PREFACE

This History of Bengal scheme was formulated by the history department of the University of Calcutta in 1961. It was approved by the University, the University Grants Commission and the Government of West Bengal. The grant was considered to be adequate. Work was begun in earnest. Planning, allotment of chapters and other details were settled very quickly. Then for more than three years there was no progress. Office expense proved to be a great burden. As editor I faced the gloomy prospect of being completely discredited. Then we appealed to our colleague Sri Nisith Ranjan Ray to become honorary secretary of the publication committee and save the situation. He agreed with some hesitation. But so much money was already spent that we could no longer maintain an office establishment. Though some of the contributors were very prompt there were others who informed the editor after three or four years that they could not find time. No one is perhaps indispensable. But it is always difficult to replace writers under such schemes at short notice. After repeated disappointments we have been able to complete the original project with only one important gap in coverage; there is no separate chapter on Law and Justice.

Apart from planning, allotment of chapters and reallocation in some cases the editorial touch has been very light. The contributors are responsible for their chapter content and their viewpoint. Though there are some contradictory views in some chapters it was not considered a part of editorial responsibility to reconcile these views. But it is a joint work of us all, not a patchwork or a disjointed series of writings. We were placed in such an awkward position by useless spending for three years that we could not secure the services of an expert proof-reader. The secretary and the editor took upon themselves the responsibility of proof-reading. It was also a race against time in the last stages because the deadline was 31st December 1967.

This hurry in the last two or three months is responsible for some of the shortcomings of this production. The chapter on
agrarian history was sent by the contributor in August 1966. He was then in England. He is still there. We could not send him the proofs and we could not wait for the concluding portion of his paper. He is still working on the subject and intends to publish his dissertation in the near future. He wrote to me that he was anxious to make changes in his article here and there. But this was not possible because the press had set it in type. In the printed pages we could notice some mistakes. 'Production efforts' should be productive efforts. In the section on Rent-legislation we should read while in Bihar Haliday for 'While in Bihar Dalhousie'. In the same manner in the chapter on Social Change we notice a wrong date. 1833 should be 1835. But we have not added an 'errata' because the list does not appear to be long and we are not in a position to make it exhaustive: some of the printing mistakes are obvious. As the contributor to Section ii of the chapter on Religion was unable to see through his coverage, the work of completing it was entrusted to the writer of the Section on Hinduism.

As this volume passes through the press I should thank all those historians who have contributed to it. The most eminent of them is Dr. R. C. Majumdar, the doyen of Indian historians, who had long ago edited History of Bengal Vol. I for the University of Dacca. Some of those who declined to contribute their chapters three or four years after they had agreed to write perhaps thought of the project as my personal venture. I should therefore be all the more grateful to those who thought otherwise and extended their cooperation. Late Dr. R. C. Mitra was the first contributor who completed his chapter. Unfortunately he died long before it could be printed.

Our thanks are due to Dr. Dipak K. Das and Messrs. Sukumar Bhattacharya, Ajit K. Niyogi and Bijan Goswami for their patient labour in preparing the Index. We should place on record our appreciation of the ready assistance we received from Sri Gouranga Press.

It was intended at one time to formulate another publication project, another volume of the history of Bengal from Partition to Partition, with the assistance of research workers and the cooperation of historians. The U. G. C. visiting team which expressed its approval of this scheme of history
from 1905 to 1947 in general terms, wanted it to be undertaken after the publication of this volume. But this experience of dependence upon the convenience of a large number of scholars, who have their many preoccupations and some of whom back out at the last moment, has scared me away from all such projects. I do not think I should make myself responsible for such a difficult venture after six years' experience of this publication scheme. I prefer to plough my lonely furrow.

My grateful thanks are due to my colleague Sri Nisith Ranjan Ray. He has more than compensated for the lack of cooperation on the part of some others. For the completion of this project credit should go to him and not to the editor. He averted failure.

Editor.