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Reference	IOR/L/PS/12/46
Title	PZ 8088/31 'Mr Bertram Thomas'
Date(s)	12 Mar 1931-27 Apr 1932 (CE, Gregorian)
Written in	English in Latin
Extent and Format	1 file (22 folios)
Holding Institution	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
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About this record

This file comprises telegrams, correspondence, memoranda, and notes on the question of a possible decoration for Mr Bertram Sydney Thomas, following his successful crossing of the Empty Quarter from Salalah in Oman to Doha in Qatar in an expedition which took place from December 1930 to February 1931.

Correspondence refers to a suggestion by a Minister to the Prime Minister that Thomas should receive a decoration – a knighthood being seen as appropriate. Further discussion by officials in the India Office, Government of India and British officials in the Gulf concerns whether shortcomings in Thomas's administrative work would allow the India Office to support such an award. The correspondence includes a letter (ff 641-643) from the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf listing Thomas's 'delinquencies' during his time as an administrator in the employ of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman.



Previous File.

IOR: L/PS/12/46

614 636
632

P.

POLITICAL (EXTERNAL) DEPARTMENT.

~~Secret cupboard~~

P.Z.
8088
1931 .

SUBJECT:

Mr Bertram Thomas.

See also till 37/22.

This File contains the following papers :—

YEAR.	P.Z.
1931	8088
19 .	P.
19 .	P.
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19 .	P.

Papers may be removed from or placed within this File only by the Political Registry.

4987A 2000 12.30





615 637
635

M: Rumbold,

I attach the papers. There is I think no need to
Mr. Clouston. add anything to Col Biscoe's note of 7.4.31. Mr. Maitland
agrees that from the I.O. point of view there wd be no objection to
Sir Warren Fisher's Private Sec. tells me that the
question of an honour for Mr. Bertram Thomas is
again on the tapis. Mr. N. Chamberlain has mentioned
the matter. While it is probably too late for
anything now to be given to Mr. Thomas, Sir W. Fisher
has asked for the reasons why the honour was not
given at the time.

The papers on the subject which Sir P. Duff
has have been seen by Sir W. Fisher, but I think
that we have probably received a report on the
grade of Muscat finances as left by Mr. Thomas,
which was not sent to No 10. If there is
such a self contained document, I said that
I would send a copy to the Treasury. If
there are any other papers bearing on Mr. Thomas'
devotion of his post which are to the point,
it might be useful to send them over also.

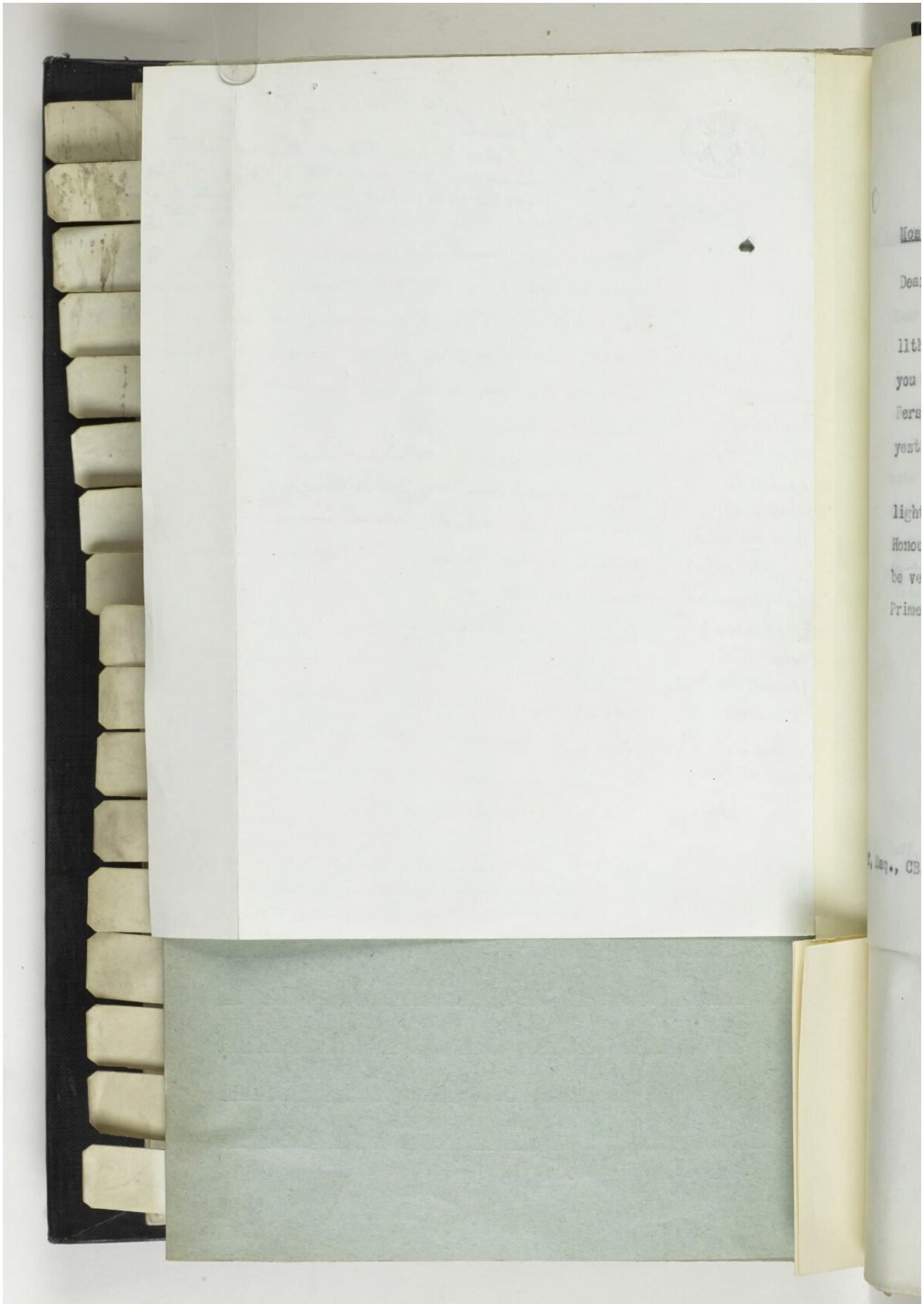
10782
2674

[Mr. Knox, Treasury, told that we have no document
which adds anything of substance, regarding the facts of
the situation, to Colonel Biscoe's note 7th April 1931.]

-X-
It is perhaps
unnecessary to
say so unless
we are asked,
& perhaps it
would be well,
if we are asked,
to get Mr. Walker's
view (he comes back
next Monday)
before Sir F.
Stewart decides what
to answer.

There is also of
course M. Philby.

WTF-27/4





P. Z. 8088
31.

(616)
634
(638)

2nd May 1931.

Most Confidential.

Dear Duff,

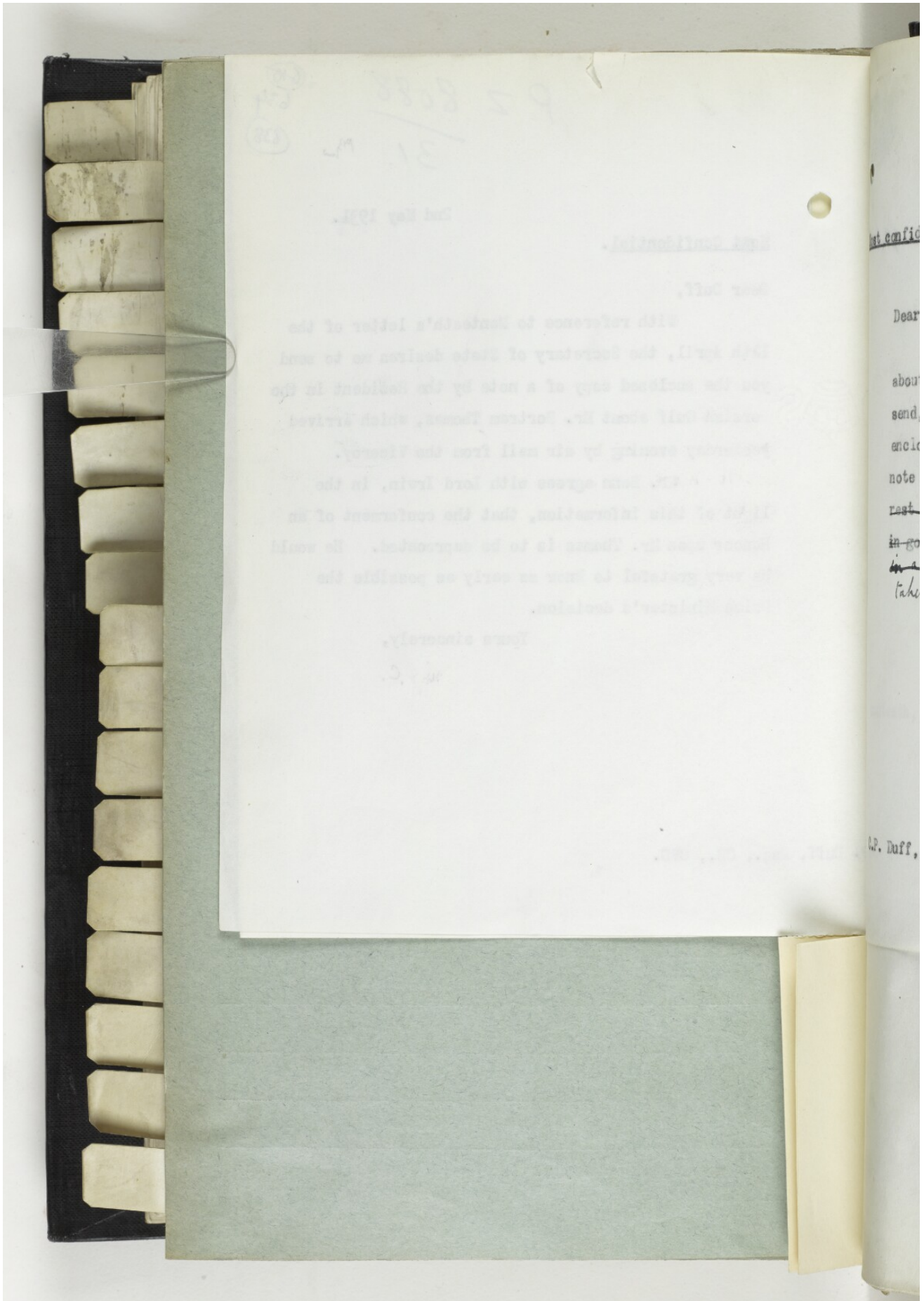
With reference to Monteth's letter of the 11th April, the Secretary of State desires me to send you the enclosed copy of a note by the Resident in the Persian Gulf about Mr. Bertram Thomas, which arrived yesterday evening by air mail from the Viceroy.

