

Confidential

119  
Mesopotamia Commission  
Thursday 14th September 1916  
Sixth Day

Members Present

The Rt. Hon Lord George Francis Hamilton, G.C.S.I., (in the Chair)  
The Rt. Hon the Earl of Donoughmore, K. P.,  
General the Rt. Hon Sir Neville Gerald Lyttelton G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,  
Admiral Sir Cyprian Arthur George Bridge, G.C.B.,  
Lord Hugh Cecil, M.P.,  
Sir Archibald Williamson, Bart., M.P.,  
Mr John Hodge, M.P.,  
Commander Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P.,  
Mr R. G. Duff, Secretary.

The Most Honourable the Marquess of Crewe, K. G., <sup>Sworn</sup> called in  
and examined.

2918 Chairman. Lord Crewe you were Secretary of State for India  
at the time when war broke out

A. I was, and I ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> been so since the autumn of 1910,  
with a short interval during 1911

2919 Q. We have had a mass of papers handed in to us by  
the India Office. I do not know whether you are con-  
versant with the number and contents of those papers

A. I am not sure that I am of all, but I have ~~from~~ carefully  
studied the appreciations which were made in the  
Military Department by Sir Edmund Barrow, and I  
am also cognisant of the general view of the Political  
Department, but I am not certain that I have seen  
absolutely all the papers you allude to. I have seen  
a great many

2920 Q. Now the first set of papers, chronologically, are the  
telegrams which were sent between the Secretary of State

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for

for India and the Viceroy prior to the outbreak of  
war with Turkey

A: Yes

2921 Q: Those are private telegrams almost exclusively

A: Yes, I think those are almost entirely private telegrams

2922 Q: Did you leave your private telegrams behind you when  
you left the India Office

A: A great number of them, not all I think, but I left all  
those that I thought would be of value to my successor  
for public purposes. I could not say that I left all the  
private telegrams; some may have been of quite a personal  
character between Lord Hardinge and myself, with whom I  
am on very intimate terms; we were school fellows and  
college mates; and therefore I could not say that I left all.

2923 Q: The purport of these telegrams is a demand, if not pressure,  
from the Imperial Government on the Indian Government  
to provide certain expeditions

A: That is so

2924 Q: Which are known as A, B and C

A: Yes

2925 Q: The Indian Government very reluctantly assented to pro-  
viding the force necessary for the expedition to East Africa

A: That is so

2926 Q: And the last telegram from the Viceroy sums up the  
situation, telegram 20 on page 8<sup>of No 9</sup> by saying "His  
Majesty's Government must remember that no such risks  
have ever been taken before. We are sending away more  
than half our regular army and we have nothing in  
this country to fall back upon. We cannot raise ~~any~~  
new forces because we have given up to the <sup>Imperial</sup> ~~Indian~~ Army all  
our new rifles and practically all our artillery  
and owing to number of our  
officers given to meet demands in

England

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England we are already very short and with no possibility of replacing them."

That is addressed to you. —

So that was the military condition in India before Turkey declared war against us

Q: What was the date of that telegram?

29 27 Q: The 20th September

A: Yes

29 28 Q: Now would you like just to make some remarks as regards private telegrams

A: I will certainly

29 29 Q: Because the Commission have been very much impressed by the large number of private telegrams which have passed, and which we understand are not necessarily filed, but are considered the property of the person who sends them

A: That is so. Speaking generally I think it is well to remind the Commission that the question as between the Secretary of State, on the one hand, and his Council on the other, does not arise in these particular circumstances. There have been occasions on which the Members of the Secretary of State's Council have thought it reasonable to protest against the use of private telegrams or of the power of sending urgent telegrams without their consent; but the whole of this subject comes under what is technically known in the India Office as the secret class, that is to say, matters <sup>concerned</sup> ~~connected~~ with war, among others, can be dealt with by the Secretary of State alone without submitting them to his Council at all; and therefore in the first instance that particular difficulty does not arise. But it may very well be asked by the Commission, why so many telegrams were sent privately, that is through the medium of the private secretaries only, and

