Sir Arthur Doughty, Shorthand, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson

by **ROBERT J. HAYWARD**

Archivists are often confronted with cryptic marginalia which would give some insight into the original recipient's reaction to the document's content, if only the code could be deciphered. Sometimes the message is made up of consonants; when vowels are added, the words come forth and understanding is possible. American President Woodrow Wilson, anxious to ensure the absolute secrecy of his own personal communication, spent much time encoding and decoding diplomatic telegrams. In his own secret code, for example, the code he employed for the Secretary of War was "Mars" and for the Secretary of the Navy "Neptune."[1] In dealing with nineteenth-century records, such as the papers of Prime Minister John Thompson, a common code found by archivists is shorthand. Shorthand was considered by one of its nineteenth-century practitioners, and a future Dominion Archivist, Arthur G. Doughty, as "a branch of study so important to success in almost every phase of commercial life."[2]

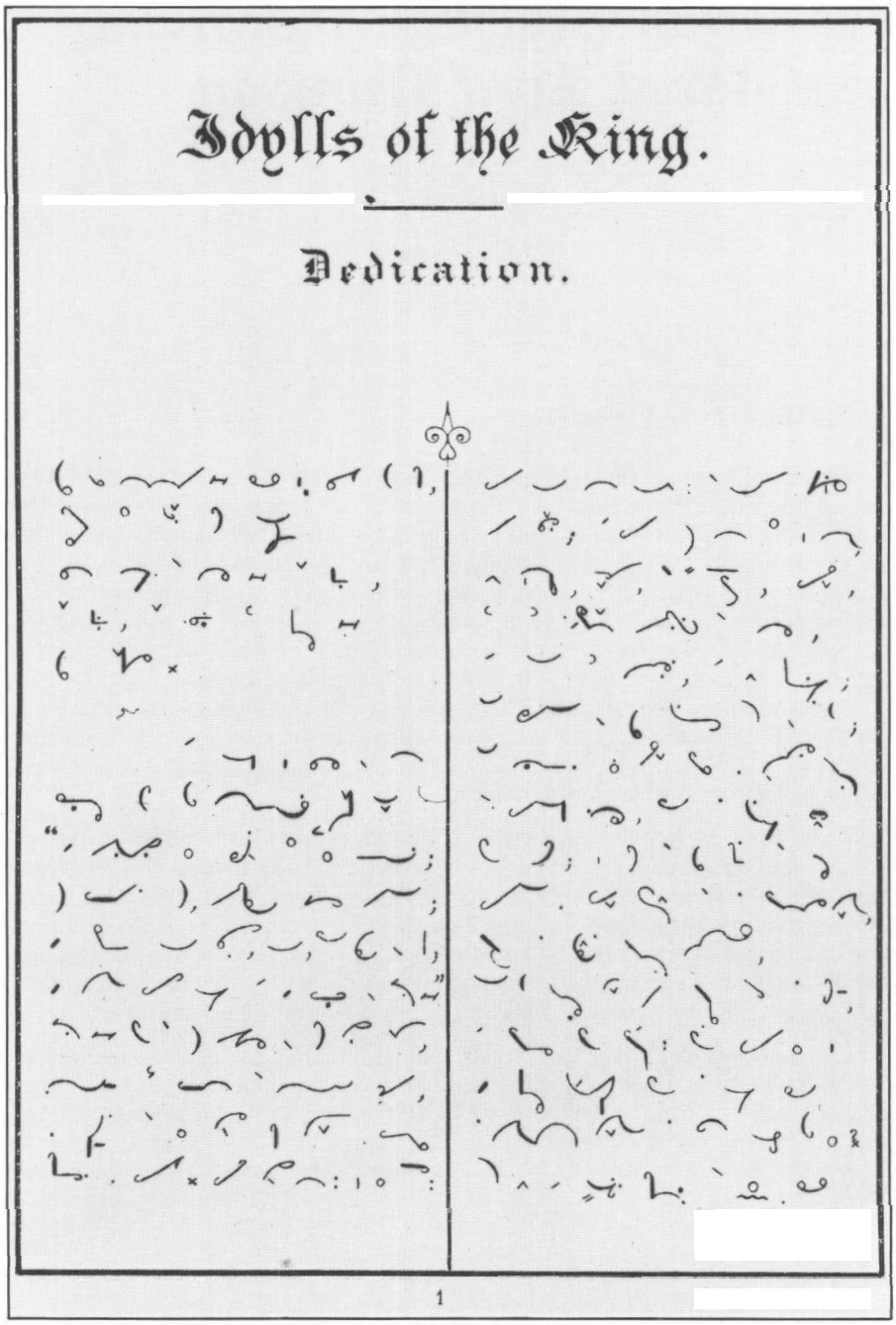
Shorthand has been defined as "a method of writing rapidly by substituting characters, abbreviations, or symbols for letters, words, or phrases."[3] As discussed by Eric Sams elsewhere in this issue of *Archivaria*, numerous shorthand systems have developed since their beginnings with the Greek historian Zenophon. Modern symbol systems date from the mid-nineteenth-century contributions of Sir Isaac Pitman and John Robert Gregg, with Pitman's system becoming the method most extensively used in the United States and Canada. It is also the system with which Arthur Doughty was familiar.

