in Detroit but in many districts in Canada. Traffic regulations are not stringent enough to protect child life.