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not in the Secret Department either in the Military Branch of it or the Political Branch. There were various reasons which I should like to enumerate which I think may be taken to account for the free use of the private process. The Chairman has spoken of those telegrams which passed before the outbreak of war with Turkey and before the expedition was sent to Bahrein. At that time, for obvious reasons, the maintenance of the utmost secrecy was demanded. We were not at war with Turkey and it was thought possible that war with Turkey might be staved off altogether; it was therefore more than desirable, it was almost imperative, to abstain from any provocative action against Turkey, and therefore the utmost secrecy in preparing these precautionary expeditions was needed. It has to be remembered that although by <sup>the</sup> Act of Parliament and for the convenience of the Secretary of State, and for the advantage of the public, the system of secret telegrams exists at this end, it has no counterpart in India. Those telegrams when they arrive in India are treated as ordinary official ~~communications~~ telegrams - no distinction is drawn between them and the ordinary telegrams which go daily in large numbers from the office, and therefore pass through a number of hands in India, including those of a number of Indian clerks, generally of good character, no doubt, but not perhaps imbued with the notion of secrecy which the Civil Service here are and it is therefore notorious that it is ~~extremely~~ <sup>exceedingly</sup> difficult to prevent news from leaking out in India ~~from~~ <sup>through</sup> one channel or another. That being so, and in this particular instance, the maintenance of great secrecy being imperative, all the telegrams, as the Chairman has told you, were in the first instance sent privately. Later on after the Expedition had landed at Abadan ~~that~~ <sup>part of the</sup> particular necessity no doubt ceased but there were

various

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various reasons which caused a number of telegrams to be sent in this manner. In the first place the maintenance of secrecy was still the overwhelming factor in the case of a great many. Then in some cases I expressed personal opinions, or asked personal questions regarding the capacity of particular officers commanding units, questions which it was held were not altogether fitted to pass through the Army Department in India. Then again, there were certain cases in which I thought it preferable that the Viceroy should place a particular question from me before his Army Department in his own way, rather than have it in the first instance submitted to him through the Army Department. I think I need not labour that; it is clear that there must have been some such cases. Then again, it was thought more easy, and more desirable, and I think my successor will also press this point, - to convey in this way the details of decisions which had been arrived at by the Cabinet, or by what was then the War Council and is now the War Committee. Some of those telegrams were sent privately instead of officially. I think it is also the fact that my very long and intimate friendship with Lord Hardinge, extending over more than forty years, impelled me to telegraph privately more often than I should to a Viceroy with whom I had not the same degree of acquaintance. I think that probably is so. But there is one more consideration which I ought to mention to the Commission. The Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, in September asked me whether it would not be possible or proper for him to telegraph directly to Sir Beauchamp Duff in India instead of <sup>communicating</sup> solely, as he would do according to custom, through the Military Department of the India Office. Well I knew that Lord Kitchener and Sir Beauchamp Duff had been

closely

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closely connected in India. During, I think the whole  
time that Lord Kitchener was Commander in Chief there  
Sir Beauchamp Duff was either Adjutant-General or Chief  
of the Staff, - he filled those two stations, - and Lord  
Kitchener told me that it would be a great saving of time in  
his opinion and a matter of great personal convenience to him  
if he could communicate direct with Sir Beauchamp Duff.

This was irregular and unprecedented, and the idea I think  
was not altogether liked by the Military Department of my  
Office, and it was certainly not liked in India by the  
Government of India; nor I think, - but this of course  
you will be able to ascertain at first hand, - was it  
particularly desired by Sir Beauchamp Duff himself.

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Q: But

Jas. J. B. M.

2930 2 But surely the Commander of Chief in India always has ~~com-~~ communicated directly with the Commander in Chief at the War Office here.

A Not with the Secretary of State I think.

2931 2 Not with the Secretary of State, but in the past he used to communicate with the Commander in Chief. It is that so? I was not aware of it.

2932 2 And I understand, - I think we had it in evidence from General Barrow, # in fact I am certain of it, - that the Council have taken the place of the Commander in Chief, what <sup>rather</sup> I wish to point out is that the Commander in Chief <sup>in India</sup> always has corresponded directly, or has had power to correspond directly, with the ~~old~~ Commander in Chief, and latterly with the War Council, but those communications were not private.

A No, they were not private, and also I take it they were merely inter-channels of information. In this case Lord Kitcheners desired to give certainly a number of orders with regard to the movement of troops, that is to say he might ask for certain units to be sent to Europe saying that he would exchange them for others, and he would expect then the Commander in Chief to act accordingly. Well, after some consideration I agreed on the understanding that I should be informed, - of course with the view of the Military Department of the India Office knowing, of everything that passed, and Lord Kitcheners <sup>fully</sup> agreed to send me a copy of everything which he sent to India; and ~~so~~ so far as I know no harmful results followed. But I mention ~~to~~ this because it showed a certain change in the custom of communication with India which also, I think, led to rather more private telegrams being sent from the India Office than <sup>would</sup> otherwise ~~have~~ have

~~would~~ have

~~would~~ have been sent. Those private telegrams I ought to mention were always framed in <sup>consult</sup> ~~consult~~ with the <sup>Military</sup> ~~General~~ Department, with General Barrow. I used to have long interviews with him every day, and in some cases he drafted the telegrams and I made emendations, or in some cases I showed him the telegram before it was sent and he made suggestions on it. And in conclusion I think I can safely say that a copy of every telegram which could be of use to the office for purposes of record was left there and in a certain number of cases they were filed before I left the office. But if I may say so, I quite agree that the practice is one which demands a certain amount of watching and it is certainly not one which ought <sup>not</sup> in ordinary times <sup>to</sup> be followed too particularly freely.

