

INDIAN HISTORICAL RECORDS COMMISSION.

PROCEEDINGS

OF

203

MEETINGS.

Vol. I.

FIRST MEETING HELD IN SIMLA,

JUNE 1919.



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CALCUTTA
SUPERINTENDENT GOVERNMENT PRINTING, INDIA
1920

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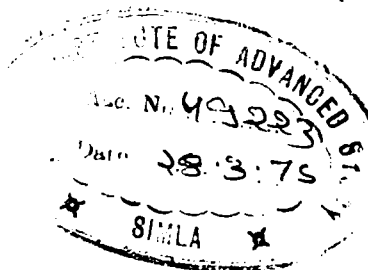
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Proceedings of the first meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission held in Simla in June 1919.

The Indian Historical Records Commission was constituted by Resolution no 77(Gen.), dated 21st March 1919, of the Government of India in the Education Department. The Resolution is reproduced in Appendix A to these proceedings.

The first meeting of the Commission was held on the 19th and 20th June 1919. It was attended by the following :—

President :

The Hon'ble Mr H. Sharp, C.S.I., C.I.E., M.A., Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Education.

Members :

Mr A. F. Scholfield, M.A., Keeper of the Records of the Government of India,

Mr H. Dodwell, M.A., Curator, Madras Record Office,

Mr P. Dias, Keeper of Records, Bengal,

Professor Jadunath Sarkar, M.A., Indian Educational Service (Bihar),

The Ven'ble Archdeacon W. K. Firminger, M.A., B.D., B. Litt., Calcutta,

Professor B. K. Thakore, B.A., Professor of History, Deccan College, Poona,

Mr R. H. Blaker, Keeper of the Records of the Government of India designate, acted as Secretary.

Mr J. M. Mitra, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, was also present at the meeting.

Professor Rushbrook Williams was unavoidably absent.

The following matters had been suggested as agenda :

Agenda for the first meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission.

1. Organisation of Records offices in India. The extent to which current records are in the custody of Records Officers.
2. Records in Indian States. Appointment of a representative from the Indian States as Member of the Commission.

3. Records in district offices. Their concentration in provincial Records offices.
4. Records in the custody of the High Courts. How best to utilize them for the purposes of historical research?
5. Compilation of handbooks of Records offices. Nature of the contents of such handbooks.
6. Rules regulating the access of the public to the records. Consideration of the draft rules for the Imperial Record Office.
7. Annual report of the Records offices. Special matters to be dealt with in the reports.
8. Method of storing records.
9. General programme for listing, calendaring and reprinting records.
10. Calendaring of Persian correspondence at the Imperial Record Office. Whether any special arrangement for editing is necessary by the Commission?
11. Investigation into the composition of the Old Coast Army.
12. Publication of certain educational records.
13. Provision of works of reference in the Records offices for students consulting the records.
14. Training of the staff of the Records offices.
15. Methods by which Officers in charge of records may best encourage research.
16. Preparation of a Source-book on Mahratta History during the 17th and 18th centuries.
17. Grant for the work of the Commission.
18. Place and date of the next meeting of the Commission.

RECORD OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

After welcoming the members the Hon'ble Mr Sharp emphasised the great importance of historical research and the fund of information contained in the archives of the several Governments in India including those of the Imperial Government. He briefly indicated the genesis of the Commission, the intentions underlying its creation and the scope of its duties.

The Commission then proceeded to discuss the matters on the agenda paper.

I.—Organisation of Records offices in India. The extent to which current records are in the custody of Records Officers.

It was pointed out by the Keepers of the Records who attended the meeting that the records dealt with in the different Records offices generally, included those of a recent date. It was not, however, felt that the work thus imposed upon the offices was an insuperable obstacle to the listing and supply of historical papers. At the same time, as public interest in historical records

increases there is likely to be some difficulty. It was thought that it would be unnecessary and impossible to confine the contents of the Records offices purely to what may be classed as papers of historical interest, although undoubtedly a certain number of papers of purely historical interest can be separated from current records and have already been so separated in Bengal. Another remedy suggested is the maintenance of its own records by each department for a longer period. This is worth consideration and may resolve itself into a question of accommodation. Such difficulties as exist can be best met by some increase of staff. This matter may receive attention.

It was felt that it was desirable that the records maintained by the Government of Bombay should be under the control of a whole-time expert officer.

The Commission passed the following resolution :

Resolution.—The Commission desire to draw the attention of the Government of Bombay to the need of the appointment of a whole-time expert officer to take charge of the Record Office at Bombay.

II.—Records in Indian States. Appointment of a representative from the Indian States as Member of the Commission.

