GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

An archives office is not only expected to preserve official documents for official use but also to make them available to interested scholars. The research students may and do claim access under reasonable conditions to all non-confidential and non-current records of the state and in every civilised country this privilege is readily conceded. Archivists of the orthodox school do not always admit that publication of records is one of their legitimate functions but in actual practice even the most conservative of them cannot help taking a keen interest in the subject matter of the manuscripts in their custody. To annotate and publish an interesting document or a series of records is going only one step further. In India the officers in charge of government records have mostly been professional historians and they have interested themselves not only in the compilation of reference media but also in the preparation of historical monographs and publication of records. The practice is not without its advantages. It helps to bring the original sources to the desk of the investigators working in the remotest part of the country and to save the fragile papers from the natural consequences of frequent handling. When the Indian Historical Records Commission suggested to the Government of India that the early correspondence between the Directors of the East India Company and their servants at Fort William should be published in extenso the recommendation was promptly accepted. The editorial work had necessarily to be entrusted to scholars of the Commission’s choice for the staff of the National Archives of India (then Imperial Record Department) could not possibly undertake the entire responsibility of implementing the whole scheme. The publication of this important series of correspondence offered one problem which had to be squarely faced. They could be treated either chronologically or subjectwise. The chronological treatment had one disadvantage. The letters issued and the letters received in a particular year often dealt with entirely different subjects and the Directors’ views on the questions broached by the President and Council at Fort William cannot be made available in the same volume. But few subjects of real importance were ordinarily disposed of in a single year and of all information about a particular question of policy were to be included in one volume the integrity of the documents could not possibly be maintained. It was therefore
decided to publish the correspondence in their chronological order though it may cause some inconvenience of reference.

The editors have kept in view the special needs of the beginners and they have discussed in details all relevant questions in their introductions. The General editor proposes to review the series in his preface to the first volume.

National Archives of India,
New Delhi,
The 14th December, 1948

Surendranath Sen.