Little is known of Sir Arthur Doughty's life prior to his appointment in 1904 as Dominion Archivist. Brief reference is made in most biographical pieces to his background as a drama critic in Montreal and his post as Joint Librarian of the Legislative

1 Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 108.

2 Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Records of the Privy Council Office, RG 2, series 3, vol. 74, Order in Council (hereafter PC) 535, 1890. See P.B. Waite's article on the Thompson shorthand elsewhere in this issue of *Archivaria*.

3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, vol. 16, pp. 709-12.



Doughty's shorthand on the dedication page of Idylls of the King. Courtesy: Public Archives Library, Public Archives of Canada, C 102541.

Library at Québec.[4] But what of his early years in Canada following his immigration to the country in 1886 at the age of twenty-six? A glimpse is provided in correspondence between Doughty and the Government of Canada in 1890.[5]

Doughty, writing from Montreal in February 1890, approached the government through the Office of the Secretary of State with a proposition. He wanted the Canadian government to support him in a publishing venture. This was by no means an ordinary book he wanted the federal government to support; rather, it was a book in shorthand. And not a textbook on the subject, but a shorthand transcription of Tennyson's Arthurian poem, the *Idylls of the King*. In his letter to the Secretary of State, Doughty the entrepreneur stated:

> The copy of the work sent herewith is one which has been prepared in the interest of stenography, generally, but more particularly to present to Canadian students a work not only valuable as an educational one but one which from its illustrative nature would act as an inducement to the study of a branch of literature which is indispensable to success in almost every phase of commercial life. The execution of the work is *entirely Canadian* and is the first work of the kind published in the Dominion.
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> Seeing that it is calculated to confer a benefit upon a large and important number of the population of Canada I have addressed a communication to the Honourable the Premier with a view of its being brought before the notice of the Honourable members of Her Majesty's Government in Canada.[6]

Doughty's marketing strategy included a letter to the Governor General, to whom he had dedicated the book, in which he sought "a recommendation of the work to the representatives of the two Houses." Doughty advised Lord Stanley of the commercial importance of shorthand and that the book was "the first effort that has been made to raise the standard of shorthand literature in the Dominion of Canada." The Governor General was also informed by the shorthand artist that the work "will compare favourably with the productions of Great Britain and the United States."[7]

Doughty's shorthand version of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* had been published in 1889 by the Dominion Illustrated Publishing Company of Montreal and sold for eight dollars a copy. Except for the work's introduction, no longhand text is found in the book's one hundred some pages. As one contemporary report states: "[The Idylls] comes to us in a strange garb, being printed in shorthand."[8] "As curious a token of respect as ever was paid to the genius of a favorite author" was another reaction to the book.[9] Doughty took care to make the book attractive; interspersed between the pages of lines and curves are beautiful illustrations by the Canadian painter, illustrator, and founding member of the

4 Standard reference sources are *Who's Who in Canada* (Toronto, 1931); *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, third series, vol. 31, 1937, pp. xiii-xvi; and Ian E. Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives, 1904 to 1935," (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1973).

