CHAPTER EIGHT

SUCCESSION OF CHIEF COMMISSIONERS.
CHAPTER VIII

SUCCESSION OF CHIEF COMMISSIONERS.

During the period from 1874 to 1921 the following persons were appointed Chief Commissioners and Lieutenant Governors.¹

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Colonel R.H. Keatinge</td>
<td>7 Feb., 1874</td>
<td>21 June 1878</td>
<td>Afterwards General.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>C.A. Elliot, C.S.I.</td>
<td>7 Oct., 1883</td>
<td>23 Feb., 1886</td>
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¹The India Office List, 1928, pp. 140-41 and the Report on the Administration of Assam, 1901-02, Part II, Chapter I.
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<th>Sl. No.</th>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>J.R. Fuller, C.I.E.</td>
<td>1 May 1900</td>
<td>1 Aug., 1900</td>
<td>Officiating.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Sir Archdale Earle, K.C.I.E.</td>
<td>1 April, 1912</td>
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Note - The Chief Commissionership of Assam was revived 1st April, 1912.

*Sir N.D. Beatson Bell was also Governor of Assam upto 2nd March 1921.
Lieutenant Governors of Eastern Bengal and Assam

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<td>2.</td>
<td>Lancelot Hare, C.S.I.,</td>
<td>20 Aug., 1906</td>
<td>21 Aug., 1911</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C.I.E</td>
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Note - The Lieutenant Governorship of Eastern Bengal and Assam was abolished on 1st April, 1912.

Let us look into the details of the occupants of this office

**Keatinge, Richard Harte (1825-1904)**, son of Right Hon.

Richard Keatinge, Judge of the court of Probate, Ireland, was appointed as the first Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1874 and held office till 1878.

Born on June 17, 1825; educated privately; joined the Bombay Artillery, 1842; served through the Indian Mutiny. In recognition of the valuable services and his gallantry, he was awarded the V.C. on March 17, 1858. Commanded irregular troops in Satpura hills, 1858–59, against insurgents; joined Brig. Parke's Brigade in the pursuit of Tantia Topi.

Keatinge held the following important and responsible civil posts and proved himself to be an administrator of considerable
ability. Political Agent in Malwa, 1857; in Nimar, 1860; at Gwalior, 1862-63, and Kathiawar, 1863-67; Governor General's Agent in 1867-70; acting Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, 1870-72; C.S.I. 1886; Retiring to Army he became Major General, 1884 and General, 1894.

Thus by dint of merit and ability he rose step by step to the highest position of both civil and military service. To Keatinge belongs the credit of organising the administrative machinery for the Chief Commissionership of Assam. He died on May 25, 1904. 2

BAYLEY, SIR STEWART COLVIN (1836-1926), Indian Civil Servant, who succeeded Keatinge as the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1878 was the youngest son of William Batterworth Bayley of Bengal Civil Service. The father and the son between them gave 106 years continuous service to India. Born on 26 November, 1836; Educated at Eton and at Haileybury, Bayley was posted to Lower Bengal in 1856; held lower appointments there; became Commissioner of Patna in 1873, succeeded in coping with the disastrous famine in this Division in 1874 and was rewarded with C.S.I.; Additional Secretary to the Government of India, 1877; Personal Assistant to the Viceroy (Lord Lytton) for famine affairs, 1877; K.C.S.I., 1878; Home Secretary, 1878; was appointed in the same year Chief Commissioner of Assam. In

addition to his duties in Assam, he acted for six months as the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal from July to December, 1879.

Lord Dufferin found in Bayley a valuable counsellor in connection with the Bengal Tenancy Act and in composing the racial antagonism caused by the Albert Bill in the final shaping of which Bayley had taken a leading part. He became Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in April, 1887 and administered its affairs with sagacity and firmness. His resignation in December 1890, on his appointment as Political Secretary at the India Office, was regretted by all classes of people. In 1895, Bayley became a member of the India Council, retiring finally from service in 1905. In 1911, he received the signal honour of promotion to the G.C.S.I. He died in London in June 1928 in his eighty-ninth year.