It was pointed out that some of the Indian States possess valuable records of a historical character. For instance, valuable records dealing with the period of the Marquis of Wellesley exist in Baroda, Gwalior and Indore. The need for inviting co-operation on the part of Indian States was generally felt. It was suggested that a beginning might be made with the three States named. The Commission then passed the following resolution :

Resolution.—The Commission suggest that as a beginning the three States of Baroda, Gwalior and Indore might be invited to appoint either a single representative or each a separate representative in successive years with a view to making their historical records available to research.

III.—Records in district offices. Their concentration in provincial Records offices.

In Madras all documents prior to 1820 have been concentrated in the Central Record Office. In Bombay there are no district records prior to 1818 and the district records save some connected with land are still in the districts. The Surat Factory records have, however, been removed to the provincial Records Office. In Bengal they are exclusively in the districts. It is understood that the way in which the older records are kept in the districts is very unsatisfactory. In the case of Assam it is possible that there are records of importance in district offices up to about 1830.

Resolution.—The Commission consider that it is desirable that old records in district offices of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa should be concentrated in the provincial Records offices and that the attention of other local Governments (excluding Madras and Bombay) might be drawn to the desirability of similar concentration.

- (2) that the use of cardboard boxes (Cartons) for unbound papers, specially such as are in danger of falling into decay, should be encouraged.

The attention of the Commission was drawn to the existence of the deeds of properties belonging to Government and held in safe custody by the Solicitor to the Government of India. Some of these documents preserve important evidence as to the history of the town of Calcutta and its former inhabitants, and many of these are in a sad state of decay. Archdeacon Firminger pointed out that the Solicitor to the Government of India favoured the suggestion that they should be sent to a Government Records office for repair, and would be glad to be relieved of the responsibility of keeping them as it was impossible for his office to devote to them the care requisite for their preservation. It was considered that such deeds should be kept in custody by the Keeper of the Records. It was also considered that the volumes of copies of ancient deeds in the custody of the Inspector-General of Registration in Bengal should be similarly dealt with. The Commission passed the following resolution:

Resolution.—The Commission recommend that the ancient deeds in the custody of the Solicitor to the Government of India and the volumes of copies of ancient deeds at present in the custody of the Inspector-General of Registration in Bengal be sent for restoration to the Imperial Record Department and be subsequently preserved there.

IX.—General programme for press-listing, calendaring and reprinting records.

It was considered by the Members that for the present the programme of work laid down in the Government of India resolution of 21 March 1919 was sufficiently large and would take some time to complete.

Madras.—In regard to the work in the Madras Presidency the Commission were informed that the following programme was in course of execution:—(1) reprinting of all documents prior to 1702; (2) calendaring of despatches (1748-1800); (3) translation of the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai (completion of work already commenced).

Further additions to this programme are not at present recommended, as the work in hand is sufficiently extensive.

Bombay.—Owing to lack of information the Commission were unable to suggest any programme of work to be executed in the Bombay Records Office.

Bengal.—With regard to Bengal the following work is in hand: The printing up of the Council proceedings of several Council Boards and the Controlling Council of Revenue during the period of Warren Hastings' government. The Commission recommend that the work be continued till the whole series is printed as the series is important for the study of revenue administration as well as for historical research. In the opinion of the Commission copies of these records should be in the possession of the three provincial Governments, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Assam. In order to expedite the printing up of the series, the Commission recommend that, the introduction of the first volume in print being fairly adequate, no further introduction be included in such volumes and that where future volumes have not been issued and a series

has not been indexed one cumulative index should be compiled for the whole series. The Commission are of opinion that, should their proposal to the effect that the district records be brought to the Bengal Secretariat Record Room be adopted, the present printing up of district records should not be continued except in the case of Chittagong where they are in a most sad state of decay.

The Commission consider that there is no necessity of continuing the press-listing of the Bengal records as the method of dealing with these records should be that laid down by the Government of India in its resolution of 21 March last.

Imperial Record Department.—The Commission understand that the work in hand, *i.e.*, the index to the Public department press-lists (1748-1800), in the Imperial Record Office will be completed before the end of the year. There still remains a large amount of manuscript of Foreign Department press-lists which should be printed. A handbook to the Record Office is in preparation. In view of the amount of work in hand, it is considered unnecessary to enlarge the programme.

In the case of future publications it was suggested that the foolscap size should be abandoned, except where a series has already been commenced in that size, and that the size should be large octavo.

Mr Mitra placed before the Commission a copy of a letter from the Central Provinces Administration regarding the printing of a certain collection of papers by Tod relating to the Pindaris which have been discovered in the Central Provinces Records Office. The Commission recommended that the manuscripts be referred to Professor Jadunath Sarkar for report to the Commission.