Mr. Benn agrees with Lord Irwin, in the light of this information, that the conferment of an Honour upon Mr. Thomas is to be deprecated. He would be very grateful to know as early as possible the Prime Minister's decision.

Yours sincerely,

m.g.c.

Pl. Duff, Esq., CB., CVO.





M: Walsely
S. F. Stewart
S/S.
S. F. might perhaps be inclined to all the L
ques etc. but I think. (Hs 1.0)
I certainly would; it is a good coal
635 639
S/S
4/5
(617)

It is for consideration whether an expression
of the S/S's view should be added to the draft,
for the P.M.'s information. 1st May, 1931.

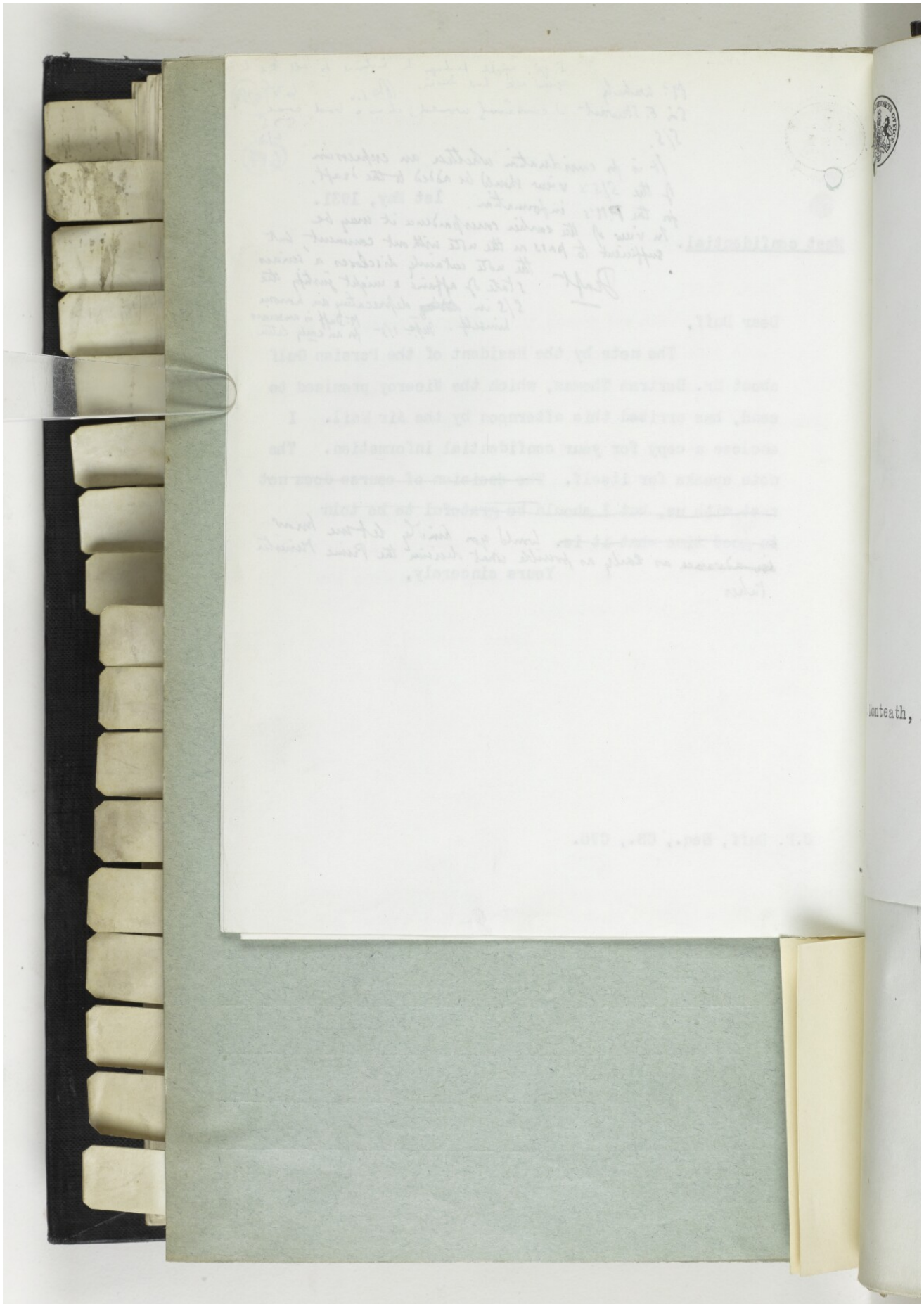
Most confidential. In view of the earlier correspondence it may be
sufficient to pass on the note with out comment, but
the note certainly discloses a serious
state of affairs & might justify the
S/S in ~~any~~ deprecating an honour
himself. M. Duff is anxious
for an early letter.

Draft

Dear Duff,

The note by the Resident of the Persian Gulf
about Mr. Bertram Thomas, which the Viceroy promised to
send, has arrived this afternoon by the Air Mail. I
enclose a copy for your confidential information. The
note speaks for itself. ~~The decision of course does not
rest with us, but I should be grateful to be told
in good time what it is.~~ Would you kindly let me know
~~in advance as early as possible what decision the Prime Minister~~
takes.
Yours sincerely,

C.P. Duff, Esq., CB., CVO.



teath,



D.O. No. 4364-G.M. (618)
636

THE VICEROY'S HOUSE. (640)
NEW DELHI.

9th April 1931.

My dear Monteath,

With reference to the Viceroy's private
and personal telegram of today, I enclose
herewith a copy of a note recorded by Biscoe
regarding Mr. Thomas.

Yours sincerely,

D. T. Monteath, Esq., O.B.E.

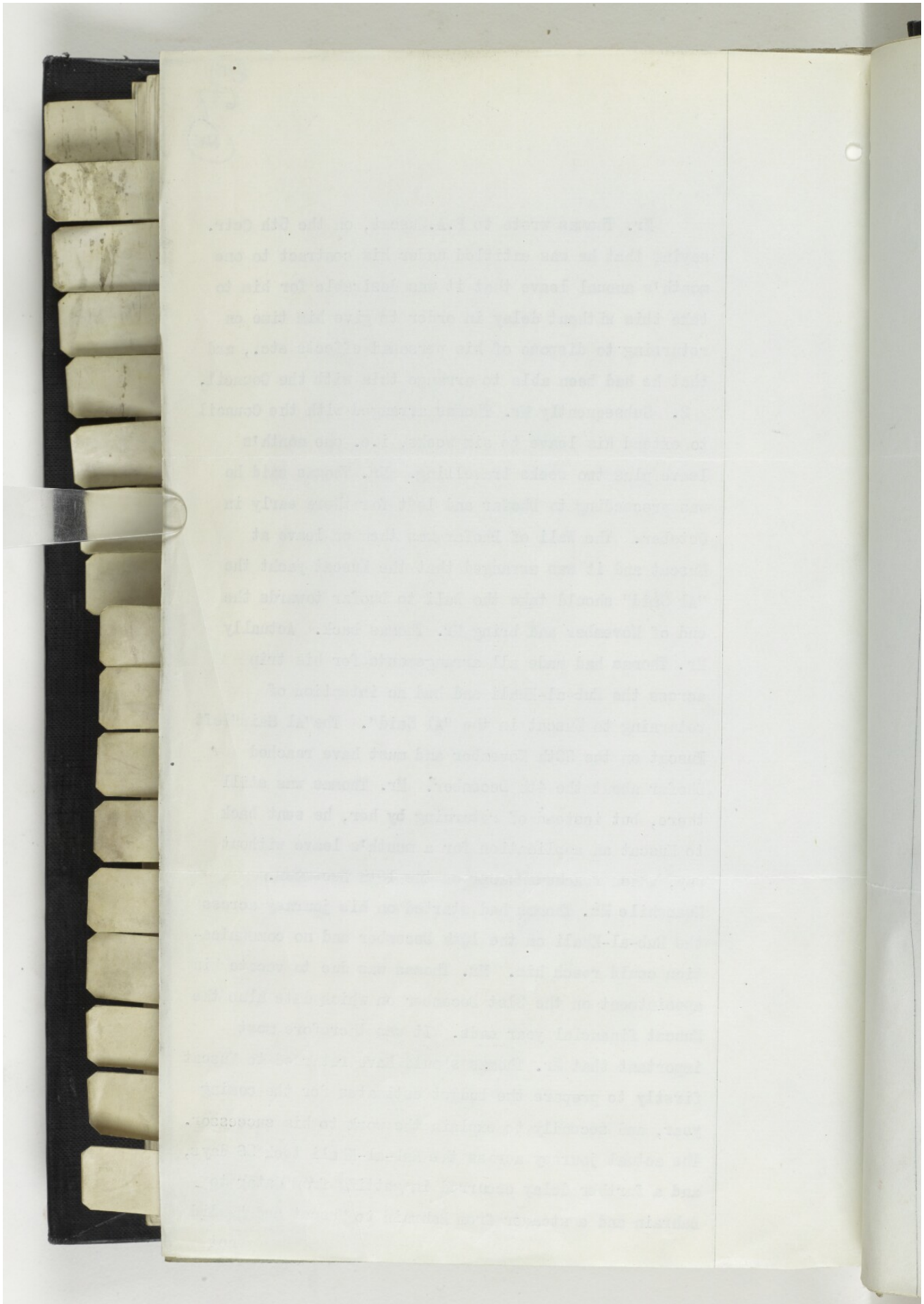




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641

Mr. Thomas wrote to P.A. Muscat, on the 5th Octr. saying that he was entitled under his contract to one month's annual leave that it was desirable for him to take this without delay in order to give him time on returning to dispose of his personal effects etc., and that he had been able to arrange this with the Council.