Bayley combined with a dignified presence and an old fashioned courtesy of manner a ready sympathy and wide interests. His conservative outlook in public affairs was tempered by his appreciation of the growth of national feeling in India, while his practical knowledge rendered him a clear headed administrator and a sound adviser.3

EUJOTT. SIR CHARLES ALFRED. I.C.S. was the son of the Rev. H.V. Elliott of Brighton. Born in December, 1835, Sir C. Elliott was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge and appointed to the Bengal Civil Service after the open competitive examination of 1856; arrived in India in November 1866; served in the N.W. Provinces, Oudh and Central Provinces; was Secretary to the N.W. Province Government, 1870-77; Famine Commissioner of Meerut, March 1877; Famine Commissioner Mysore, September 1877; Secretary to the Famine Commission (Sir Richard Strachey's) 1878; C.S.I., 1878; Census Commissioner, October, 1880; Chief Commissioner of Assam, March 1881; President of the Committee for the retrenchment of public expenditure 1886; K.C.S.I., 1887. Member of the Governor General's Council (in charge of P.W.D.) 1887-90; Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 1890-95.

His important writings had been the "Chronicles of Unag", the Reports on the Mysore Famine, 1879, Famine Commission 1880, and Finance Commission 1887. Since his retirement in 1895, he had been Finance Member of the London School Board, and Member of the Educational Committee of the London County Council. Throughout his career, Sir Charles Elliott laboured with great energy and ability in his various charges, and made reputation as an expert in Settlement, Famine, Finance and Education.

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Dictionary of Indian Biography, p. 136.
WARD, SIR WILLIAM KESKINNE, I.C.S., was the son of Hon. John Petty Ward, brother of third Viscount Bangor, Born 1838, educated at Trinity College, Cambridge; entered Bengal Civil Service, 1861; Judicial Commissioner of Lower Burmah, 1888-91; Chief Commissioner of Assam, officiating 1883 and 1886, and substantively 1891-96, K.C.S.I., 1896.

FITZPATRICK, SIR DENNIS (1837-1920), Indian Civil servant, was born 26 August 1837 in Dublin, the second son of Thomas Fitzpatrick, M.D. of Dublin. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, he passed the open examination for the Indian Civil Service in 1858 and was posted in the following year as Assistant magistrate at Delhi. His natural bent for the law and his grasp of complicated detail attracted notice and he was sent on legal duty in London for four years which he utilised to the full. He returned to India with an established legal reputation, which was further enhanced by his tenure of the offices of the Deputy Secretary (1874-1876) and Secretary (1877-1885) and Judge of the Chief Court of Punjab (1876-1877). His judgements have always been cited with respect.

Fitzpatrick was, however, more than a lawyer and he displayed his all-round ability in the field of administration. From 1885 onwards, he held responsible

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6D.W.R. 1912-1921, p. 188.
administrative posts in rapid succession. Secretary of the Home department, 1886; Acting Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, 1886-87; Acting Resident in Mysore; Chief Commissioner of Assam; Promoted Resident at Hyderabad 1889; G.C.S.I., 1887; Knighted K.C.S.I., 1890; Promoted to Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, 1892-97.

He retired in 1897 and was immediately appointed to the Council of India of which, in 1901, he became Vice-President. Also a member of the inter-departmental committee on the naturalisation laws (1899); In 1911 promoted C.C.S.I. He died in London 20 February 1920. Fitzpatrick's greatness lay in the fact that he left on all who knew him the impression of a charming character, of inexhaustible energy and a mind of exceptional breadth.7

QUINTON, JAMES WALLACE (1834-1891) I.C.S. was the son of a wine merchant. Born in 1834, educated at Trinity College, Dublin; after open competition appointed to Bengal Civil Service, 1856; Served in the North West Provinces and Oudh until 1876; Officiated for two years as Judicial Commissioner, Burma, 1875-77; Commissioner of a Division in North West Province and Oudh; Additional member of the Governor General's Legislative Council, 1883-84, and again Member of the Board of Revenue, North West Province, 1895;

and of the Public Service Commission, 1886; Gazetted C.S.I., 1887; appointed Chief Commissioner of Assam 22 October, 1889. 8