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I quite frankly <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>delegation</sup> ~~delegation~~ which has been made to us and come through the Press is that the function of the Council of the Secretary of State here and the Council in India has been in practice largely curtailed by this system being adopted. I dare say you have heard that.

A Yes, I have heard that criticism made

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I wanted to find out whether the system of private telegrams, which seems to me so very much expanded, may have had that effect. Just let us follow your statement. Agreeing with you that secrecy, - I use <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>term</sup> ~~term~~ in the broad sense and not the parliamentary sense here, - is advisable and absolutely necessary with regard to certain telegrams, surely it would have been <sup>very</sup> easy to have secured that secrecy by just a change in the machinery of ~~the~~ cyphering and ~~the~~ <sup>deciphering</sup> ~~deciphering~~ of those telegrams.



A I do not know whether it would have been easy for the Viceroy to make a difference of that kind if the telegrams went into his Army Department at all. I am not closely familiar with the way in which official matters are worked at Simla, but I should have supposed that it would have been difficult for him to avoid the passing of such telegrams through a great number of hands from time to time.

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Lord Hugh Cecil But is not the practice in other offices when a telegram is intended to be of special secrecy to begin by saying, "To be deciphered by", so and so, and therefore the telegram is sent very often by the Secretary of State himself.

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A I had not known that done ~~or~~ except in the case of telegrams sent with the heading "private".

Q But it might be done with official telegrams.

A Yes, it might.

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The Chairman Then they could be classified as A, B and C, whatever you like. But coming to the question of secrecy, as ~~to~~ you know the Viceroy's Private Secretary is the head of a Department.

A That is so.

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Q And there are a considerable number of clerks including natives in that Department.

A Yes.

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Q And every letter you write to the Viceroy, and every letter the Viceroy writes to you comes back printed.

A Yes, that is so.

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Q So that secrecy seems to me hardly to enter into the question here, because even in that Department to which these private telegrams come there is no security that there might not be a leakage.

A No, there is no absolute security, but I should

in -

imagine that the men in the Private Secretary's Department are ~~kept~~ carefully picked and <sup>the risk</sup> I think, ~~the~~ leakage is bound to be ~~perceived~~ proceed more from the number of hands through which the message may pass. Perhaps I may give an instance of an occasion when it was desired to ~~obtain~~ <sup>maintain</sup> the most absolute secrecy and <sup>in</sup> which we succeeded <sup>ed</sup> in doing so, namely, with regard to the announcement his Majesty was to make at Delhi of the change of capital. Only three people in India were aware of the impending change, and the telegrams in that case were all deciphered by the private secretary himself who was one of the three persons who, in the first instance, knew of the project.

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2941 Q Well now I should just like to look at the matter, first from the legal, <sup>and</sup> Constitutional standpoint and secondly from the administrative standpoint. You introduced and passed through Parliament an Act for the Government of India in 1915. A I did.

2942 Q The Act is perfectly precise and clear. There are only three methods by which communications or orders can be made from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy. A Yes.

2943 Q The first is through the Council, the second is urgent and the third is secret, and urgency and secrecy can be combined.

2944 Q <sup>A Yes.</sup> But there is not a word about private telegrams or personal telegrams in the Act of Parliament. A No, that is so.

2945 Q <sup>A Yes.</sup> The private telegrams that were sent practically amounted to an order and that order was hardly constitutional; I should say it was illegal.

A I think I quite see your point, but assuming, as it is undoubtedly assumed, that the system both

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of private letters and of private telegrams is not merely convenient but necessary, it is very difficult to ensure that definite instructions may not be sent to the Viceroy by a private letter or by a private telegram, and no distinction, I think, can be drawn between letters and telegrams in this matter

2946 c Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge: Did you have <sup>a</sup> different cypher for these telegrams?