No formal resolution was recorded in connection with this item on the agenda paper.

X.—*Calendaring of Persian correspondence at the Imperial Record Office. Whether any special arrangement for editing is necessary by the Commission?*

It was considered that the work should be continued as at present and that no special arrangements for editing were necessary.

XI.—*Investigation into the composition of the Old Coast Army.*

In regard to this matter Mr Dodwell reported that he had taken action in the matter and would report fully to the next meeting of the Commission.

XII.—*Publication of certain educational records.*

The Hon'ble Mr Sharp outlined a scheme for the publication of a series of selections from educational records and he pointed out that Sir Michael Sadler had interested himself in the scheme. He had been at work collecting such records for over two years and the first part was now ready for publication. These records were of course not prior to 1702, but they would be published mainly for their educational interest.

The Commission cordially supported the proposal, being of opinion that such a publication would be of great use not only to educationists but to the future historians of India.

XIII.—Provision of works of reference in the Records offices for students consulting the records.

Ordinary works of reference are already provided in their offices for the use of Records officers. As regards the provision of works of reference for students of history who frequent the records rooms it was felt that as their number was limited the question should be postponed till that number increased. It was added that large local reference libraries were as a rule in the vicinity of the Records offices and could conveniently be made use of by those engaged in research work.

XIV.—Training of the staff of the Records offices.

The Commission were of opinion that no special training was needed beyond that given to the members after they had entered the service of the Records offices.

XV.—Methods by which Officers in charge of records may best encourage research.

As regards the methods by which Officers in charge of records may best encourage research it was decided that Professors Jadunath Sarkar and B. K. Thakore should circulate a note for consideration by the Members. This, if approved, would be circulated subsequently to local Governments.

XVI.—Preparation of a Source-book on Mahratta History during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The subject was brought up by Professor B. K. Thakore. After some discussion the Commission passed the following resolution :

Resolution.—That the Government of India be requested to ascertain from the Government of Bombay their views on the proposal for a Source-book on Mahratta History during the 17th and 18th centuries and the possibility of obtaining pecuniary contributions towards the expenses of its publication from the University of Bombay and from the Bhárata Itihás Samshodhaka Mandala of Poona and other local bodies and public-spirited individuals. Should the Government of Bombay consider the proposal a likely one the Government of India might be asked to contribute to the production of the volume at Re 1 a page.

The Source-book should be in English and should contain English translations of original documents, summaries, etc.

XVII.—Grant for the work of the Commission.

The Commission did not feel themselves at present in a position to state the amount which they would require in future for the encouragement of publication and research as such are unlikely to be undertaken in ordinary circumstances in the near future. They would therefore defer the specification of any sum until a future meeting. At the same time they felt that, until the work of the Commission began in full swing, the money might more usefully be spent locally upon the increase of the staff of Records offices, the improvement of its pay and the prosecution of local publication and research.

XVIII.—Place and date of the next meeting of the Commission.

The Commission were of opinion that their meeting could suitably partake of a public character, that is to say, it was desirable that lectures and papers should be arranged at the time of their meetings to which those interested in research in the centre where the meeting takes place, should be invited. Such lectures, etc., would be in addition to the meetings of the Members for the discussion of matters which are connected with the Commission. The Secretary should at once set about attempting to arrange some programme for the next meeting.

The date of the next meeting may conveniently be the early half of January. The place would be decided by the President in consultation with the local authorities.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION.

Resolution I.—(Item 1 of agenda). The Commission desire to draw the attention of the Government of Bombay to the need of the appointment of a whole-time expert officer to take charge of the Central Records Office at Bombay.

Resolution II.—(Item 2 of agenda). The Commission suggest that as a beginning the three States of Baroda, Gwalior and Indore might be invited to appoint either a single representative or each a separate representative in successive years with a view to making their historical records available to research.

Resolution III.—(Item 3 of agenda). The Commission consider that it is desirable that old records in the district offices of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa should be concentrated in the provincial Records offices, and that the attention of other local Governments (excluding Madras and Bombay) might be drawn to the desirability of similar concentration.

The Commission also consider that even where the records have been printed the original papers are of considerable value and that it would be well to preserve them either in provincial Records offices or in local libraries or in museums.

Resolution IV.—(Item 5 of agenda). The Commission recommend that the note presented by Messrs Scholfield and Dodwell be circulated to local Governments as a guide for the commencement of handbooks.

Resolution V.—(Item 6 of agenda). Subject to the approval of the Government of India the revised rules, regulating the access of the public to the records, may be introduced in the Imperial Record Office and brought to the notice of other offices.