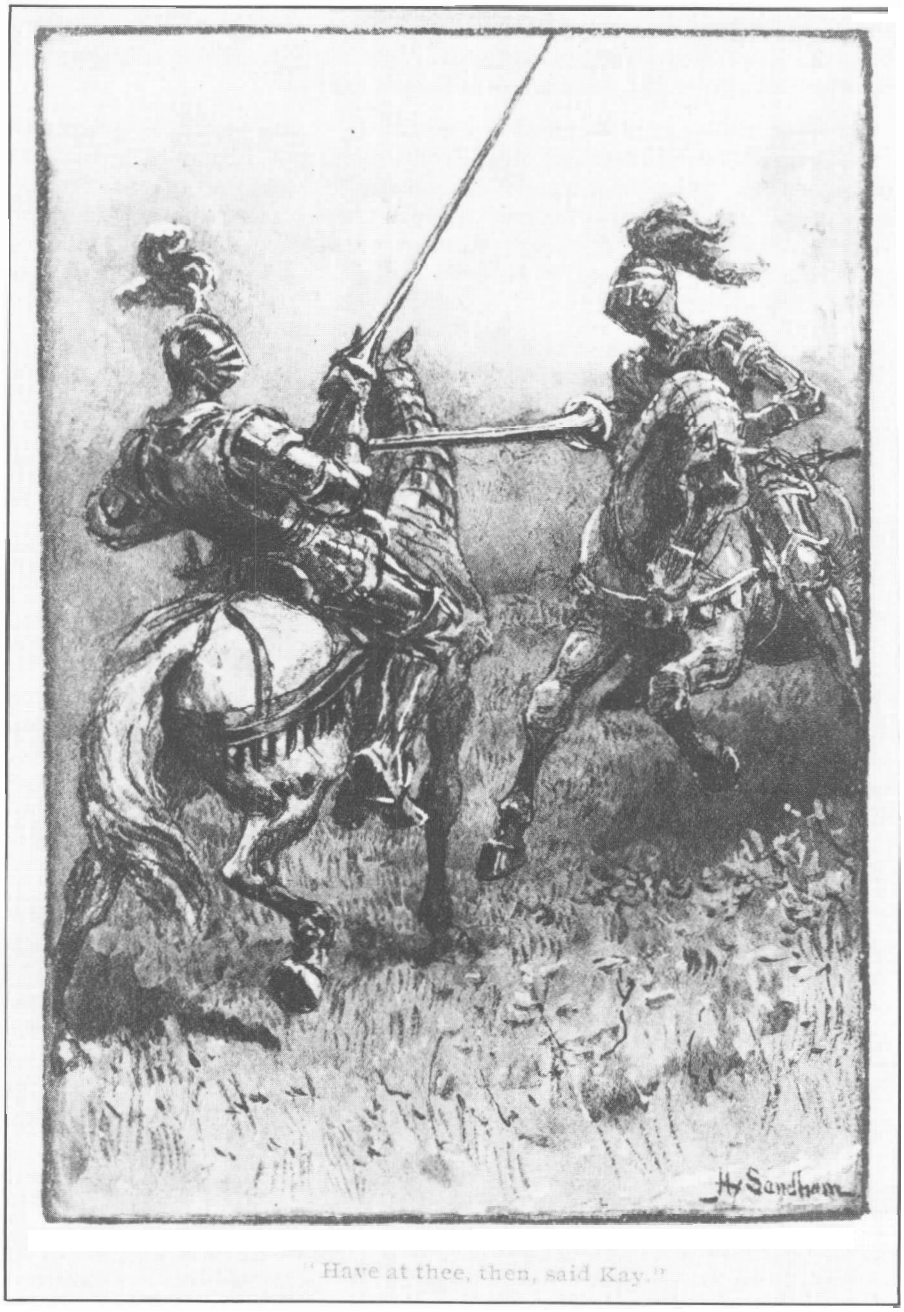
5 PAC, PC 535, 1890.

6 PAC, PC 535, 1890, A.G. Doughty to Secretary of State, 22 February 1890. Emphasis in original.

7 *Ibid.*, A.G. Doughty to Governor General, 22 February 1890.