A In some cases, yes. I instituted a private cypher with the Viceroy at the time of the transaction. I think that ~~probably is so~~ of which I have told you, that of the change of Capital. I ~~have~~ <sup>then</sup> obtained a disused cypher, one that had been withdrawn and of which a very few copies existed and it remained a ~~the~~ means of communication between the Viceroy and myself, it being understood that everything received by <sup>it</sup> would only be deciphered by the Private Secretary

2947 Chairman: You notice that in this collection of private ~~leg~~ telegrams the most important of all, which is the last one, which sums up the situation, N° 20, is sent back from India officially, - the substance of it.

Ayes.

2948 I Therefore the fear of leakage so far as this telegram is concerned, did not enter into the Viceroy's mind; he thought it necessary to send an official telegram. I quite admit that in times of emergency and urgency you must sweep away technicalities, but from an administrative standpoint ~~of view~~ do you not think the result of these private telegrams is to give the go-by to the Council both here and in India.

A It is very difficult to say in this particular matter how far the Council are or can be directly concerned. There is no obligation on the Secretary of State to convey to the Council at any time or in any form telegrams or papers, instructions generally, sent secretly under section 27, I think it is, of the Act. It is quite true that a number of secret papers are at the will of the Secretary of State circulated to the Political or to the Military Committee, but that, I take it, is entirely according ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> the option of the Secretary of State of the day.

2949 Earl Donoughmore: Because he feels he wants advice

advice probably.

A He wants advice and support, the valuable backing which is given by experienced people.

2950 <sup>the</sup> Chairman: But is it not the fact that the Secretary of State for India in Council has enormous powers given him?

A Yes, enormous.

2951 Q Do you think those powers would ever have been given to the Secretary of State unless he was associated with the Council.

A I think for ~~the~~ purposes of ~~the~~ war they actually have been given.

2952 Q Now coming to ~~the~~ purposes of ~~the~~ war, the object of the Act for the Government of India undoubtedly was to associate with politicians who might be put in the position of either Secretary of State or Viceroy, a number of trained Indian administrators with personal knowledge of India.

A Yes, that is so.

2953 Q And it was assumed, I think, that their personal knowledge would in times of emergency be of very great value to the higher officials, who, possibly, might have very little local knowledge.

A Yes

2954 Q Now take these private telegrams. One of the questions which undoubtedly <sup>was</sup> present to your mind, and must have <sup>been</sup> very present to the mind of the Viceroy, was the internal condition of India.

A Yes.

2955 Q Surely that is a matter on which the Council here

here, and certainly the Council in India, ought to have been consulted, because it would be the Home Department on whom probably the burden would lie if there had been any general disturbance.

A I do not think the Government would have agreed that the opinion of the Council as to the force which it might be desired to leave in India in order to insure the perfect safety of India in all circumstances ought to be taken into account when the despatch of troops to Europe had been agreed upon, and when the despatch of troops up the Persian Gulf also, became a matter of Government order.

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2956 I But on that point I think the most important and significant telegram that was sent during the whole time was one sent by you just when you directed the Indian Government to increase the force in Mesopotamia; it is No. ~~102~~<sup>102</sup> on page 21 of Book No 5.

Q What date?

2957 I The 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1915. The telegram ends up in this way: "The Secretary of State for War has pressed Commander-in-Chief in Egypt to return you at any rate a Brigade if he can regard Suez Canal as secured against present attack, but in any case you and Commander-in-Chief must understand that His Majesty's Government definitely order the strengthening of General Barretto's force at once, and that you are both

entirely,

entirely relieved of responsibility for ~~the~~ <sup>consequences</sup> of further reduction of Indian internal defences for this purpose."

A "You are both" - that is to say, both the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.

2958 Q That telegram is not made private, but it goes officially.

A It goes through the Military Department, yes.

2959 Q But that telegram is probably the most important that you sent during the whole time, so that the plea you put forward for secrecy, apparently does not apply here.

A But the question of secrecy does not, I think, always depend upon the intrinsic importance of the telegram; We should have had no objection, I suppose, to that telegram being read at Charing Cross.

2960 Commander Wedgwood: Is it not the fact that you would have found it extremely difficult to get the Council here to send that telegram; it had to be sent, and therefore you had to send it.

A It was not sent by me or by the office; it was sent by His Majesty's Government.

2961 Q The Council would not have agreed to send that telegram at all, I suppose.

A I cannot say whether it would or not; it is impossible to say.

2962 Chairman: Admitting that there is a good deal of force in your contention that you have to act with rapidity and with secrecy in times of emergency, do not you think that if the system of private

telegrams

telegrams gets developed it is very likely to invade other spheres of action in which it is not necessary that the order either should be so urgent or that the matter should be so secret.