2. Subsequently Mr. Thomas arranged with the Council to extend his leave to six weeks, i.e. one month's leave plus two weeks travelling. Mr. Thomas said he was proceeding to Dhofar and left for there early in October. The Wali of Dhofar was then on leave at Muscat and it was arranged that the Muscat yacht the "Al Said" should take the Wali to Dhofar towards the end of November and bring Mr. Thomas back. Actually Mr. Thomas had made all arrangements for his trip across the Rub-al-Khali and had no intention of returning to Muscat in the "Al Said". The "Al Said" left Muscat on the 30th November and must have reached Dhofar about the 4th December. Mr. Thomas was still there, but instead of returning by her, he sent back to Muscat an application for a month's leave without pay, which reached Muscat on the 18th December. Meanwhile Mr. Thomas had started on his journey across the Rub-al-Khali on the 10th December and no communication could reach him. Mr. Thomas was due to vacate his appointment on the 31st December on which date also the Muscat financial year ends. It was therefore most important that Mr. Thomas should have returned to Muscat firstly to prepare the budget estimates for the coming year, and secondly to explain the work to his successor. The actual journey across the Rub-al-Khali took 58 days, and a further delay occurred in getting from Qatar to Bahrain and a steamer from Bahrain to Muscat and he did not



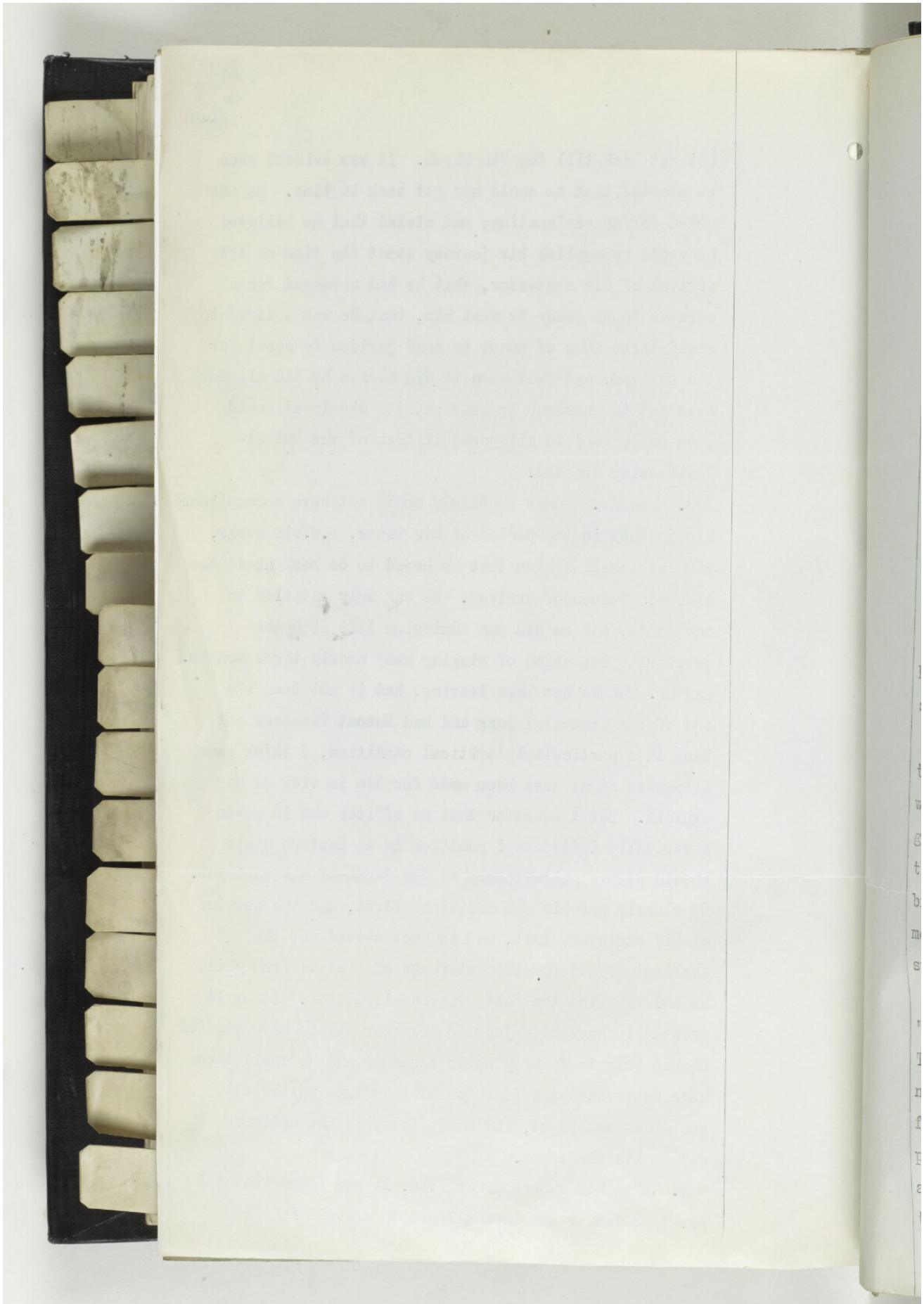


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642

not get back till the 7th March. It was evident when he started that he could not get back in time. He was asked for an explanation; and stated that he believed he would accomplish his journey about the time of the arrival of his successor, that he had arranged for a caravan to be ready to meet him, that he was obliged to spend large sums of money to send parties to scout for the caravan, and that when it did arrive he had already been put to enormous expense and its dismissal would have put an end to all possibilities of the Rub-al-Khali being crossed.

3. Now Mr. Thomas certainly could not have accomplished his journey in the period of his leave, i.e. six weeks, and he himself states that he hoped to be back about the time his successor arrived. He was only entitled to one month, and on his own admission left with the deliberate intention of staying away nearly three months. Had Mr. Thomas not been leaving, had it not been the end of the financial year and had Muscat finances not been in a particularly critical condition, I think some allowance might have been made for him in view of his exploit. But I consider that an officer who is given a virtually independent position in an Eastern State should adhere meticulously to the terms of his contract. He clearly put his own ambitions first, and the service of his employers last, and in fact showed not the smallest regard for the interests of a State from which he had received the most generous treatment. It would presumably have been just as easy for him to have started on his trip in January as in December and he could then have supervised the finances of the State up^{to} the end, prepared the budget, and handed over in the ordinary way to his successor.

4. When his successor arrived, it was found that the greatest laxity had been allowed to prevail in the financial





621
639
643

financial administration of the State:

(a) It was discovered that there were undisclosed State liabilities to local merchants amounting to Rs.1,16,577 under the system in force dates were frequently not inserted, and a facsimile of the account of the chief creditor to whom Rs.84,145 which was forwarded to the Government of India under my despatch No.7-T, dated the 27th January 1931 speaks for itself.

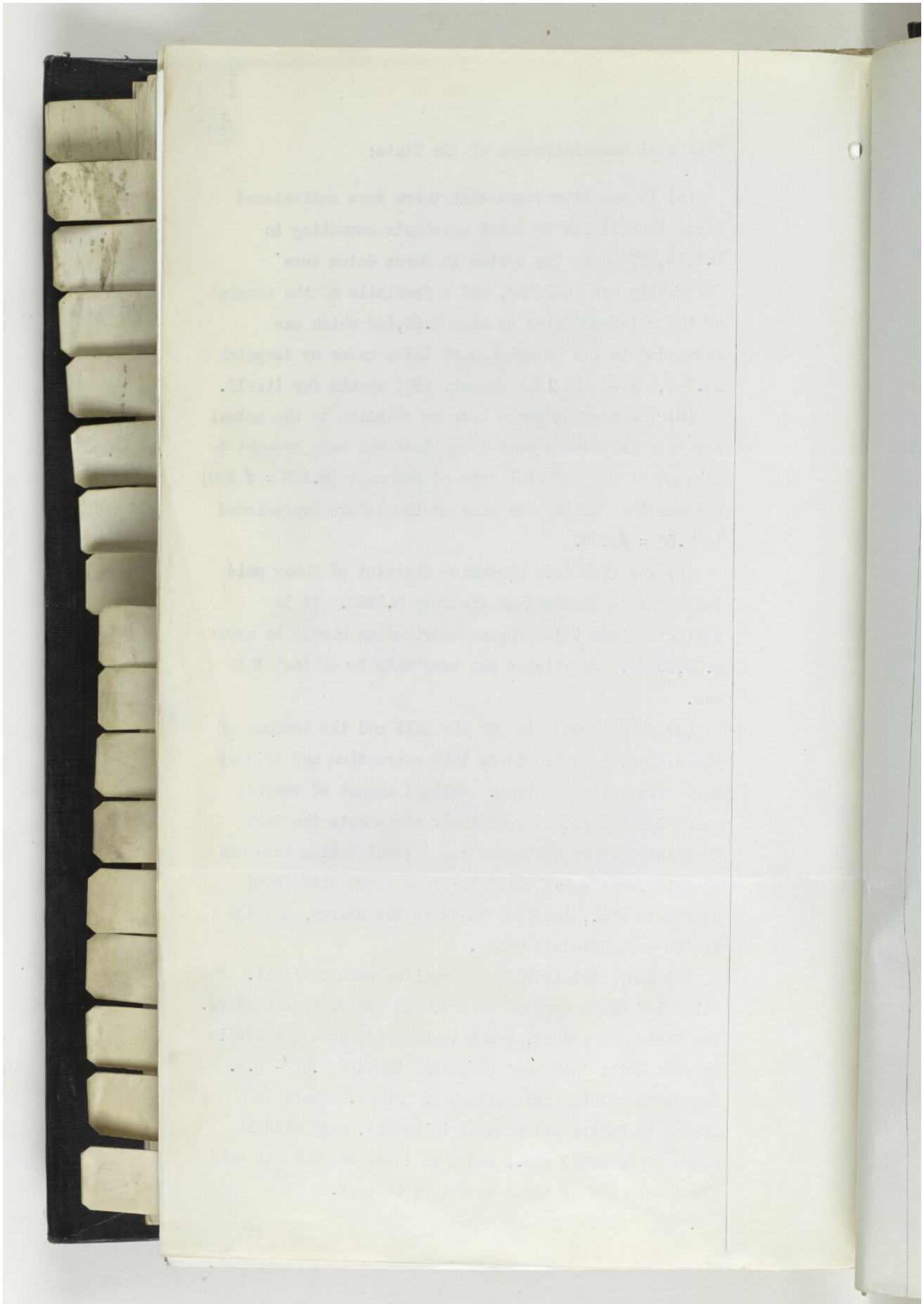
(b) The account books bore no relation to the actual position as revenue paid in dollars had been brought to account at the official rate of exchange (Rs.125 = \$ 100) whereas the dollar had many months before depreciated to Rs.68 = \$ 100.