Quinton was murdered on March 24, 1891 by the Manipuris who were enraged by the sudden and unprovoked attack by night on the residence of Tikendrajit Singh, the Senapati and the most popular and powerful member of the court. 9

COTTON, SIR HENRY JOHN STEDMAN, I.C.S., born September 13, 1846 at Kumbakonam in the Tanjore district, Madras Presidency belonged to a distinguished family which served India for five successive generations. In 1866, he entered Magdalen College School, Oxford. At King’s College, London, he studied English History and literature. Entered the Bengal Civil Service in 1867, held numerous appointments until he became the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, 1888; Secretary in the Financial Department, 1889; Chief Secretary, 1891-96; Acting Home Secretary to the Government of India, 1896; In the same year, he was appointed Chief Commissioner of Assam which post he held until 1902 when he retired after 36 years of

8Dictionary of Indian Biography, P. 347.

service. He was awarded K.C.S.I., 1902. 

"Saturated with Indian traditions and Associations ..........," Cotton all through his official career did his best to do good to the people of India. Sir Surendra Nath Banerji had found a friend in him while he was Chief Secretary of Bengal. Cotton himself wrote "A spirit of devotion to the people of the country is not inconsistent with, and has never obliterated my sense of official duties." As Chief Commissioner of Assam, Cotton earned the good will of the people. He opposed all reactionary measures. He fought for the cause of the coolies of Assam against the interest of planters. The labourers in Assam were an ignorant and voiceless community and there was no labour member to argue their cause. As representative and head of the Province, he stated 'the case on their behalf as completely as possible and without reserve.'

Shortly after becoming the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Henry Cotton penned his famous Minute of 26 January 1897, on the proposed transfer of Chittagong Division from Bengal to Assam. Convinced by the forceful arguments of Cotton, the Government of India dropped the

11 Cotton, H.J.S. Indian and Home Memories, 1911, Preface.
13 Cotton, H.J.S. Indian and Home Memories, 1911, P. 269.
the reactionary scheme of his predecessor, Sir William Ward who recommended the transfer of the Chittagong Division from Bengal to Assam. "It is interesting to note that almost all his arguments were quoted in the discussions evoked by the Partition movement in 1905." Cotton tried his best to do what he could for Assam.

"The Cottons were a family long connected with India", and immediately after his retirement from the Indian Civil Service, he was called on by the Congress to guide its deliberations at the Bombay Session in 1904."14 The proposed partition of Bengal was viewed by Sir Henry Cotton as "a most arbitrary and unsympathetic evidence of irresponsible and autocratic statesmanship."15 He vehemently fought against the policy of partition and continued his efforts along with other members of the Indian group in the House of Commons for the annulment of the same as he had full sympathy and support for the growing sense of nationalism which was the most marked feature of the then Indian national life.16

Cotton wrote many articles on Indian affairs in The Fortnightly Review, edited by John Morley and in leading Indian Newspapers. His "New India" first published

16 Indian and Home Memories. P.316.
in 1885 and "Indian and Home Memoires" published in 1911 reveal his genuine and humane interest in the welfare of India. His name is associated with a first grade College which he established at Cachar. To the encouragement of education he devoted the best of his energies.

FULLER, SIR JOSEPH HAMPFILDE, (1854-1936), K.C.S.I., C.M.G., I.O.K., was the son of Rev. J. Fuller. Educated at Marlborough; entered the Indian Civil Service, 1875; Served in Northwest and Central Provinces in different capacities; Commissioner of Settlements C.P., 1885; Secretary to the Government of India, Revenue and Agriculture Department, 1901-1902; Officiating Chief Commissioner of Assam, May 1900; and again April, 1902; C.S.I., June 1902, Confirmed in October 1902, Fuller held the position till the formation of the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, of which he became the first Lieutenant Governor, October, 1905, K.C.S.I., 1906.\(^7\)

Fuller committed many blunders in tackling the problems, arising out of 'Partition of Bengal' in the newly created province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. He did not make any secret of his special attachment to the Muslims and aversion against the Hindus.