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2963 A Yes, I think that danger undoubtedly exists and ought to be guarded against. I Because, taking now the different sets of papers here, there is a set of papers in connection with the medical arrangements in Mesopotamia; it is No. 8, Supplement B. This is subsequent to your giving up office.

2964 A Yes. I But a number of documents have been laid before us, and really for a year, I think, with scarce an exception, each communication with regard to the state of the wounded, and so on, was private, and in one telegram from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, - it is one of the last, - it says "Private. I shall be grateful if you will leave with the Chancellor copies of my private telegram on 27<sup>th</sup> and your reply of the 30<sup>th</sup> for reference if required." Does not that rather indicate the inconvenience and danger of the system of private telegrams.

A Yes, I am quite prepared to repeat that it ought to be carefully watched. I am quite sure you would not expect me to express any opinion about the act of my successor in having adopted the

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the system, because he will give you his own account of why he used it in particular instances. ~~But~~ I am quite prepared to admit <sup>generally</sup> ~~certainly~~ that it is not a practice which ought to be greatly indulged in. I have observed an account of a discussion which took place between the Duke of Argyll, when he was Secretary of State, and some of his Council, in the year 1874, and I observe that the Duke of Argyll had expressed a strong opinion that the system of either private letter or private telegram ought not to be used in order to keep anything from the knowledge of the Council, or to do anything behind their backs. Of course we should all cordially agree with that, and I think the system is one which requires careful consideration; but so far as its use at this particular juncture is concerned, I confess I am unrepentant as to the extent to which I consider it used it myself.

2965 I That is as regards the telegrams sent prior to the declaration of war.

A yes, prior to the declaration of war.

2966 Earl of Donoughmore: Is not the greater part, I think not the whole part, but the greater part, of the objection that might be made to the private telegram system the fact that unless, as you have done on your own initiative, copies are left for ~~that~~ <sup>your</sup> successor, there is great danger that the successor will not have

have the advantage of the discussions on important subjects that have taken place in previous years.

A Yes, I quite agree, and it is, of course, conceivable that an ill-minded Viceroy and Secretary of State might conduct a private correspondence both by letter and telegram, on all sorts of subjects of a very important character, and both of them carry away their private correspondence and do an infinity of harm, but they would both be committing a gross breach of propriety in their respective offices.

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2967 Q Is it understood, or, so to speak, is it an unwritten law, that copies of private telegrams are left for successors.

A Certainly not in the case of a great number of private telegrams; only if they are supposed to be of such public interest and importance that it is useful to the successor that they should be left.

2968 Q And then it ought to be done.

A But I do not think in the case of private letters they are left at all.

2969 Chairman: But it is at the option of the ~~receiver~~ sender.

A Entirely.

2970 Q He could if he chose, take away anything.

A I think my predecessor did. Did not think Lord Morley left me any private telegrams at all.

2971 Darby Donoughmore: And the same, of course, would

would obtain at the other end, in India.

A I have no doubt.

2972 I Perhaps it is more important to have the records kept there if possible than here.

A Perhaps I might give an instance. Lord Morley's and Lord Minto's most important official act was of course the administrative changes that were made in India by those two combined, and I have no doubt that a great number of private communications on that subject passed between them, but I have never seen or heard anything of any of them.

2973 I And even in a case like this ~~it~~ might ~~it~~ not be unfortunate. You have got a new Viceroy who has taken over in the middle of the Mesopotamian proceedings, and he may, for all we know, be quite ignorant of the correspondence between his predecessor and yourself or your successor, in fact he has not got ~~reference to~~ <sup>the benefit of</sup> the previous correspondence to guide him in any way at all.

A You must find out from Lord Hardinge what he left for Lord Chelmsford. I have no knowledge.

2974 I But it was at his option entirely whether he left anything at all.

A Entirely, as regards his private telegrams.

2975 General Sir Neville Lyttelton. That is not the same practice as here with private telegrams to the Viceroy.

A No, I was speaking of technically ~~secret~~ secret telegrams that do not go before the Council

in England. Those, when they get to India, are treated like any ordinary official telegrams; they are public although they are technically secret. The word "secret" at the India Office you know, has a different meaning from what it has anywhere else.

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2976 Earl of Donoughmore: That is so; because you have been Secretary of State for the Colonies.

A yes.

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2 And if I remember aright, the ~~practice~~ practice of the Colonies is secret telegrams. I remember in the case of a colony in which I was slightly concerned, I never received ~~from~~ the government <sup>ones or the</sup> ~~one~~ ~~any~~ confidential telegrams either, which I gather from you is not the custom in India.