(c) The rich date producing district of Sohar paid last year to the Central Treasury Rs.1900. It is estimated that it's proper contribution should be about Rs.30,000/-. No attempt was ever made to collect this sum.

(d) When I went to Sur the Wali and the headman of the village reported to me that corruption and bribery were rife in the customs. While I cannot of course guarantee the accuracy of their statements the fact that the Customs Collector was a local Indian born and bred in Sur and naturally in close touch with local merchants etc., lent substance to the charge, and the system was certainly wrong.

(e) Many administrative anomalies came to light. The "Al Said" has a crew of 25 which is obviously excessive. The State own a dhow, which is kept at Muscat: there is no crew but a 'nakhuda' (captain) is paid Rs.38/- p.m. for doing nothing and resides in Muttra. There is a prison in Muttra and another in Muscat, each with its appropriate staff etc., and when I was there I was told there were two or three prisoners in each.

It





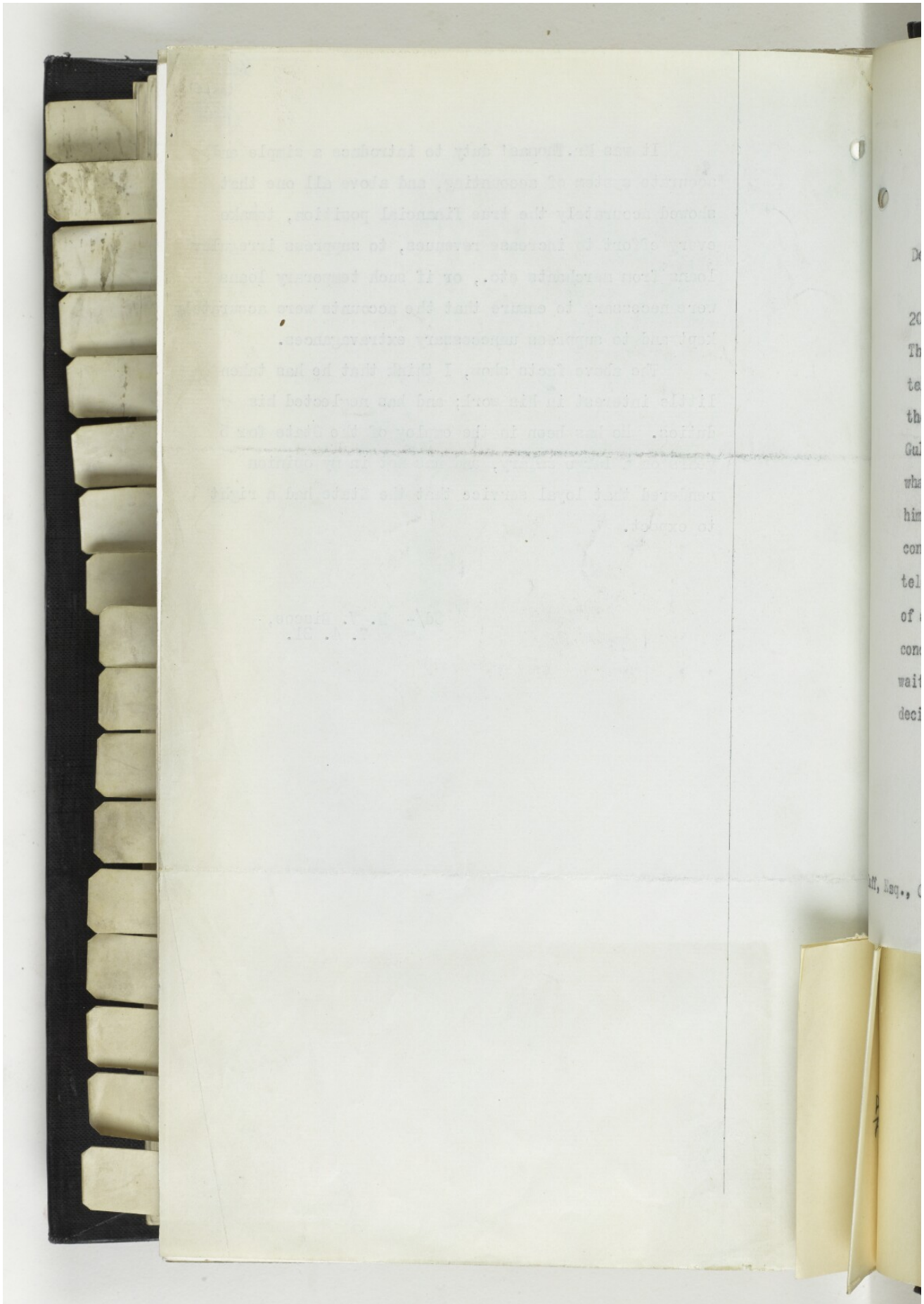
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644

It was Mr. Thomas' duty to introduce a simple and accurate system of accounting, and above all one that showed accurately the true financial position, to make every effort to increase revenues, to suppress irregular loans from merchants etc., or if such temporary loans were necessary to ensure that the accounts were accurately kept and to suppress unnecessary extravagances.

The above facts show, I think that he has taken little interest in his work; and has neglected his duties. He has been in the employ of the State for 5 years on a large salary, and has not in my opinion rendered that loyal service that the State had a right to expect.

Sd/- H. V. Biscoe,
7. 4. 31.

JNG.
10.4.





623
641
645

11th April 1931.

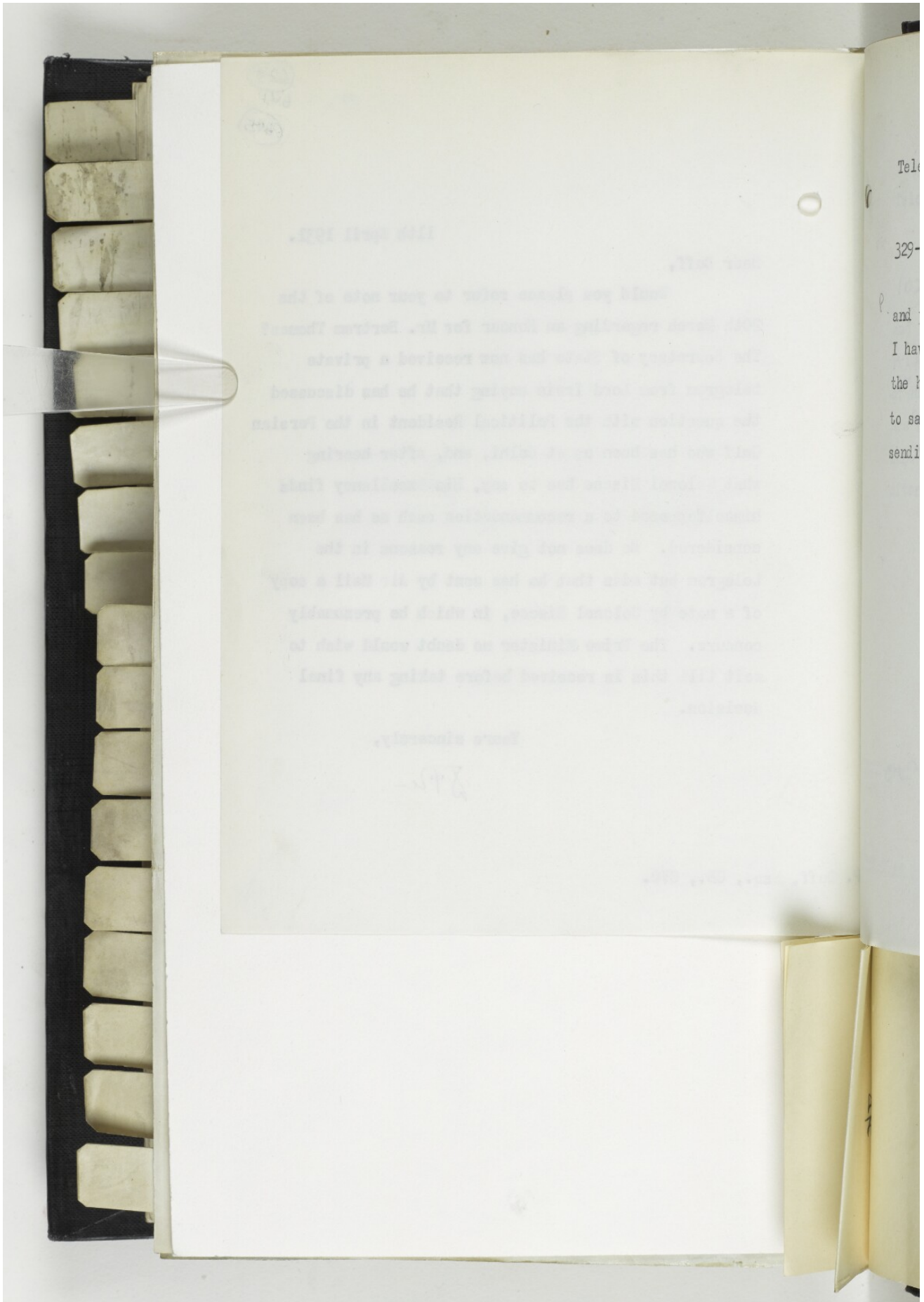
Dear Duff,

Would you please refer to your note of the 20th March regarding an Honour for Mr. Bertram Thomas? The Secretary of State has now received a private telegram from Lord Irwin saying that he has discussed the question with the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf who has been up at Delhi, and, after hearing what Colonel Biscoe has to say, His Excellency finds himself opposed to a recommendation such as has been considered. He does not give any reasons in the telegram but adds that he has sent by Air Mail a copy of a note by Colonel Biscoe, in which he presumably concurs. The Prime Minister no doubt would wish to wait till this is received before taking any final decision.