8 PAC, PC 535, 1890.

9 As quoted in Arthur G. Doughty, *Nugae Canorae* (Portland, Maine, 1897), endleaf.



One of the seven illustrations prepared by the Montreal artist Henry Sandham for Doughty's shorthand version of Tennyson's Idylls of the King. *The plates, prepared from watercolours, were described as "things of beauty."* Courtesy: Public Archives Library, Public Archives of Canada, C 102451.

Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Henry Sandham.[10] According to Doughty, there were also "many editions of Tennyson in phonographic characters, the principal being a large quarto edition of the 'Idylls of the King,' illustrated with many fine plates, which the poet greatly admired. (Montreal, 1889)."[11] The "principal" edition mentioned was, of course, Doughty's own version.

Idylls was not Doughty's first experiment with "literature shorthand," as he had previously produced a shorthand version of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. The choice of Tennyson for this particular manner of presentation was no doubt the result of Doughty's student days at New Inn Hall, Oxford. Doughty was a devotee of Tennyson. He wrote and had published several books of poetry which in theme and structure were Tennysonian.[12] One of Dougthy's poems entitled "Crossing the Bar" is acknowledged by him as being "in imitation of Tennyson"[13] and at least two of Doughty's poetic contributions have Tennyson as their subject.[14] There was also the revival and adaptation in Victorian Britain and throughout the Empire from the late eighteenth century until the First World War of the code of medieval chivalry, of knights, castles, armour, heraldry, of medieval art and literature. Furthermore, the ideals of chivalry and Empire were linked by Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King*. He prefaced them with an ode to Queen Victoria which urged that the Empire should not be dismembered, and praised Lord Dufferin for speaking up in favour of keeping Canada within it.[15] Doughty was aware and part of these cultural developments. In his biographical work on Tennyson, Doughty wrote that "the poetic muse is not alone in her devotion to the spirit of romance which pervades the Arthurian legends. The sister arts of painting and music in the nineteenth century have felt their fascination; but to Tennyson alone belongs the honour of having revived, beautified and adorned them in epic form."[16]

To Doughty the *Idylls* was a "marvellous composition — epical, lyrical and idyllic."[17] He interpreted Tennyson's poem as a "wonderful picture of human life in which the poet paints the heights of love, the depths of sin, the beauty of truth, the nobility of manhood, the purity of womanhood, the effect of evil, the influence of good, harmonizing and elevating all that is 'lovely and of good report,' and pointing through all that 'one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves.' "[18] Doughty was also in sympathy with the visionary, idealistic experience expressed in Tennyson's works. No clearer statement of this spirit can be found than that of Doughty's review of Tennyson's "The Forresters," in which he states:

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10 Born in Montreal in 1842, Sandham joined William Notman's photographic firm as an apprentice and studied painting with John A. Fraser, Otto Jacobi, and Adolphe Vogt. In the 1880s and 1890s, Sandham's illustrations were found in *Picturesque Canada* and in American magazines such as *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and *The Century*. In addition to providing illustrations for Doughty's book, Sandham provided illustrations for Poe's *Lenore* and Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and *Glimpse of California and the Missions*. He died in England in 1910. For further details see PAC, Picture Division, Reference File 705-185.

11 Arthur G. Doughty, *The Life and Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson* (London, 1893), p. 62.

12 Two publications of Doughty's poetry are *Rose Leaves. A Collection of Simple Verse Written on Various Occasions*, (London, 1894); and *Nugae Canorae* (Portland, Maine, 1897).

13 *Nugae Canorae*, p. xliv.

14 *Rose Leaves*, "To Alfred, Lord Tennyson," pp. 53-54; and "The Passing of Tennyson," pp. 70-71.

15 Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981), p. 227.

