

### **OED Computerised**

The news that OED or the Oxford English Dictionary is being computerised should be of interest to anyone who knows what it is or has ever used it. All its 22,000 pages with 500,000 definitions and usages are in process of being transferred to three compact computer disks, and the project will cost \$13 million, a figure as staggering as the size of the dictionary itself.

OED is the greatest dictionary of its kind in any language, and its authority is unquestioned. Compiled on historical principles it is a complete record of the English Language. Its etymological descriptions trace every word back to its earliest form and usage and track variations in meaning and use century by century with illustrations so profuse and elaborate as to remove any doubt about its history. Begun in the 19th century and initially called the New English Dictionary—the Dacca University library used to possess a copy of this early edition—it has developed into a tremendous challenge to lexicographers who have the duty of keeping it up to date. The latest revision was completed only about a few months ago.

The compact disks, it is claimed, will make it easier to handle. The multiple search powers of software would permit users to track a particular German-rooted word, for instance, in a few minutes and then tangentially inquire into how many such German words came into the language in a particular century. If you were interested in perfumes, you could track down in minutes all the words involving scents and also discover how many of them are French and how many derive from oriental sources.

Using the Oxford English Dictionary ever since it made its appearance has always been a delightful scholarly pastime, and that pleasure, we imagine, is likely to be enhanced by the computer disks. Exploring its contents is an education in itself not only because of the immense volume of information it yields but also because of the light it throws on the patient and punctilious scholarship which has gone into its making. The transference of the definitions to computer disks has needed the same patience and the same care for accuracy as the original compilation, and is a technological achievement of the highest order.