A My recollection of the Colonial Office is that most of the telegrams, indeed, that all telegrams which were intended to be private in the circumstances that these are, were marked personal, - either "personal and secret," or "personal and confidential." I might mention that the practice of the Foreign Office has somewhat altered since the war. Formerly at the Foreign Office there were only two classes of telegrams, - official telegrams and private telegrams. The private telegrams were treated as those, cyphered or decyphered in the Private Secretary's room and taken away by the Secretary

of State when he gave up office; but when the war ~~was~~ began it was found that the number of telegrams marked "private" and "secret" accumulated so enormously that the Private Secretaries, although there were several of them, were completely snowed under, and therefore a special register was devised on which these telegrams were filed and kept in the office, and those which are of a more strictly private character are now called "private and personal."

2978 Chairman: Then really that is the reverse of what has gone on in the India Office. Personal telegrams have been curtailed at the Foreign Office, and all the more important ones are registered.

A yes, that <sup>is</sup> ~~would be~~ so.

2979 Lord Hugh Cecil: Would there be any real difficulty in securing any degree of secrecy with a record.

A I do not think there would; but on the other hand, there is a certain class of personal telegrams which it is hardly necessary, I think, to keep recorded. I was trying to recall instances.

2980 I you mean letters that are really personal - relating to persons.

A yes, or telegrams indeed - telegrams relating to <sup>the</sup> personal qualities of particular officers, for instance, not perhaps from a purely military point of view, but from a strictly personal point of view. I think it is hardly possible to conclude that

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 2981 Q That all such telegrams ought to be permanently recorded.

A But the record might be just as private as the original telegram. What does seem to me open to criticism is that the telegram should be taken away altogether at the conclusion of the Secretary of State's term of office, or the Viceroy's term of office, and that there should be no official record at all. There might be a record <sup>kept</sup> in the hands of the Secretary of State and his private secretary, or of the Viceroy and his private secretary, and not known to anyone else. That would ensure some degree of control in the case of the enquiry or in the case of scandal.

A Provided that the matter is of any public interest, of course, but it is quite possible that a personal telegram may pass between the two individuals which has no public interest.

2982 Chairman: But are these telegrams given us here recorded in the India Office, or did your private secretary supply them out of papers that you took away?

A I left them behind.

2983 Q You had them recorded, practically.

A I knew they had been recorded.

2984 Q You left them for record.

A So far as I know that applies to all of them; it certainly applies to a great many. Certainly the more important ones, those giving instructions, were all recorded.

Lord

... has been ...

2985 Lord Hugh Cecil: Is the practice the same in regard to private letters, or is there a distinction?

A Private letters disappear altogether, I think, with the gentleman <sup>to</sup> whom they are written.

2986 I We have had some very important private letters laid before us, so that I presume copies of those must have been kept.

A Copies are kept of all private letters, and when I prepared the little memorandum which I think has been circulated to you, I ~~went~~ <sup>looked</sup> out and dictated a certain number of extracts from my private letters to Lord Hardinge, and, I think, one or two from Lord Hardinge to me.

2987 Chairman: But they are only recorded in the sense that they are in the custody of the person having them.

A Mine are not in any sense recorded in the office; those are in my private possession.

2988 I And is no record kept of any private letters.

A No record is kept of any private letters.

2989 I Either in the India Office or in India.

A No, I think not; I do not think any record is kept at all.

2990 Earl of Donoughmore: Is it legal for you to do anything in a public office and not leave a record of it? Does not the Master of the Rolls come in?

A I cannot tell you. <sup>It is quite clear</sup> ~~I quite think~~ that no Minister could destroy an official paper, I take it, or at any rate he might get into trouble for doing so; but I fancy that <sup>the</sup> ~~is~~ system of private communications obtains in all offices.

Johnson

M.

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Mr Hodge: The point of these private telegrams has been so clearly dealt with that I do not know that much else wants to be asked except I assume that private telegrams <sup>are</sup> all paid for out of public funds

A They are all paid for out of public funds

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Q So that a retiring Secretary of State has no right to take them away, he ought to leave them as a record

A Yes, that I think might fairly be argued. On certain occasions, <sup>probably</sup> both the Viceroy and the Secretary <sup>of State</sup> telegraph at their own expense, but all such such telegrams as you see in these papers go at the public charge

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Q And for historical <sup>reference</sup> ~~reasons~~ if for nothing else it <sup>would</sup> be well that they should be left behind

A That ~~it~~ would in some degree curtail the freedom of communication. You are speaking only of telegrams and not of letters.