16 Doughty, *The Life and Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, p. 116.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

> The impulse that underlies this piece is the old, incessant, undying aspiration, that men and women of the best order feel, for some avenue of escape, some relief, some refuge, from the sickening tyranny of convention and the common place, and from the overwhelming mystery with which all human life is haunted and oppressed. A man who walks about in a forest is not necessarily free. He may be as great a slave as anybody. But the exalted imagination dwells upon his way of life as emancipated, breezy, natural, and right. That way, to the tired thinker, lies peace and joy. There if anywhere, as he fancies, he might escape from all the wrongs of the world, all the problems of society, *all the business of recording and analyzing and ticketing mankind, all the clash of selfish systems that people call their history*, and all that gabble that they call their literature.[19]

The union of literature and shorthand was discussed by Doughty in his preface to the *Idylls*:

> In the manifold progress of our time Shorthand can claim an honourable share. Step by step it has advanced with the general movement of invention and adaptation, until its merits once known to a small circle of earnest reformers, are now recognized throughout the broad domain of Civilization. Its progress has been materially furthered by the publication of Literature at once choice and popular, in magazines and books. Masterpieces of English speech, such as Bacon's Essays, Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress, Gullivers' Travels, and the Vicar of Wakefield, have lightened the learners' toil by winning his best thought, and adding dignity and beauty to what might otherwise have proved a monotonous task.
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> A still higher flight was taken when the Laureate's name appeared on the title page of a shorthand work. The music of "In Memoriam" has already been set to stenographic notation. In now presenting the Idylls of the King in the same characters, to the cultivated reader, the Editor hopes that, in thus becoming the handmaid of Lord Tennyson's muse, Shorthand may gain some reflected glory from so ennobling a service — a service with which Art has deemed it a privilege to be associated.[20]

A contemporary review of Doughty's work echoed Doughty's concern that shorthand was indispensable for the educated person:

> We need scarcely say that it was a task of no slight difficulty and of extreme delicacy, requiring a thorough knowledge of the tachygraphic art and the utmost patience and pains taking at every stage of its progress. A difference of a hair's breadth in any of these graceful lines and curves would mar the sense, render nugatory the labor of months, and impair, if not destroy, the value of the volume. Adepts in shorthand pronounce it a marvel of accuracy and taste. To the uninitiated, these fair pages must cause regret at their inability to decipher them. They need not despair, however — especially if they are young — of one day possessing the key to their meaning. One object

19 *Ibid.*, p. 171-72. Emphasis added; this passage reads much like the job description of an archivist! Doughty's posting as Dominion Archivist was eleven years away.

20 Arthur G. Doughty, *The Idylls of the King by Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, in Shorthand, (Montreal, 1889).

> of the work is, indeed, to set the advantages of shorthand before the world in a new and attractive form. Our age is essentially and, for many reasons, necessarily, an age of short cuts, of compendious and time-saving methods. It has given birth to a host of devices, in every department of human effort, for the economy of energy, the lessening of distance, the alleviation of the strain of toil. Of these inventions few have been more prized than those successive improvements which have brought shorthand to its present perfection.
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> Shorthand writers are no longer confined to the newspaper press or to departments of state. Hundreds of persons of both sexes find it profitable to master its mysteries, sure of employment in the ranks of business and the professions. To secretaries it is no longer an accomplishment — it is indispensable. The lawyer, the clergyman, the physician, the man of science — all who have occasion at times to take down rapidly, verbatim or in outline what they might find it embarrassing not to recollect afterwards — are every year more and more devoting themselves to its acquisition. There is no reason to fear therefore, that the "Idylls of the King" in shorthand, will lack readers.
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> But this volume has charms which are sure to extend its circulation beyond the pale of stenographic experts. The illustrations of Mr. Sandham are, in every truth, things of beauty. Some of our readers have, doubtless, seen the originals, which have been universally admired.[21]

As already stated, Doughty's approach to the Governor General and the Secretary of State was part of an author's marketing strategy. The matter was referred to the Privy Council in March 1890, but no decision was taken. Hoping to influence the matter, Doughty again wrote in April 1890, noting that "the book has been authorized as a prize for the schools of Montreal under the control of the Commissioners" and that "this is further proof of [the book's] utility."[22] No doubt Doughty had employed a similar publicity campaign in Montreal where it had met with better results than in Ottawa. The federal government does not seem to have conveyed its negative response to the enterprising author. This did not prevent Doughty from continuing his sales campaign, for in October he applied to become an exhibitor at the 1891 international exhibition in Jamaica. In his application for space, Doughty gave his occupation as that of a "Mercantile Agent" and proposed to display two copies of the *Idylls* along with two original watercolour drawings from which the plates had been reproduced as well as a frame containing plates and a sample of the work. Doughty had problems getting his material to the shipper on time and it is unclear whether he actually displayed his materials in Jamaica.[23] It is interesting to note that two years later Doughty again approached the