Resolution VI.—(Item 7 of agenda). It was resolved that Records offices should submit an annual report in the form of a letter specifying:—

- (1) any new accessions to the collections of records in the office (It is, however, unnecessary to report the periodic transfer of departmental papers from Government secretariats which are still 'current' and cannot be treated as 'historical'),
- (2) the collection of records catalogued or listed, whether the list has been printed,
- (3) what has been done in the way of calendaring, abstracting, and indexing records,
- (4) any publications dealing strictly with records that have issued from office,
- (5) the nature and quantity of documents mended, repaired and bound (It is not enough simply to give, *e.g.*, '560 original letters.' The date, condition, size and nature of the papers should be briefly described),
- (6) the number of 'search cases' (*i.e.*, requests for information or for permission to examine the records) adding (*i*) the names of the applicants, (*ii*) the nature of the information required,

- (7) any changes or improvements made in the method of preserving, storing and housing records.

Resolution VII.—(Item 8 of agenda).— The Commission recommend (1) that where records are tied in bundles the bundles should not be over-large, *i.e.*, not thicker than 10 or 12 inches including boards, and (2) that the use of cardboard boxes (Cartons) for unbound papers, specially such as are in danger of falling into decay, should be encouraged.

Resolution VIII.—(Item 8 of agenda). The Commission recommend that the ancient deeds in the custody of the Solicitor to the Government of India and the volumes of copies of ancient deeds at present in the custody of the Inspector-General of Registration in Bengal be sent for restoration to the Imperial Record Department and be subsequently preserved there.

Resolution IX.—(Item 16 of agenda). That the Government of India be requested to ascertain from the Government of Bombay their views on the proposal for a Source-book on Mahratta History during the 17th and 18th centuries and the possibility of obtaining pecuniary contributions towards the expenses of its publication from the University of Bombay and from the Bhárata Itihás Samshodhaka Mandala of Poona and other local bodies and public-spirited individuals. Should the Government of Bombay consider the proposal a likely one the Government of India might be asked to contribute to the production of the volume at Re 1 a page.

The Source-book should be in English and should contain English translations of original documents, summaries, etc.

Appendix A.

Government of India, Department of Education, Resolution No 77 (General), dated 21 March 1919.

The Government of India have been considering for some time past the question of making the official records in India more accessible than at present to students of history and of removing, so far as possible, any existing obstacles to research. In framing suggestions to this end, they have been assisted by the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Public Records of England and Wales. Certain questions arising from the application of those recommendations to Indian records were laid before local Governments. After considering their replies and consulting expert advice, the Government of India have decided to introduce the following changes in their own Record Office and they recommend a like procedure in the offices of the local Governments.

2. The records of India are kept partly in the Records office of the Government of India, and partly in the provincial Records offices. The system hitherto followed in their treatment is evolved from the practice followed in the English Record Office and consists in the preparation of :—

- (i) a press list giving a complete list of documents, with some indication of their dates and contents ;
- (ii) a calendar giving a précis of nearly every document of importance or a reference to some publication where it may be found.

Were full effect given to this system, it would greatly facilitate the work of students and serve to remove some of the difficulties which now militate against research. But the progress made has not been satisfactory and the system has been characterised as defective by the Commission in England. Press lists are regarded as too meagre. Calendaring is admitted to be a process too slow, too elaborate and too costly for application to modern State papers. Such criticisms of the method pursued in England have still greater weight in India, where widely scattered collections and paucity of workers present additional difficulties.

3. In supersession of this system, the Government of India have now decided that the best method of rendering the records accessible to the public will be as follows :—

- (i) The preparation of a list of the volumes or bundles contained in the Records offices accompanied by a descriptive handbook to their general contents,
- (ii) The calendaring of certain documents only.
- (iii) The reprinting in full of certain specified classes of documents.

By dealing with the records on these principles, it will be possible to discontinue the preparation of press lists except so far as may be necessary to finish a volume which is in hand or to complete a definite series which is capable of completion within three or four years. In the same way, when the preparation of calendars now actually in hand has been completed, no fresh calendars should be prepared except in accordance with the system now suggested.

Some amplification of the three new methods now proposed is found in the paragraphs below.

4. It is an essential preliminary that in each Records office there should be a printed list or catalogue of the volumes and bundles which it contains.

Catalogues and handbooks.

Such lists require to be supplemented by a brief *catalogue raisonné* or handbook on lines similar either to the Madras handbook published by the Curator of the Madras Records or to the more detailed catalogue of Orme manuscripts prepared by Mr S. C. Hill.