Lord Minto was convinced that Fuller's administration in Eastern Bengal and Assam constituted a grave danger. He showed courage and statesmanship in

\(^7\)Opic
de B.H.B. 1901-1920, P.159.
dealing with his tyrannical Lieutenant Governor, who submitted his resignation over the question of the disaffiliation of two institutions of the Calcutta University. Fuller was confident that the Viceroy would not dare take the extreme step of accepting his resignation. But unfortunately for Fuller, Minto took him at his word and accepted his resignation in August, 1906. When Morley, the Secretary of State for India also approved of it, the people of Eastern Bengal, particularly the Hindus heaved a sigh of relief.  

Fuller, though a reactionary, was an administrator of considerable ability and an author of repute. His publications include 'The Empire of India' (1913) and 'The Tyranny of the Mind' (1935).

BARLE, SIR ARCHDALE, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., I.C.S., was educated at Uppingham and Queen's College, Oxford; appointed after examination of 1880; arrived, 18th December, 1882 and served in Bengal in different capacities: officiating private Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor, February to March, 1886; Director of Public Instruction, April 1906; Commissioner, February, 1908; C.I.E., January, 1908; Chairman, Calcutta Corporation, November, 1909; Commissioner, May, 1910; officiating Secretary to the

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18Majumdar, R.C. Ed. The History and Culture of the Indian People. Vol.XII, 1929, P.98.
Sir Archdale was appointed Chief Commissioner of Assam, 1st April, 1912 after the annulment of Partition and reversion of Assam to Chief Commissionership. He was awarded K.C.I.E., January 1918 and retired from Indian Civil Service, April, 1918.\(^{19}\)

**NEaton-BELL, SIR NICHOLAS DODD, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.,**

R.A., Indian Civil Service (Bengal) was educated at Clifton Bank, St. Andrews, Edinburgh Academy, and Balliol College, Oxford. He was appointed after the Indian Civil Service Examination of 1886, arrived 16th December, 1889 and held different appointments in Bengal. Received K.I.R. Medal, 2nd class, May, 1900; transferred to the newly created Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, October, 1908; C.I.E., January, 1908.

Henceforth in the service career of Sir Nicholas, promotion followed one after another in rapid succession. He held the posts of Director of Land Records and Agriculture, October, 1906; Commissioner, January 1910; officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, April, 1911; retransferred to Bengal as Commissioner after the annulment of Partition, April 1912; became member of the Executive Council, Bengal, November, 1912.

\(^{19}\) *The India Office List, 1922, Record of Services,* p. 594.
1914 to March 1918; awarded C.S.I., June 1918. Nicholas succeeded Sir Archdale Harle to the office of the Chief Commissioner, Assam, 1st April, 1918. Received the honour of K.C.I.E., January, 1919 and K.C.S.I., January, 1921. He was elevated to the position of the first Governor of Assam, 3rd January to 2nd March, 1921 after Assam became a Governor's Province; retired December, 1921, after a successful career. 20

MARK, SIR LANCELOT, C.S.I., C.L.E., K.C.S.I., I.C.S., son of late Thomas Hare of Book Surrey, was appointed the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam after Sir J.B. Fuller resigned, 20 August, 1906. Born in London, 7 January 1861, educated Harstpierpoint, Sussex; city of London school; served in Bengal and Assam from 1879; held important appointment and post before his elevation to the position of the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1903-11; became a member, Board of Revenue, and a member, Governor General's Council, 1903-1906. Sir Lancelot was decorated for his service in India. 21

RAYLEY, SIR CHARLES STUART, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., I.E.O., Farr (1877), I.C.S., who succeeded Sir Lancelot Hare was the third and the last Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Educated at Harrow and Heidelberg; appointed to the Civil Service Bengal, December, 1877 and

20 Ibid. P. 515.
held numerous appointments including Political Agent Bikanir June 1888 and again September, 1901; additional private Secretary to the Viceroy, December, 1894; officiating Agent to the Governor General, Central India, July to October, 1898, and March, 1900 to June, 1901; O.S.I., January, 1903; Resident, Hyderabad, February, 1905; officiating Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, May to November, 1908; awarded K.C.S.I., June, 1908.