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21 PAC, PC 535, 1890. One century after this was written the value of shorthand has greatly diminished. Its demise is attributed primarily to the high cost of face-to-face dictation, which first requires secretaries to speed-write and then type the correspondence. Using a dictating machine instead cuts the cost of producing a letter by 27 per cent. Except for taking telephone messages and minutes of meetings many secretaries never use shorthand and it is being used less and less as a requirement for future secretaries. See Pamala Hollie, "Short Shrift for Shorthand," *The New York Times*, 9 March 1986, p. F1.

22 *Ibid.*

23 PAC, Records of the Department of Agriculture, RG 17, vol. 662, docket 75387. I thank Tom Nesmith for bringing this reference to my attention.

government in an effort to "obtain the right to sell Canadian views and souvenirs" during the Chicago World's Fair. Again, it is not clear whether he was successful in this new venture.[24]

Doughty does not appear to have produced another work of literature in shorthand, although his literary interests remained. For example, he produced a book on the life and works of Tennyson in 1893, just one year after the great bard's death. This was followed the next year by a collection of "simple verses, written on various occasions" entitled *Rose Leaves*. Another of Doughty's poetic products was a work entitled *The Song — Story of Francesco and Beatrice* which he "illuminated on Vellum and had illustrations by F.S. Holiday." Finally in 1899, using only his initials A.G.D., *Nugae Canorae*, a collection of poems, was published.

Doughty believed in the importance of shorthand to the educated man.[25] He saw shorthand as something more than just a tool for the office. The union of shorthand with literature was the fusion of technique with culture, a fusion that concerns archivists still. By producing *Idylls*, Doughty apparently believed that there was a market consisting of people skilled in shorthand and willing to read Tennyson's *Idylls*. Since he did not produce another book using shorthand, one would conclude that Doughty had misread the market. How this entrepreneurial exercise was viewed by Doughty is now impossible for us to know, for no further records survive. With so much documentation existing on Doughty's career after his appointment as Dominion Archivist, it is possible that his earlier exploits were an embarrassment and all traces to it were destroyed.

The skills Doughty evidenced in this venture were not without consequence. His shorthand abilities, though not initially "equal to the requirements" of a position of stenographer and typewriter in the Montreal Post Office,[26] did aid his eventual appointment in 1896 as private secretary first to the Quebec Minister of Public Works and subsequently to the Provincial Treasurer, thus marking the start of a public career that would bring him to the Archives Branch in 1904. Doughty's later books also demonstrated his early knowledge of quality publishing, quite aside from his better-known historical and documentary collections published under the imprimatur of the Public Archives of Canada. Productions such as *The Fortress of Quebec 1608-1903*, limited to seventy-four copies and printed in 1904, *A Daughter of New France: Being a Story of the Life and Times of Madelaine de Verchères 1665-1692*, published in 1916, and the 1931 *Under the Lily and the Rose: A Short History of Canada for Children* are just a few examples of Doughty's books which united historical material with careful, quality printing and serious, artistic illustration. Finally, the *Idylls* project, which today seems curious in the extreme, reveals Doughty as salesman. This entrepreneurial spirit was an essential part of Doughty's success as Dominion Archivist.

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24 PAC, Records of the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, RG 72, vol. 87, docket 79839.

25 The term "educated man" is used advisedly. One must recall that nineteenth-century offices were staffed almost exclusively with male shorthand stenographers and clerks. This was Doughty's target market. For details concerning the nineteenth-century office see Graham S. Lowe, " 'The Enormous File': The Evolution of the Modern Office in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 137-51.

26 PAC, Records of the Post Office, RG 3, vol. 1124, Letterbook, June 1894-June 1896, p. 141. J.L. Palmer to Deputy Postmaster General, 25 September 1895. I thank Tom Hillman for bringing this reference to my attention.