A student of history will ordinarily with the help of the printed catalogues and handbooks be placed in a position to know whether a particular office is likely to contain papers of the kind required by him. The offices already contain in a greater or less degree a series of manuscript indices to the proceedings, which have been compiled contemporaneously with the proceedings themselves, and these indices though often defective are utilized for tracing documents for administrative purposes. If a moderate degree of attention is devoted to the maintenance and where necessary to the completion of these indices, it is believed that when a student has ascertained the existence in the office of any class of documents of which he is in search, he will be able with the help of these indices to be placed by the records staff in possession of such documents as he may desire. By these means the Government of India hope to attain the object for which press lists have hitherto been compiled without incurring the loss of time and money which the continued preparation of such press lists would entail.

5. For the benefit of the general public and of students who are unable to visit the Records offices or to read the documents in vernacular, the preparation of calendars may be

Calendars.

desirable. But the matter to be dealt with in these calendars would be so limited as to enable the calendaring to be completed within a reasonable limit of years and would be defined under a pre-arranged system so as not to be subject to alteration by individuals. The precise fields to be selected for this purpose would be determined by the Indian Historical Records Commission, described in paragraph 8 below; but as at present advised, the Government of India would confine the preparation of calendars to the despatches passing between the Indian and the Home Government, certain series of vernacular records and a few selected series of English records.

6. The Government of India in the third place hope that the reprinting in full of certain records or selections of records will be undertaken

Reprints.

(a) by the Government itself, (b) by private societies, and individuals with financial assistance from Government, and (c) by such societies or individuals without such help.

- (a) As regards work to be done by Government it is worth mentioning that a certain amount has already been accomplished, though on no uniform plan. In Bombay, Madras and the Central Provinces, for instance, a large number of fasciculi have been issued containing interesting reprints of individual reports or special series of correspondence and a valuable collection of papers has been reprinted by the Punjab Government in ten volumes. Any series at present under reprint might suitably be concluded, but for the future the Government of India desire that except in the case of records showing signs of decay or likely to perish, such reprinting should be confined to records of a date previous to 1702.

- (b) The Government of India are of opinion that an arrangement under which Government should subsidize reprinting by private societies or individuals may suitably be introduced to meet the case of special classes of records, the determination of the records to be so treated resting with the Government or with the Commission proposed in paragraph 8 below. The publications thus subsidized should, however, be confined to copies of unedited records or translations of vernacular records which have not before been published in English.

- (c) The Government of India consider that publication of reprints without financial help from Government, if carried out by competent persons, should

be encouraged in every possible way, and all necessary facilities should be given by Government officers to the students who undertake it.

7. In addition to the steps explained above, which the Government of India think can be taken to bring the contents of the records to the notice of those who wish to use them for

research, arrangements may suitably be made by the various Records offices to grant proper facilities to those who desire personally to consult the documents. For this purpose a series of rules is desirable for each Records office, to govern the use of records by students. Such rules have already been introduced in the Bengal Record Room and where similar rules are framed for other Records offices efforts are required to keep them before the public whom they affect by communicating them to the Professors of History in Colleges and Universities and in other ways. The Government of India recognise that considerable advantage would attend the grant of free access, with suitable precautions, to the earlier records and they would be prepared to have the matter considered under the advice of the Indian Historical Records Commission. The Government of India would at the same time like arrangements to be made for a fuller interchange than at present of the publications of the various Records offices and a more extensive sale of these to the public.

8. The Government of India feel that in these questions they should have at their disposal a permanent body of expert advisers whose opinion would carry weight with the Records officers and the public. With such a body at hand for advice, they are convinced that the methods adopted would meet the real wants of genuine historical students. They have accordingly decided to constitute an "Indian Historical Records Commission" consisting of :—

- (1) The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, *ex-officio* President.
- (2) The Keeper of the Records of the Government of India, *ex-officio* Secretary.
- (3) The Curator, Madras Record Office, *ex-officio* member.
- (4) The Keeper of Records, Bengal, *ex-officio* member.
- (5) Professor Jadunath Sarkar, M.A., member.
- (6) The Ven'ble Archdeacon W. K. Firminger, M.A., B.D., B.Litt., member.
- (7) Professor L. F. Rushbrook Williams, M.A., member.
- (8) Mr B. K. Thakore, B.A., member.

The *ex-officio* members will be permanent, but the rest of the members will hold office for a period of three or five years. The headquarters of the Commission will be at Delhi and it would ordinarily meet twice a year—the routine work between meetings being carried on by the Keeper of the Records of the Government of India, Calcutta, as permanent Secretary to the Commission. The duties of the Commission would be of a purely consultative character; it would make enquiries and recommendations regarding (i) the treatment of archives for the purposes of historical study in all provinces of India and in such Indian States as might seek their advice; (ii) the scale and plan on which the cataloguing, calendaring and reprinting of each class of documents should be undertaken; (iii) the sums required for encouraging research and publication in respect of unpublished documents; (iv) the extent to which and the manner in which documents should be open to inspection by the public; and (v) the training of Indian students from the Universities in methods of historical research and the selection of competent editors and assistants for the publication of documents. The Government of India have also arranged to place at the disposal of their Department of Education, when the financial conditions improve, a grant of money, the distribution of which would be effected annually after consultation with the Commission.