Yours sincerely,

J.P.

C.P. Duff, Esq., CB., CVO.





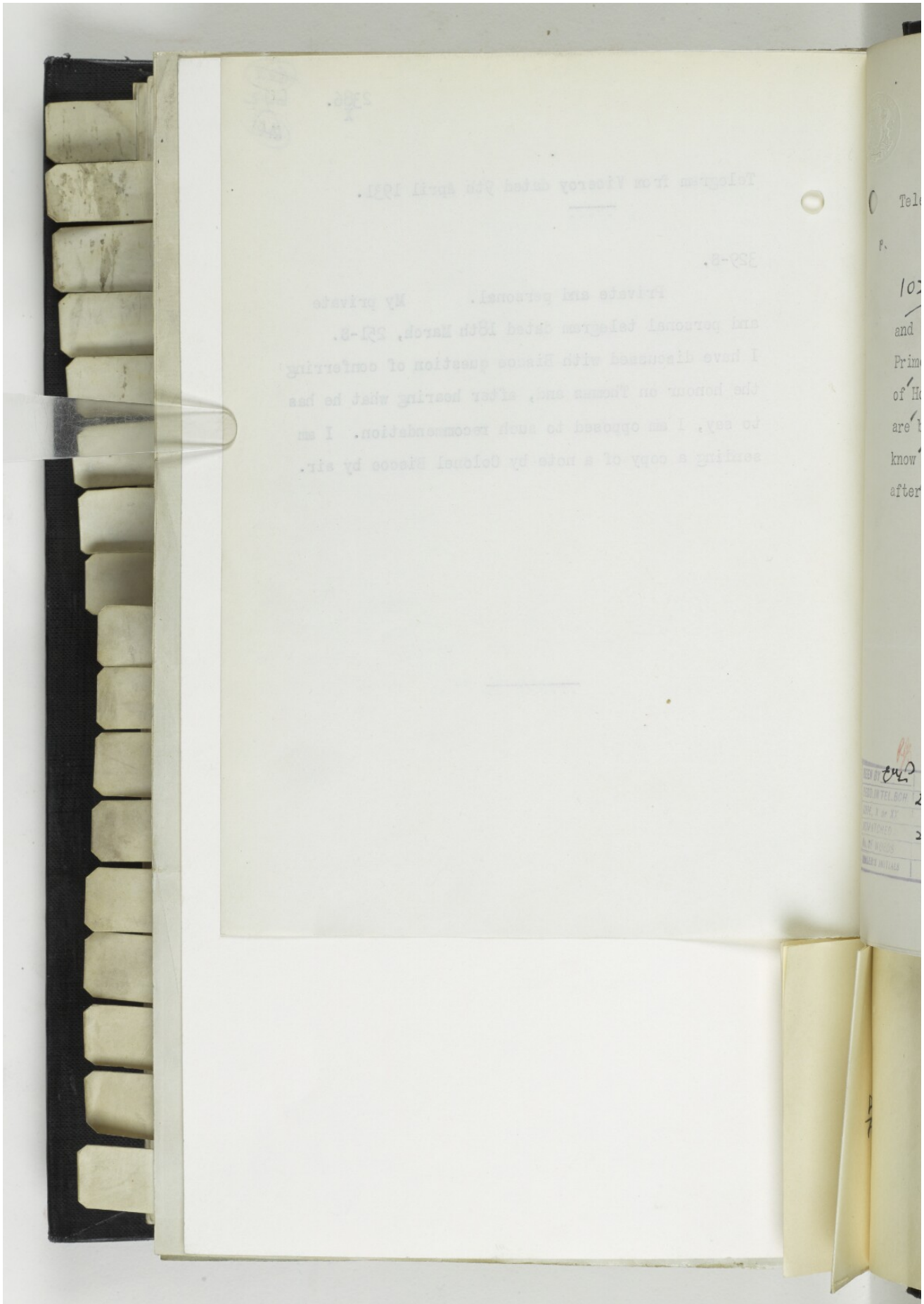
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Telegram from Viceroy dated 9th April 1931.

329-S.

Private and personal. My private
and personal telegram dated 18th March, 251-S.
I have discussed with Biscoe question of conferring
the honour on Thomas and, after hearing what he has
to say, I am opposed to such recommendation. I am
sending a copy of a note by Colonel Biscoe by air.





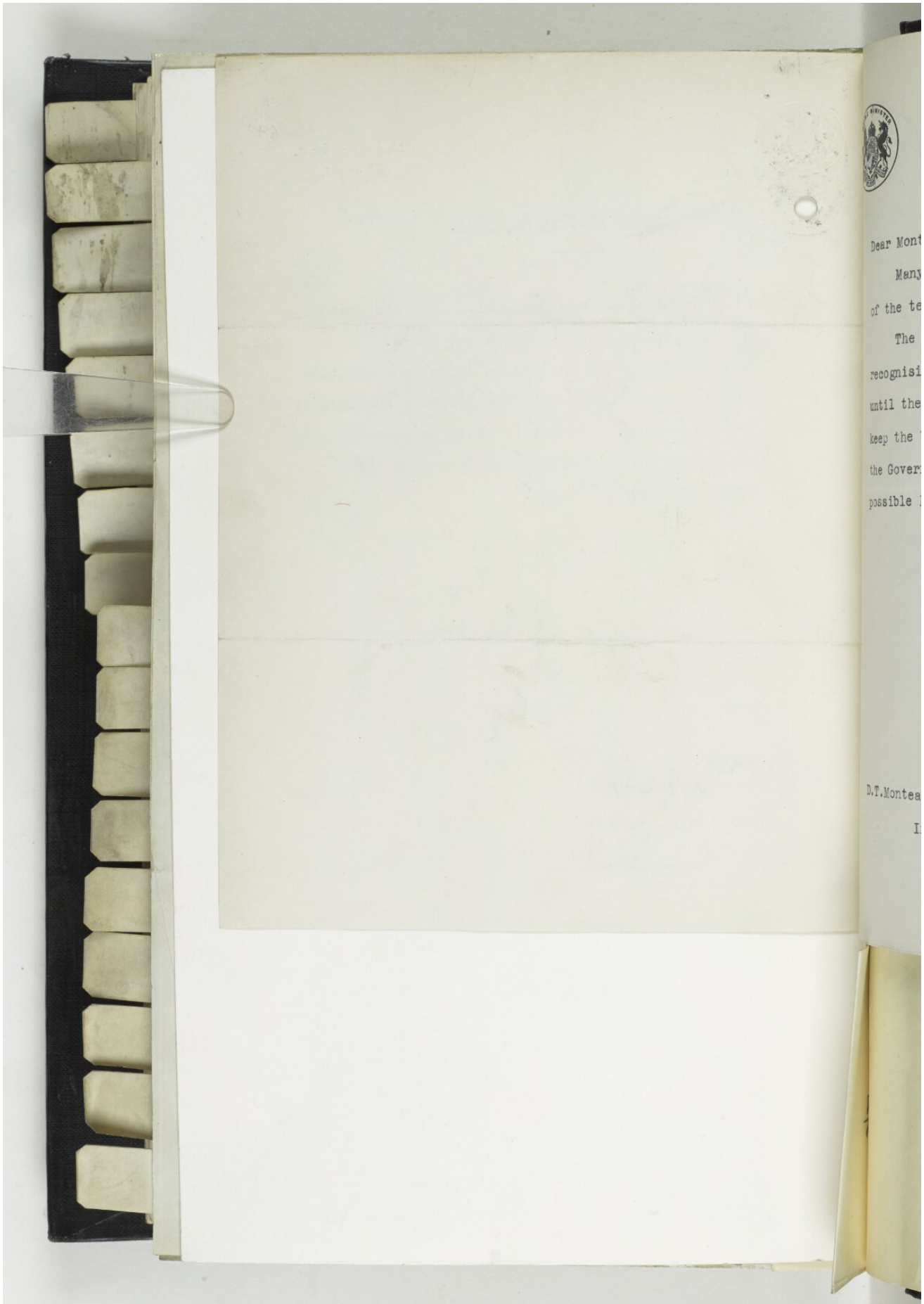
625
643
P.S. + 647
W.P.M.
21.3

Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy.
dated 21st March, 1931.

P.

1023. Private and personal. Your private and personal telegram 18th March, 251-S. Prime Minister has decided to defer consideration of Honour for Thomas till the Birthday recommendations are before him. But it would be convenient to know as early as possible what are your views after speaking to Biscoe.

SEEN BY	DATE	TIME
evl	21/3	2.15p
REGD. IN TEL. BOX		
CODE, X or XY	X	
DESPATCHED	21/3	4.20p
NO. OF WORDS		15
SENDER'S INITIALS		W.P.M.





10, Downing Street,
Whitehall.

20th March 1931.