Sir Charles Stuart became the regular Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, August 1911, and held the same high position in the newly created Lieutenant Governorship of Bihar and Orissa, April 1912 to November, 1915. He received I.S.O., June, 1912; and G.C.I.E., June, 1915 before his retirement in November, 1915. Charles had the honour of becoming a member of the Council of India, from December 1915 to December, 1924. 22

The total number of permanent and temporary officiating Chief Commissioners in Assam were 10 (ten) and 4 (four) respectively.

Sir W.E. Ward held the post in three spells for the longest period i.e., a little over six years, the normal tenure being five years.

Dr. J.W. Quinton, who was murdered in Manipur had been in office for the shortest term i.e., about one and a

22 The India Office List, 1933, Record of Services, Pp. 513-514.
Among the temporary officiating Chief Commissioners, Lieutenant Colonel P.R.T. Gurdon held the office for the longest term i.e., about 4 (four) months while Brig. General Sir H. Collett held for the shortest term i.e., for less than two months.

Colonel R.H. Keatinge, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam belonged to the Army who afterwards rose to the highest rank i.e. General. Among the officiating Chief Commissioners, two others namely Brig. General H. Collett and Lieutenant Colonel P.R.T. Gurdon were drawn from the Army cadre. As a rule, the Heads of the Local Government of Assam during the period from 1874 to 1911 including the period of the Lieutenant Governorship of Eastern Bengal and Assam (1905 to 1912) were drawn from the Indian Civil Service, except in the case of first Chief Commissioner. Generally speaking, it would be found that they have been selected either from those who had already held important office under the Government of India, or from those who had already had administrative experience in any part of the British Indian Empire. Some of them had high academic attainments and some were authors of repute. One of them, Fitzpatrick had legal qualification of a very high order.

Four of the permanent Chief Commissioners of Assam namely Sir S.C. Bayley, C.A. Elliott, Dennis Fitzpatrick and J.B. Fuller were promoted to the post of Lieutenant Governor, the first two being posted to Bengal, the third to Punjab.
and the fourth to Eastern Bengal and Assam. One of them, Sir W. D. Beaton-Bell, the last Chief Commissioner was also elevated to the position of the Governor for the first two months of the newly created Governorship.

One of the Chief Commissioners of Assam, Sir H.J.S. Cotton had the unique honour of presiding over the Bombay Session of the Indian National Congress in 1904. He was a noble Englishman whose name is associated with the history of the Indian National Movement. He has been rightly described as one of "our British Friends" whose name and abiding services to the nation cannot be forgotten. It was Cotton who "visualised the ideal of the Federated states of India for the first time." After his retirement from the I.C.S., Cotton was the only Chief Commissioner of Assam who sat in the British House of Commons as one of its members. One of them namely Sir S.C. Bayley became a member of the India Council.

Of the three Lieutenant Governors of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Sir Lancelot Hare who became a member of the Governor General's Council had the longest but normal tenure of five years in office while Sir Charles Bayley, who had the honour of being selected as a member

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of the India Council, held the post for the shortest term due to annulment of partition. Sir Sampfylle Fuller was the only Lieutenant Governor who was rather compelled to resign long before the expiry of his term and service.

Apart from the strength of character, courage, the principal qualities in a Chief Commissioner were some familiarity with public affairs, some experience in administration and sympathy with the people committed to his charge. Administrative ability combined with tact and strong common sense and organising capacity of a high order were pre-eminentely necessary for a Chief Commissioner who was called upon to organise the administrative set up of a backward but important Province like Assam. A Chief Commissioner lacking in these essential qualities was apt to find himself at sea and could not discharge his duties and responsibilities properly. The murder of J.W. Quinton by the Manipuris was a typical example of tactless handling of the situation by the head of the Province of Assam.