9. In order to enable the Commission to follow the progress of the work in the various Records offices, the Government of India desire that each officer in charge of a Records

Annual reports of record offices.

office containing archives of historical interest should submit annually to the local Government concerned a very brief report containing information as to the work done in respect of cataloguing, calendaring, reprinting, indexing and weeding of all the older records and the use made by public of the facilities afforded by the Records offices. If the officer in charge exercises supervision over district records also, a brief note on the results of that supervision may be added to his report.

10. Among the difficulties attendant on historical research in India, the most prominent is the fact that documents are scattered, with the result that the student even of a single subject may have to prosecute his investigations at widely distant places. In Madras steps have already been taken to remedy this defect; district records previous to 1820 and, it is understood, certain other documents have been concentrated in the provincial Record Room. It is possible that other local Governments will follow their lead. The cataloguing and inspection of district records is in any case desirable. The larger question of removing the older records to a central office for all India has been considered from time to time, but has not, unnaturally encountered opposition. The Government of India accordingly make no further suggestion on this subject at present, though the matter is one which the Indian Historical Records Commission will doubtless consider.

Madras, Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, Punjab, Burma, Central Provinces, Assam, North-West Frontier Province, Coorg and Delhi.

Order.—Ordered that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the local Governments and Administrations noted in the margin for information and guidance.

Ordered also that a copy be forwarded to the Home Department, Finance Department, Public Works Department, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Legislative Department, Foreign and Political Department, Department of Commerce and Industry, Railway Department (Railway Board), Army Department, Indian Munitions Board, Financial Adviser, Military Finance, and the Keeper of the Records of the Government of India for information and guidance and that the Resolution be published in the supplement to the *Gazette of India*.

Appendix B.

Memorandum for the Indian Records Commission by the Ven'ble Archdeacon W. K. Firminger, dated 3rd June 1919.

In regard to the assistance which it may perhaps be in my power to offer the Records Commission, I have to confess that my experience has been confined to records belonging to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Assam. I have had little or no knowledge of the records of Madras and Bombay, or of the work done by the Records officers of these provinces. I have worked in my leisure time for many years past at the Imperial Record Department, and have enjoyed the friendship and advice of the late Dr C. R. Wilson and Mr S. C. Hill. I have also worked at the Record Room of the India Office. For the last few years, however, my work has chiefly been spent on the Revenue records preserved either at the Bengal Secretariat or at such stations as Chittagong, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Sylhet. I have been very little concerned with records of a military interest or of a political nature. The materials with which I have been concerned would serve for a history of the extension of English Government through the various districts of the Bengal Presidency (as it existed in the time of Lord Cornwallis).

In Calcutta the records for the period indicated are to be found partly at the Imperial Record Department and partly at the Bengal Secretariat Record Room—a distribution which might seem to suggest that the records have been divided into (1) those which are "Imperial" as relating to the Governor-General and Council and (2) those which are "Bengal" as relating to internal provincial administration. That this is not altogether the case may be proved by the fact that there are records of the Select Committee—preserved at the Bengal Secretariat (formerly at the Board of Revenue Office), and this Committee was even more imperial than was the Council itself. Moreover the immaterial controversy between Hastings and the majority overflowed into the Revenue Department, and this is why Sir G. Forrest's volume of Selections from what are now "Imperial" records is defective.

When starting work at the Record Room of the India Office, in 1911, I discovered that the Bengal records had never been properly classified. The history of the various Government Departments could not have been known, and perhaps was not available, when the catalogues were prepared. Mr Foster has, I believe, set all to right. I mention this, as it will illustrate the great difficulty the Commission will experience, until such time as it has before it a clear account of the materials on which it has to work. This difficulty, it is understood, is to be met by the preparation of either handbooks similar to the Madras handbook (which I have not seen) or Mr S. C. Hill's detailed catalogue of the Orme collection. The question how long it would take to produce catalogues of the kind would depend on the cadre of the officers employed at the different Records Offices. I believe Mr Hill's book represents at least four years' steady work on well-preserved papers, and if Government secure for each presidency a scholar gifted with Mr Hill's knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm, the situation would indeed be hopeful. My own feeling is that, taking into view the class of worker, the limitations of proof-readers, etc., in India it would be far more economical in the long run to print *in extenso*, than to make use of abbreviated methods which invariably involve a multiplication of printed proofs and an expenditure of the editor's time which, if that person be paid for his work, would be a serious loss.