Dear Monteath,

Many thanks for your note of yesterday with the copies of the telegrams in regard to Mr. Bertram Thomas.

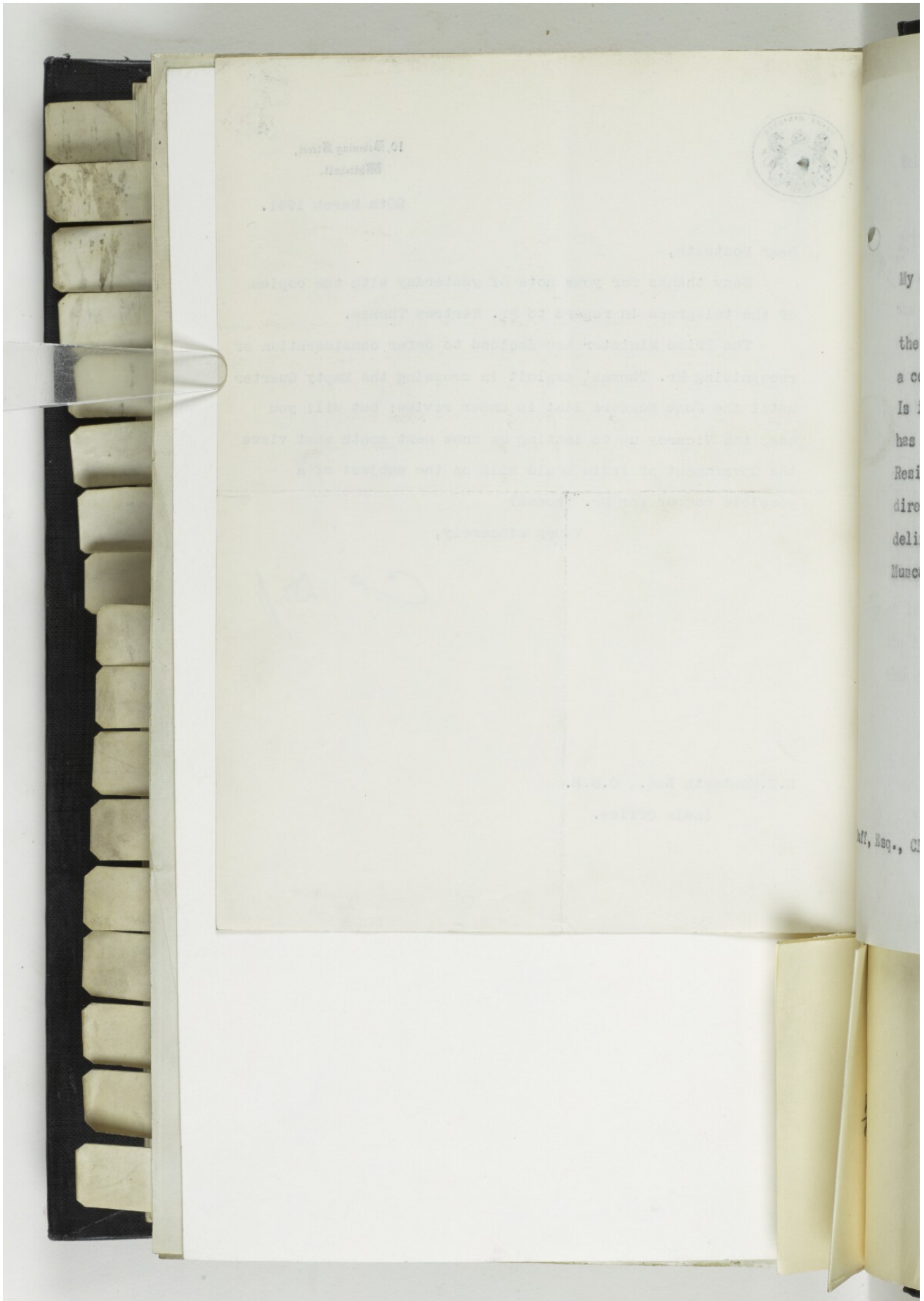
The Prime Minister has decided to defer consideration of recognising Mr. Thomas' exploit in crossing the Empty Quarter until the June Honours list is under review; but will you keep the Viceroy up to letting us know next month what views the Government of India would hold on the subject of a possible honour for Mr. Thomas?

Yours sincerely,

C. R. Duff

D.T. Monteath Esq., O.B.E.

India Office.





M: Keith write

*627
645*

649

*To help for the present. On Mr Duff's reply it might be shewn to V.S.S.
Duff 19/3*

*N: W. J. M. to me
Dec 19/3*

19th March 1931.

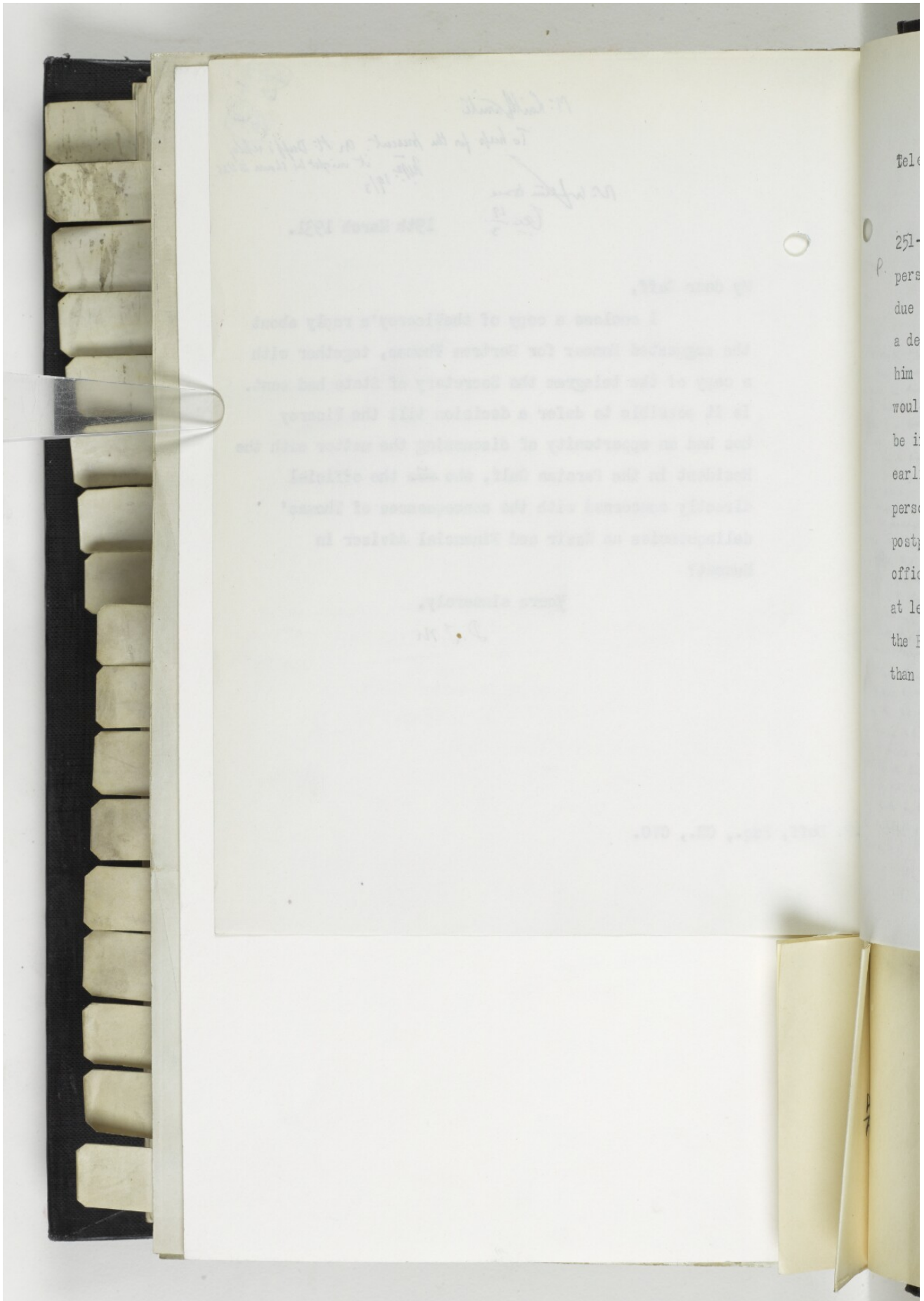
My dear Duff,

I enclose a copy of the Viceroy's reply about the suggested Honour for Bertram Thomas, together with a copy of the telegram the Secretary of State had sent. Is it possible to defer a decision till the Viceroy has had an opportunity of discussing the matter with the Resident in the Persian Gulf, who ~~was~~ the official directly concerned with the consequences of Thomas' delinquencies as Wazir and Financial Adviser in Muscat?

Yours sincerely,

D. J. M.

C.P. Duff, Esq., CB., CVO.

