

REPORT ON HISTORICAL ARCHIVES.

DOUGLAS BRYMNER, ARCHIVIST.

To the Hon. J. H. POPE,
Minister of Agriculture.

SIR,—I have the honour to present the Annual Report respecting the Historical Archives under my charge, and the result of investigations made this year among the state papers in Great Britain and France, to ascertain the character, value and extent of the documents relating to Canada to be found there.

Before, however, entering on the report of the work of the year, it may be permitted to recall, very briefly, the history of the origin of the Archives Branch of the Department. In March, 1871, a very numerous signed petition from authors and literary inquirers in Canada, was presented to Parliament, calling attention to the disadvantageous position in which they were placed, and expressing their conviction that the best interests of society in this country would be consulted by establishing a system with respect to Historical Archives, analogous to those in Great Britain, France and the United States. The petition was referred by Parliament to the Joint Library Committee, who, after careful consideration, recommended that it should be transmitted for action to the Minister of Agriculture, as the proper authority by whom the work should be undertaken; a recommendation which was adopted by Parliament, and in accordance with which the Secretary of the Library Committee transmitted to the Minister of Agriculture, for consideration and action, the petition which had been addressed to the House of Commons. On the 2nd of August, following, the Minister of Agriculture, was authorized by Order in Council, to make preliminary investigations on the subject, and to have a sum placed on the estimates next session, for the prosecution of the work, and on the 8th September, the copy of the petition addressed to His Excellency the Governor General, transmitted to the Secretary of State's Department was, in accordance with the resolution of Parliament, and the Order in Council, transferred by the Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture, as the custodian of all documents relating to Historical Archives. The failure to distinguish between these and Departmental Records, having apparently led to confusion, it may not be improper to repeat, that the Departmental Records are, by law, in charge of the Minister of each Department; that, on receipt or transmission, each document is summarized, indexed and registered. When no longer required for current reference, the documents are transferred to the Departmental Record Room, in charge of a departmental keeper, no additional indexing being required, the office indexes being sufficient for all purposes, and the documents being easily obtainable by reference to the register. On the other hand, the duty of collecting, arranging