2994

Q Just telegrams

A But the letters also go at public expense. ~~There are two Indian~~

2995

Q Well, a penny stamp is not so bad you know as these cablegrams. But I think the question <sup>of</sup> Lord George asked about the following Secretary of State possibly being in a difficulty if he cannot trace up these things <sup>is</sup> important, so that from that point of view it would be well that the telegrams should be left behind, and it would be perfectly possible to file them in such a way that they would not be generally accessible. You agree

A It being I assume at the discretion of the outgoing Secretary of State as to what telegrams would be of sufficient public interest to leave

2996

Q Well, telegrams of private interest might very well

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well be destroyed

A Or taken away

2997 Q Yes, but any telegrams of public interest and of historical interest should be left behind. It would be perfectly feasible to keep them absolutely secret

A I think that would in some degree curtail the freedom of communication between the two officials if it was an absolute rule that every communication must be left behind and ~~be~~ filed. It may be said that there would be no particular harm if it was curtailed, but I think it would have that effect

2998 Lord Hugh Cecil: It would involve your leading political opponent knowing all that you had said

A. Yes, <sup>and</sup> in the now remote days of party government ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> would have been a practical inconvenience, I think

2999 Commander Wedgwood. Is it not the fact that private telegrams have increased because official telegrams would have to go through the <sup>India</sup> Council here.

A That is not the case with secret telegrams

3000 Q No, with private telegrams. Official telegrams would have to go through the Council here

A Not if they were in the secret Department

3001 Lord Hugh Cecil There are three classes of telegrams, private, secret, and official

A Yes

3002 Commander Wedgwood: Secret telegrams you could have sent off without the knowledge <sup>of</sup> or consultation <sup>with</sup> of the India Council

A Undoubtedly

3003 Q So that really all these private telegrams could have been sent as secret telegrams so far as your own freedom of action is concerned

A Quite so

3004

Q The reason why you did not send them as secret telegrams and why you sent them as private instead of secret was because it has been for some time the custom of the Indian Government and the Secretary of State to send them as private and not as secret; or what was the object

A Largely the secrecy, and to some extent speed, - to some extent, <sup>the</sup> saving of time

3005-

Q That is to say, it was quicker for you to send them as private telegrams than as secret telegrams

A Yes, undoubtedly

3006

Q Why

A Because they would go straight to the Viceroy and be deciphered almost immediately under his eye instead of ~~the Department~~ going through the Department passing through several hands and reaching him perhaps after a day's delay

3007

Q In that case ~~you~~ <sup>then</sup> really ~~limits~~ <sup>save</sup> the criticism, the powers of the India Council have been curtailed by private telegrams is quite a mistake, because you could have got round that difficulty perfectly well by sending them as secret telegrams instead of as private telegrams

A It would not have been a way of getting round the Council; it would have been the ordinary procedure. It would have been my duty if I had not sent them as private telegrams to send them as secret telegrams, because their subject matter did not come under the class of business which is submitted to the Council at all

3008

Chairman But you cannot make any telegram ~~were in for~~ that you like a secret telegram

A No; one has to examine the section of the Statute. It is ~~at~~ war telegrams only

Commander

Garden of Bingham

- 3009 Commander Wedgwood: Every telegram we have before us marked private could have been sent as secret under the Act of Parliament which authorises you to send secret telegrams.
- A. Speaking generally I think that is so
- 3010 Chairman: That is as regards those telegrams in this particular document, the Red ~~Book~~ Book
- A. Yes
- 3011 Commander Wedgwood: Everything could have been sent as secret instead of private
- A. Yes
- 3012 Q: Therefore there was no curtailment of the powers of the India Council
- A. None
- 3013 Q: Who are the India Council
- A. The India Council are ~~the~~ <sup>a</sup> Statutory body
- 3014 Q: What are their names
- A: At the moment I cannot say. Some of them have changed since my time
- 3015 Lord Hugh Cecil: How many are there
- A: I think now about 12. There are two Indian members
- 3016 Commander Wedgwood: Do they represent anybody
- A: The two Indian members are assumed to represent the population of India as far as two people can
- 3017 Q: By whom are they nominated
- A: By the Secretary of State. They are not an elected body in any sense, they are merely nominated
- 3018 Q: In fact the Secretary of State for India is the only person who can be said to be representative of anybody
- A That is so
- 3019 Chairman: They are not less than 12 and not more than 14
- A Yes, that is so
- 3020 Sir Archibald Williamson: In practice I suppose it would be impossible to consult such a body in time of war

before

before you send your cable

A: Yes it would lead to the postponement of decisions and undoubtedly to a great deal of discussion which would be highly interesting in itself, but would take up a great deal of time when both the Secretary of State and the other people in the Office are exceedingly busy