In regard to work actually in hand, I would return to plead that the publication *in extenso* of the consultations of the Murshidabad Controlling Council of Revenue should be continued. A volume of Supervisors' Correspondence, and a volume of Consultations are on the eve of publication, and a second volume of Consultations is in print. I believe that these

volumes will be most helpful to those who have to prepare the catalogues of the remaining Councils as they will illustrate the origins of the several jurisdictions, and reveal the extent and the importance of the several zemindaries.

I had to commence the preparation of this memorandum before receiving a copy of the resolution of Government dealing with the purpose and scope of the Commission. I see that in the matter of reprints, Government desires "that except in the case of records showing signs of decay or likely to perish, reprinting should be confined to records of a date previous to 1702." This date, save for the exception stated, would exclude the reprinting of records belonging to Bengal.

As to records showing signs of decay, I may say that the Midnapore District records, when sent to me for examination in 1906, or 1907 were in so bad a condition, that it was scarcely possible to open the bundle without large pieces of the sheets pulling away. Some of the early Chittagong papers were in deplorable condition. These, of course, are the oldest Bengal District Records, those for Burdwan at that early period having disappeared. It is difficult to see how either the Provincial Government or the Commission could know of the condition of ancient district records, unless either an officer be sent on special duty to report or the ancient records be brought to the Secretariat Record Room. The Hon'ble Mr A. P. Muddiman's Report of 1904 is full of valuable information in this respect.

There are a number of historical records which should not be lost sight of, *e.g.*,

1. The records of the Mayor's Court and of the Supreme Court in its earliest years.
2. The Records of the Commissioners of Police in connection with the Improvement of Calcutta.
3. The Register of Deeds, Calcutta.
4. The Note Books of Mr Justice Hyde, in the Bar Library (the most important volume almost ruined by indiscreet "restorations").
5. The Note Books of Sir R. Chambers, C. J., Judges' Library.
6. The leases and deeds of Government Buildings at the office of the Solicitor to the Government of India. These require urgent attention, and should be sent for repair to the Bengal Secretariat Record Room.
7. The Register of St. John's Church and early vestry Records.

I would suggest also that the Commission do recommend to Government the preparation of Provincial lists of all European burial grounds with all inscriptions on tombs of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. Dr Wilson's book is a museum of errors.

Memorandum of points by the Keeper of Records, Bengal.

(1) Printing of records so far as they relate to the work being done in the Bengal Secretariat Record Room, *viz.* (a) District Records of Rangpur and (b) records of the Controlling Council of Revenue at Murshidabad and the Resident at the Darbar, 1769-74.

(2) The form of catalogues of records preserved in the Bengal Secretariat Record Room with special reference to the point of exchange of copies of records between the Government of Bengal and the India Office.

Letter from Professor B. K. Thakore to Mr K. S. Dixit, dated the 7th June 1919.

In reply to your Memorandum No 3040, dated the 5th June 1919, if I am allowed by the Principal, Deccan College, to go to attend this first meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission, to take place at Simla on the 19th instant, I wish to broach one

matter there immediately. But this would rather be in the nature of a preliminary query, whether a body like the Commission would take up a matter of that character for active encouragement and support, or whether the Commission would have to leave it as outside its province. A Source-book on Maratha History, in several volumes, is one of the most pressing needs to-day for students of Indian History. And for the students who do not know Marathi, *i.e.*, for the great majority, the material presented in the volumes, should also be rendered into English, the most important portions of it in literal translations, and the rest in full summaries. Such a book will, as already said, have to be in several volumes. Nor will it have a large sale. Now public bodies like the *Bharata Itihas Samskrodhaka Mandala*, Poona, and the University of Bombay, might be induced to allot some funds towards its publication. But their resources are very limited and they have to decide between many competing claims. If a body like the Government of India Historical Commission could take it up, on the ground that it was really a matter of all-India concern, and allot some funds for it, the undertaking would at once be placed on a hopeful footing. The example of the Commission might be followed by the University of Bombay and other public bodies in the Presidency and in the Deccan, and if it was found necessary and also thought otherwise unobjectionable, Chiefs and Sardars of the Deccan and other public-spirited gentlemen interested in such matters, might also be approached with every hope of obtaining adequate assistance from them, so as to bring out the volumes within a reasonable period of time.

Personally I should consider it a worthy opportunity to serve fellow-students of Indian History, if entrusted with the planning and publication of the work as its general editor.

The size of the undertaking would be to a great extent determined by the amount of support that could be anticipated for it. A book smaller than two volumes or 700 (seven hundred) pages in all would not be much use. This is the minimum. On the other hand and speaking very roughly, even six volumes, or thrice the minimum size, would not include all that is at present available of first-rate importance.