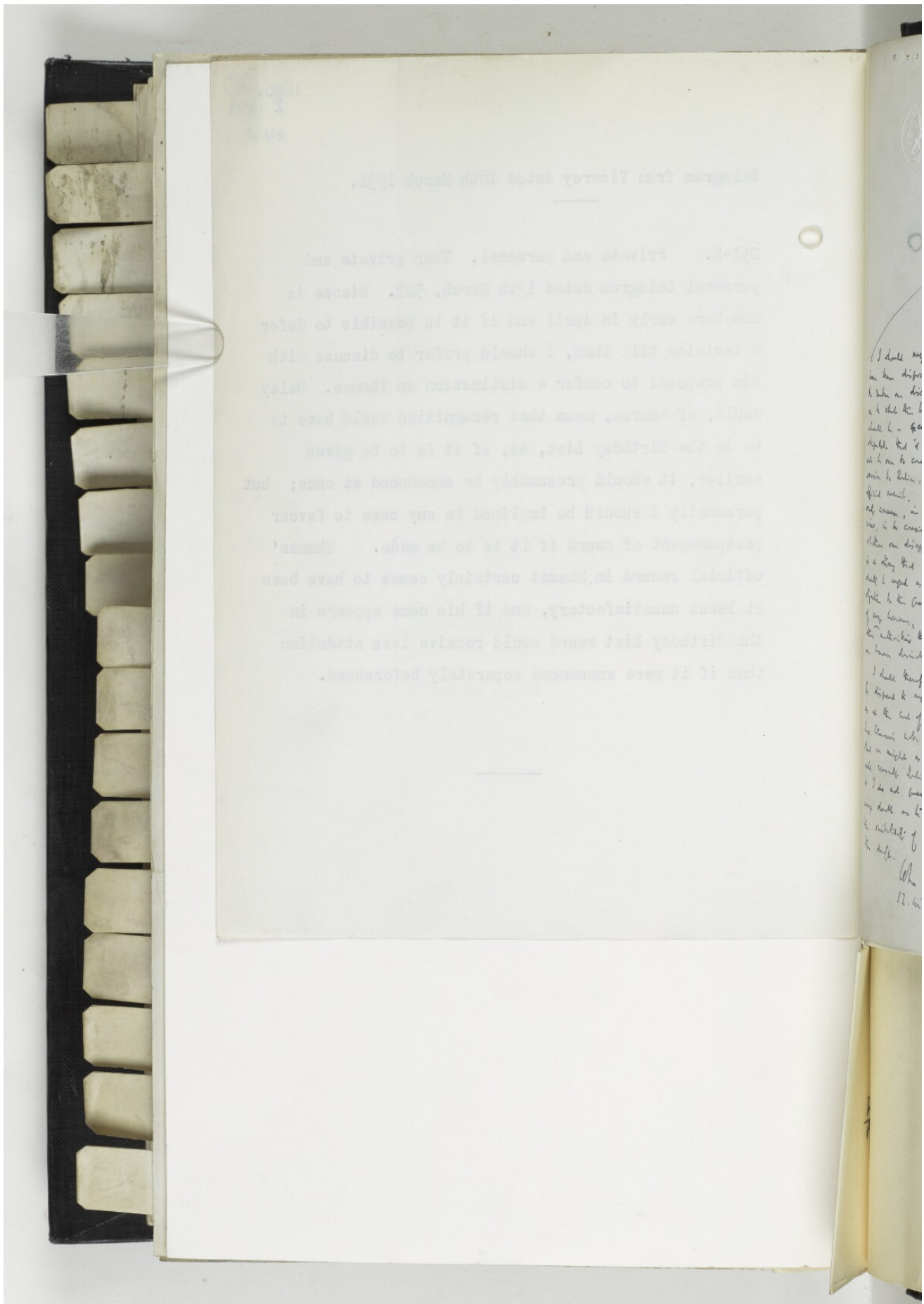




1860
X
646

Telegram from Viceroy dated 18th March 1931.

P. 251-S. Private and personal, Your private and personal telegram dated 13th March, 1922. Biscoe is due here early in April and if it is possible to defer a decision till then, I should prefer to discuss with him proposal to confer a distinction on Thomas. Delay would, of course, mean that recognition would have to be in the Birthday List, as, if it is to be given earlier, it should presumably be announced at once; but personally I should be inclined in any case to favour postponement of award if it is to be made. Thomas' official record in Muscat certainly seems to have been at least unsatisfactory, and if his name appears in the Birthday List award would receive less attention than if it were announced separately beforehand.





Confidential

629

647

651

Mr. Laithwaite, Note below & draft 12/3

Mr. Walton, 12/12/3

Mr. Wakely,

Sir F. Stewart, 13/3

I concur in the draft.
(I think we could depart
a knight on the ground that
it is disproportionate to the honours given
to a man of his rank - the many years of
his Indian Service for geographical exploration
- e.g. Col. F. M. Bailey

The Prime Minister's private Secretary

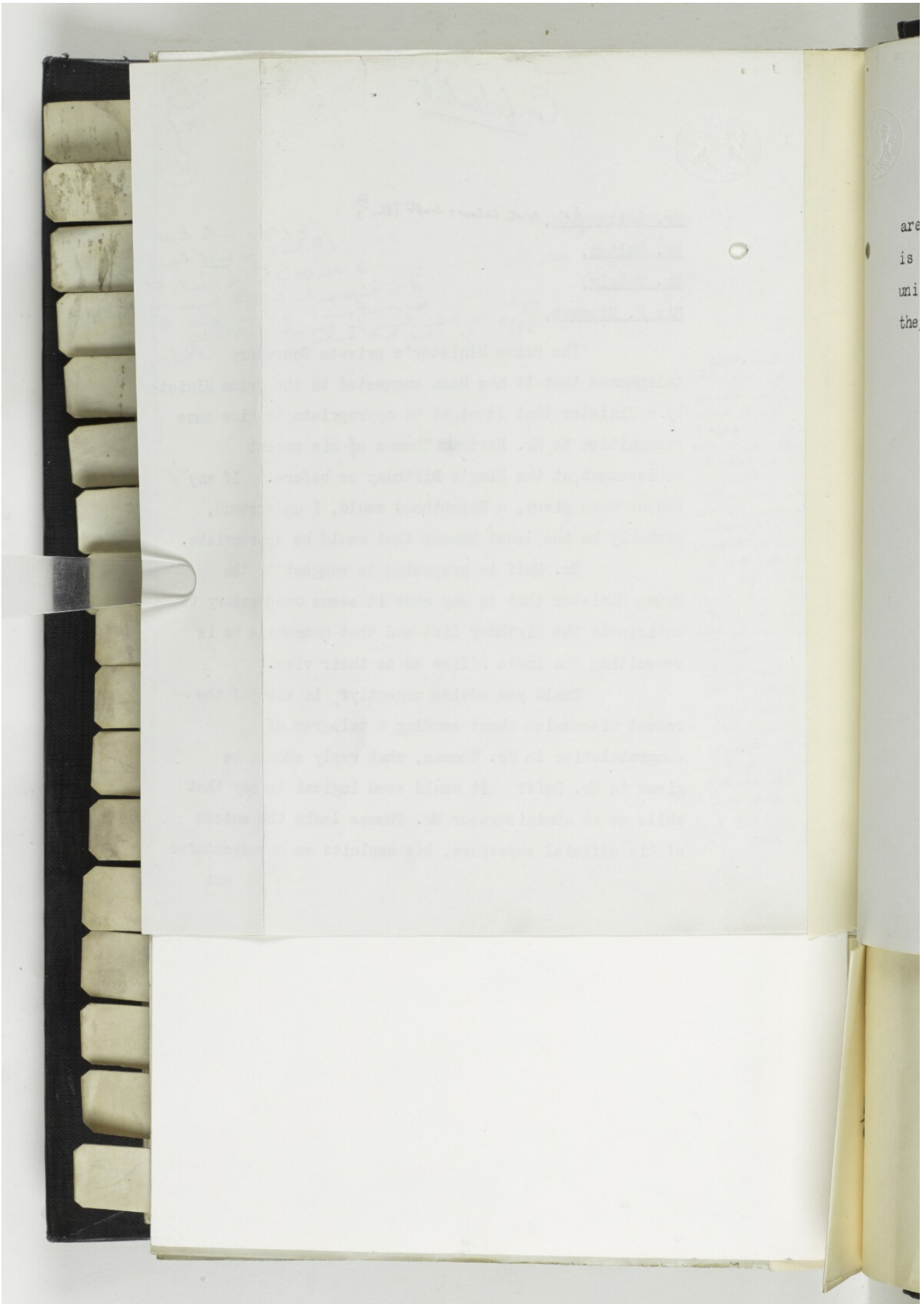
I shall myself
have been disposed not
to make a decision
as to what the honours
shall be - except to
suggest that if there
was to be one to create
senior to India, an
official visit, an
only occasion, in my
view, it is possible
rather on disapproval
is a thing that it
shall be used as an
opportunity to the benefit
of any honours, if
the authorities think
on honour desirable.
I shall therefore
be disposed to reply
as at the end of
Mr. Clayton's letter.
But in view of
what you write I shall
I do not know
any doubt as to
the suitability of
the draft.
W.S.
12.iii

telephones that it has been suggested to the Prime Minister
by a Minister that it might be appropriate to give some
recognition to Mr. Bertram Thomas of his recent
achievement, at the King's Birthday or before. If any
honour were given, a Knighthood would, I understand,
probably be the least honour that would be appropriate.