13  
3021

Commander Wedgwood: We have this in evidence from Sir Edmund Barrow. At Question 109 he was asked "I gather from these documents that there was a certain amount of reluctance to supply troops out of India, <sup>and</sup> you had to press for it?" and his answer was "Yes"

A: That I can fully confirm. After the original despatch of the Force to France, which was agreed to with enthusiasm not merely by the Government of India but by the whole people of India, - after that Force had gone the Government of India became seriously concerned about further drains upon them. There is no system of reserves for Army Reserve in India such as that which exists here, and therefore from the first it was a serious pre-occupation of the Government of India how the force was to be maintained

3022

Sir Archibald Williamson: I was going to put this to you. If the conditions were laid down that records <sup>had to</sup> ~~should~~ be kept of all classes of cables which you might exchange with the Viceroy, it would, I suppose, greatly interfere with the freedom of your consultation by cable or letter with the Viceroy

A: It doubtfully would

3023

Q: Indeed there are many matters, I suppose, that you cable or write about which you would certainly be most reluctant to have permanently recorded

A: Yes, certainly, and particularly as regards private letters. In some cases, even in ordinary times, that would apply to telegrams, but as regards private letters I should

certainly

certainly have flatly refused to leave my private letters to the Viceroy, or the Viceroy's to me, on record in the Office

3024 Q: And that would apply, of course, to peace <sup>time</sup> as well as war  
A: To a certain extent; the number of private telegrams which pass in peace time between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy is not very large

3025 Q: And of course in time of war there are the two objections if I may say so; there is ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> aversion to <sup>a</sup> record for certain reasons, and the danger of information leaking out concerning military projects

A: Those I think were the two main reasons which caused me to telegraph so often privately. So far as the subject matter of the telegrams was concerned there was no reason why they should not have been sent in the ordinary way as secret telegrams, and it would be very difficult for me at this distance of time to say why a particular telegram was sent in one way rather than in the other but I always understood and intended from the first that telegrams which could be regarded as forming part of a historical record should be afterwards filed and left on record

3026 Q: I assume that if the Viceroy were in London you would have many private conversations <sup>with him</sup> of which no record would be kept unless decisions were come to, and then ~~those~~ the decisions would be recorded

A: Yes

3027 Q: And that applies pretty much to correspondence

A: Yes, I think that is a ~~pretty~~ <sup>very</sup> fair parallel

3028 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: I understood you to agree with the Chairman's statement that private telegrams are orders. That is hardly so, is it?

A: I should be sorry to say without refreshing my memory

3029 Q: If a private letter contains an order it would not become imperative until it was made official

A: That is so

Q: No

3030

Q As regards these telegrams between Lord Kitchener and Sir Beauchamp Duff, I suppose Lord Kitchener was telegraphing as President of the Army Council, ~~and~~ not as Commander-in-Chief

A: He was telegraphing as ~~Commander-in-Chief~~ <sup>Secretary of State</sup> and therefore ~~the~~ President of the Army Council

3031

Q: But he was not representing the Army Council really, — but himself. I am talking of the private telegrams

A. I was trying to recollect ~~but~~ I think that when he telegraphed about the movement or allocation of particular troops he presumably did so in consultation with the Chief of the Staff or the Adjutant-General or both

3032

Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge. You said in reply to the ~~Chairman~~ <sup>a question</sup> just now that the number of private tel- egrams passing between the Secretary of State <sup>for India</sup> and the Viceroy had increased of late

A. During the war, certainly

3033

Q. You have had experience, of course, of other Government Departments; would not that apply to all the Government Departments with which you are acquainted

A. Yes, I think so certainly; it certainly applies to the Foreign Office. I have been in charge of the Foreign Office several times since the War for considerable periods and I should say that certainly more private telegrams are sent from that Department than in ordinary times

3034

Q. Has the private letter writing decreased; has it been superseded by telegrams

A. So far as the India Office is concerned, as the Chairman has told you, it has been the invariable practice for the Secretary of State and the Viceroy to correspond generally at some length every week

Gardner Bingham

3035 Q: I was not alluding to letters of that kind; I mean purely private letters although dealing with public matters passing between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy

A: But those are private letters, ~~those letters~~ of which the Chairman spoke

3036 Q: Those are placed on record

A: No, those are not placed on record in any way

3037 Chairman: Having got rid of this rather thorny question of private telegrams, we will take you next through the Statement which you have been good enough to make for us and which we will accept as your evidence in chief

A. If you please

Printed Statement  
to come in here