A detailed memorandum would be more or less of the nature of a Table of Contents of the volumes. The proper time to prepare it would therefore be after the Commission approve of the matter as one falling within their province and are able to recommend it to Government as one deserving of pecuniary support.

I am posting to-day a copy of this letter to Rai J. M. Mitra Bahadur, M.A., Assistant Secretary to the Government of India, as although you will doubtless forward it on to him, you can only do so through the proper channels, and in that way it might not reach him in time for the meeting of the Commission on the 19th instant. In fact, I am not a little surprised that Rai Bahadur Mitra's letter No 409 of the 9th May, should have reached me on the 29th day. I know of the case of a poor schoolmaster in a Native State who asked for a few days' leave of absence for his own marriage. He had sense enough to go away for his marriage in anticipation of sanction. For this sanction reached him twenty-six or twenty-seven months later, when his first child was just learning to toddle about.

Appendix C.

A Note on Handbooks to Government Records offices by Messrs A. F. Scholfield and H. Dodwell.

It will be found that all the records in a Government Records office come from some department of Government or subordinate office. The records from each department or office should be arranged chronologically and catalogued separately in that order. This grouping of records according to source will furnish a preliminary classification. It will probably also be found that the records consist of (a) proceedings, (b) other papers; this may furnish a further sub-division.

The next process is to prepare a description of each series (or sub-division when a series is sub-divided). In the case of proceedings of a department this should include (a) the period embraced by the series, (b) the origin of the department or office, (c) its functions and subsequent development, (d) the quantity of records (*i.e.*, the number of volumes, bundles, etc.)

In the case of other papers which do not form a series of proceedings further treatment is necessary, *e.g.*, the description of a collection of letters should give not only the period covered but also a list of the writers and some indication of the subjects. In general, a brief summary should be given of each volume or bundle of non-proceedings papers.

The handbook should contain a full and careful index.

Guidance and examples may be found in the following. Scargill-Bird—*Guide to the Public Record Office* (last edition); H. Dodwell—*Report on the Madras Records*. (It is understood that handbooks to the India Office records and the Imperial records will shortly be available.) A good example (though too full for exact imitation) of description applicable to non-proceedings papers will be found in S. C. Hill's *Catalogue of the Orme MSS. in the India Office*.

Appendix D.

Rules affecting private access to the records of the Government of India.

I

Note.—These rules are applicable only to cases where documents are required for *bond fide* historical research.

(1) The Record Office is open daily (excepting Sundays, the Christmas and Easter holidays, the October Pujahs and certain other festivals and holidays), the hours of admission being 10-30 A.M.—4-30 P.M., on Saturdays 10-30 A.M.—2 P.M.

(2) Persons wishing to examine the records of the Government of India should apply in writing to the Keeper of the Records (3, Government Place West, Calcutta), stating their office, profession, titles or other qualifications and the object with which they wish to examine them.

(3) Government reserves to itself the right to refuse or to modify any application.

(4) Inspection is allowed only in the Record Office itself.

(5) Permission must be obtained to take copies and extracts and to make use of information gained from the records. (Typed copies can be supplied by the Record department at the rate of 1 anna for 50 words.)

(6) Any person who uses the records for purposes of historical research and publishes works based on those records, is required to deposit one copy of his work as soon as published in the Record department.

II

(7) Persons not wishing or being unable themselves to examine the records should apply to the Keeper of the Records who will, if possible, arrange for the search to be undertaken at the cost of the applicant either by the Assistants of the Imperial Record Department or by some other reliable person.

III

(8) A separate slip shall be clearly written and signed by every person for each paper or volume he requires before any record can be produced. The slip is returned to him when he again hands over the record.

(9) No person may have more than five 'original consultations' or two volumes out at a time.

(10) Big folio volumes are to be placed on bookrests and handled as little as possible.

(11) No person may lean on any of the documents, or put one on top of another or place upon them the paper on which he is writing.

(12) No sort of mark, pen, pencil or otherwise, may be made on any record. Tracing is not permitted.

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ABBREVIATIONS:—**Dept**=Department; **Dist.**=District; **I. H. R. C.**=Indian Historical Records Commission; **I. R. D.**=Imperial Record Department; **Procs**=Proceedings

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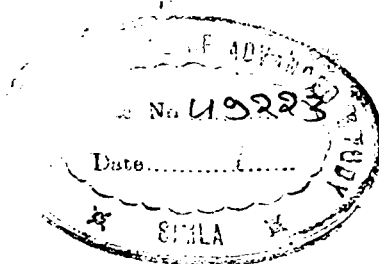
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