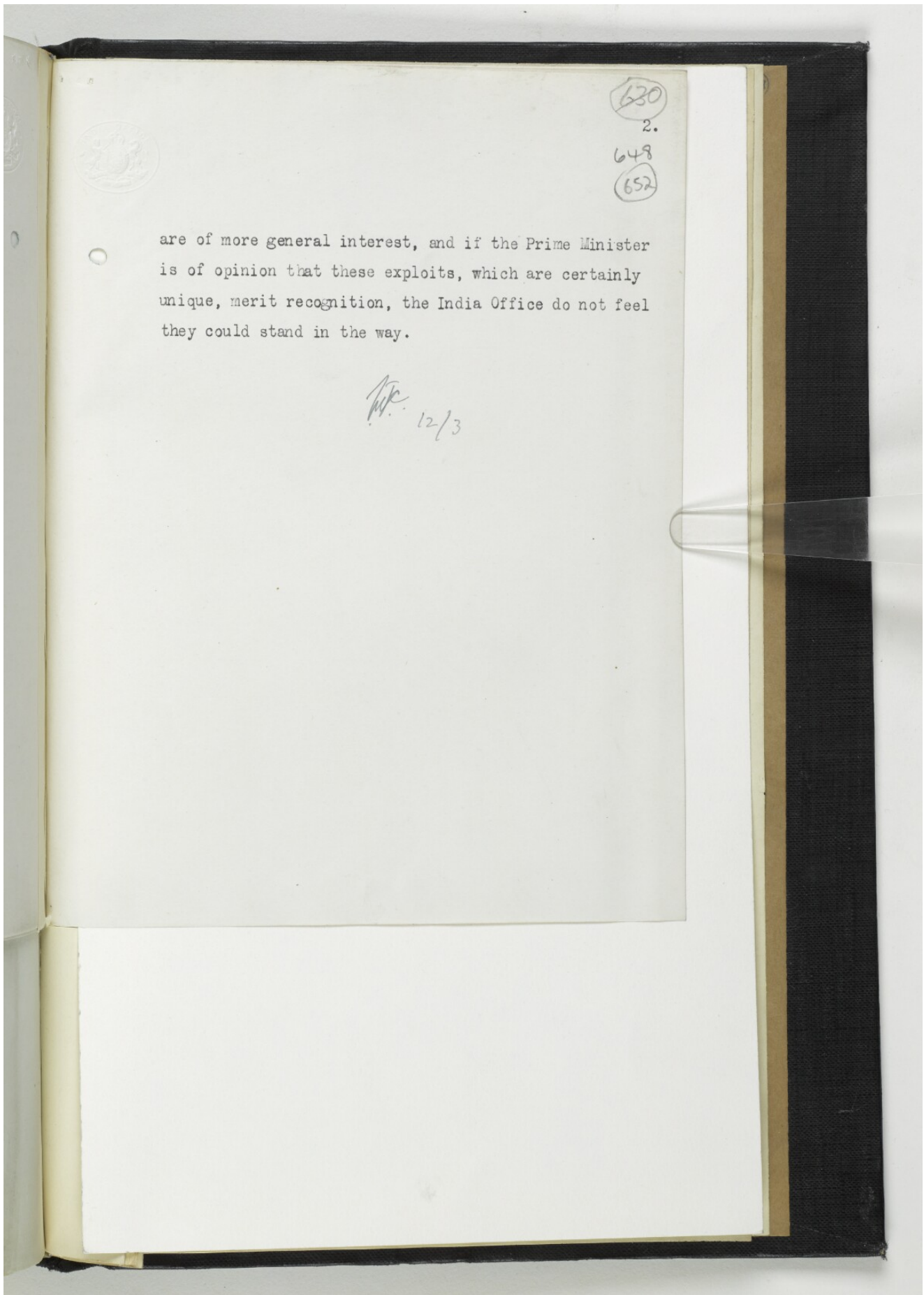
Mr. Duff is proposing to suggest to the
Prime Minister that in any case it seems unnecessary to
anticipate the Birthday List and that meanwhile he is
consulting the India Office as to their view.

Could you advise urgently, in view of the
recent discussion about sending a telegram of
congratulation to Mr. Thomas, what reply should be
given to Mr. Duff? It would seem logical to say that
while as an administrator Mr. Thomas lacks the esteem
of his official superiors, his exploits as an adventurer

are



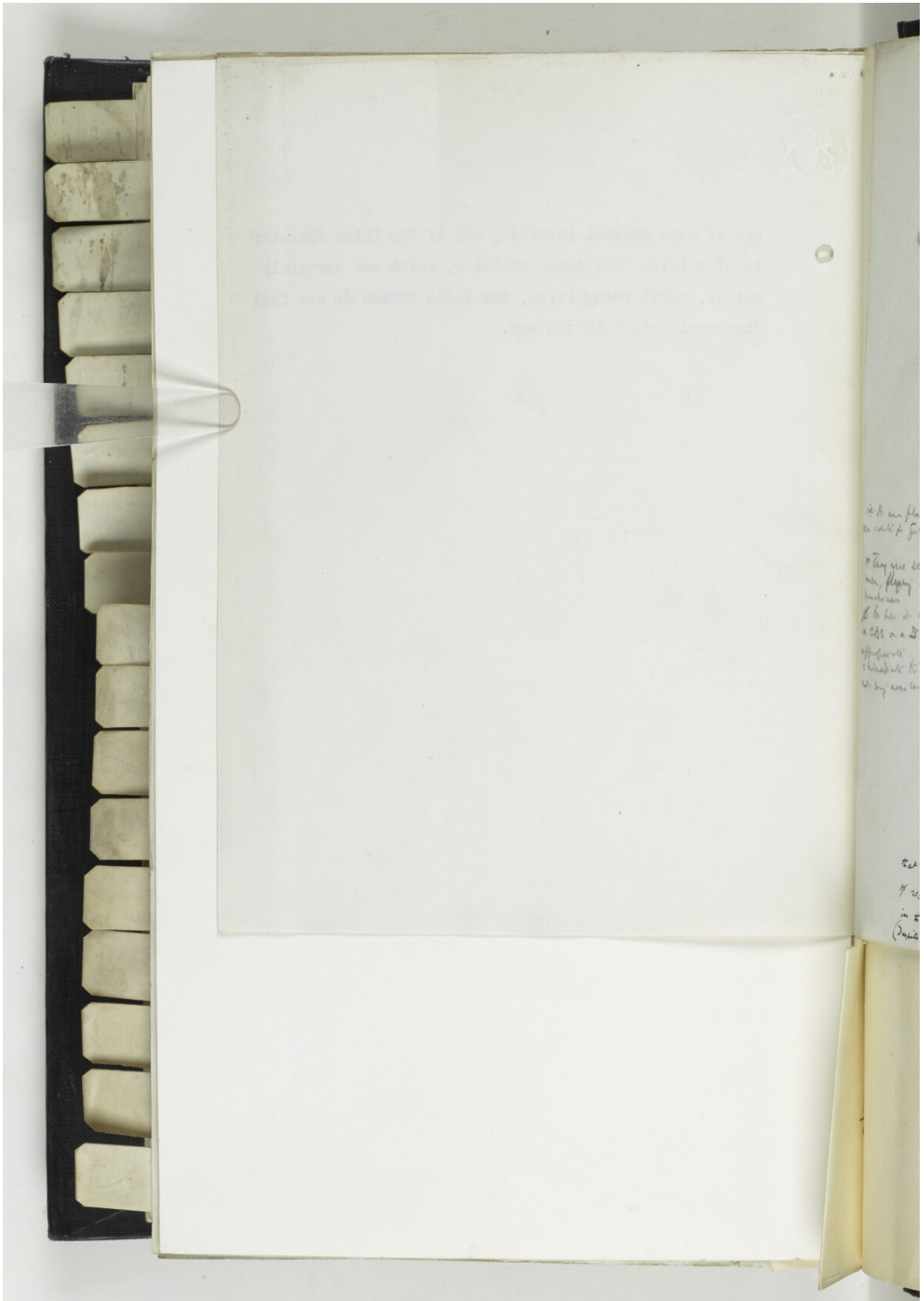
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are of more general interest, and if the Prime Minister is of opinion that these exploits, which are certainly unique, merit recognition, the India Office do not feel they could stand in the way.

W.C. 12/3

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We are, of course, dissatisfied with Mr Thomas's conduct as Fin^l Adviser Muscat. But his exploit in crossing the Rub'al Khali is one of great distinction; he has been publicly congratulated by the King; he might in the ordinary course expect some formal recognition; and I do not think we sh^d. be justified in offering the grant of an honour in respect of his geographical work merely on the ground of our dissatisfaction with his administrative shortcomings in Muscat - more especially as there is no suggestion of dishonesty or the like about the latter. There can be little doubt that the Sultan, whose servant he was, wd. be unlikely to object.

If however Mr Thomas is to receive an honour, I cannot help thinking a Knighthood on the generous side. Sir M. Campbell & Sir H. Segrave were knighted for speed records: Colburn was given the KBE for flying to Australia, & Hawker a knighthood for the first Atlantic flight. But the Schneider trophy winners got an AFC & DFC at the outside; and Miss Amy Johnson a CBE (in the ordinary honours list). I suggest that in Mr Thomas's case a CBE, given if necessary in advance of the Birthday list by way of investing it with a special distinction, wd. probably suffice. It wd. presumably come from the U.K. List. But before a final decision is taken, it will perhaps be well to consult the Viceroy (an interim reply sh^d. be sent to Mr Duff), and I attach a draft telegram.

V.A. Lathbury
12.iii.31

Though it would have been awkward for the Spd list to congratulate Mr Thomas, I agree that there is no sufficient reason why our Directorship with him in one capacity should stand in the way of recognition of his merits in another. But whatever honour is given should certainly not be included in the honours list & for the same reason it seems doubtful whether we have ^{any} much cause to stand ^{for} (Despite the fact that the expedition was through country in or near Her Majesty's sphere of influence)

* He was planning an expedition to Tibet
x They are service men flying across the mountains
B. For her it was rather a CBE or a DBE - but appropriate to her rank & immediate to her husband's rank - by analogy.



for suggesting a less honor than what the P.M. may be prepared to
recommend. To do so might look as if we thought that his official
distinguished should be set off against his private achievement. It could
however be explained to the P.M. that our view is based solely on our
assessment of the value of achievement (if it being equal with this).

12. 7. 71

and then
of honor
possibly

and then
of honor
possibly

SEEN BY
RECORDING
CODE X
REBRATCH
NO. OF WORDS
SENDER'S IN



632
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654



Vicary dated 13th March 1931

Important

Cypher X

922 Private & Personal

Suggestion has been made to Prime Minister that some recognition of THOMAS'S achievement in crossing RUB'AL KHAKH should be given either in or before Birthday List, and that Knighthood would be appropriate.

and immediate credit of honors might be desirable to counterbalance

We are of course disappointed with Thomas's administrative work & conduct in Muscat. But, especially now that the King has publicly congratulated him, I doubt if we could offer honors in recognition of his eminence as an explorer merely on this ground.

but any honor bestowed (which wd. presumably be outside Indian list) can form the basis of

~~Some time ago we considered and had been thought a medal was possible given in advance of Birthday list as a special distinction, would suffice~~

Pl. let me have yr. views as early as possible.

Send

S.S.S.
13/3

SEEN BY	DATE	TIME
REGD. IN TEL. BCH	13/3	8.2 m.
CODE, X or XX	X	
DESPATCHED	13/3	8.50m
NO. OF WORDS	41	
SENDER'S INITIALS	S	

