

Ernest Satow's Early Years in Japan (1862-9) (Part 1)

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Abstract

This paper is intended as the basis for the first part of the second chapter of a biography of the distinguished British scholar-diplomat Ernest Mason Satow who served in Japan from 1862 to 1883 (with home leaves) and from 1895 to 1900. Modern appellations (eg. Emperor, not Mikado) and spelling of place names (eg. Edo, not Yedo) are used, except where older texts are quoted.

A Diplomat in Japan

Satow relates the story of his early years in Japan in his memoirs entitled *A Diplomat in Japan* (hereafter referred to as *Diplomat*), first published in 1921. Although there were editions in 1968 (Oxford) and 1983 (Tuttle), in recent years it has been out of print which is regrettable as it provides a fascinating, if not totally reliable, insight into the critical years 1862-9. It tends to suggest that Satow was more important than he in fact was, although he was indeed near the centre of events, and knew or met all of the key figures, both foreign and Japanese, in pre-Restoration (*Bakumatsu*) Japan.

A Japanese translation of the whole text by Seiichi Sakata first published in 1960 is currently available in a cheap paperback edition from Iwanami Bunko. However the book was banned from general circulation in Japan from 1924 until the end of World War 2, and it was only available in a much abridged translation to Japanese researchers from 1938 as *Ishin Nihon Gaikou Hiroku* (Secret Memories of the Meiji Restoration)¹⁾. Sakata suggests that the government wanted the Japanese people to view the Restoration as a great and glorious event, and that Satow's memoirs were too near the bone for comfort.

The subtitle of the book explains its content more fully. It is "the inner history of the critical years in the evolution of Japan when the ports were opened and the monarchy restored, recorded by a diplomatist who took an active part in the events of the time, with an account of his personal experiences during that period". It was written in two stages: the first portion was written between 1885 and 1887 while Satow was Her Majesty's Minister in Bangkok; the second part was completed during Satow's retirement between September 1919 and January 1921 at the urging of younger relations. It is mainly a transcript of Satow's diary, supplemented by his papers in the Foreign

Office's "Confidential Print", his letters to Sir Harry Parkes and his mother.

The thirty six chapters begin with Satow's appointment as a student interpreter at Edo. After introducing Yokohama society and giving a brief history of political conditions in Japan, Satow recounts various major events including Richardson's murder; the bombardments of Kagoshima and Shimonoseki; ratification of the treaties by the Emperor; various travels in the Japanese hinterland; the Bizen Affair; the Sakai Incident in which French sailors were murdered and so on. The final chapter describes Satow's last days in Tokyo and his departure for home in 1869.

Diplomat is of course not the only source available to historians interested in Satow. The original diaries sometimes give further and more private details, and there is a vast reservoir of primary sources in Japanese archives still to be tapped, or translated. At the same time it should be remembered that throughout this period Satow was still a very young man of low rank in the Legation with a vital mission: to learn the language above all.

Japanese studies

Satow devotes half of the fifth chapter of *Diplomat* to describing his Japanese studies. He had left London without any of the very few books that had been published on the language. He was fortunate therefore to be introduced in Kanagawa to two Americans (Dr Hepburn and the Reverend Dr Samuel R. Brown) on September 9, the day after his arrival in Yokohama. Hepburn, a physician, was in the process of editing his Japanese-English dictionary. The first work of its kind, it was published in 1867 as *Wa-ei gorin shusei*. He was also responsible for the system of romanization which bears his name and is still widely used. Brown, a missionary, was just then printing his *Colloquial Japanese*, and generously allowed Satow to have the first few sheets as they came over from the printing office in Shanghai²⁾.

Satow struggled at first with no teacher and living at a hotel could not find a quiet place to study. He was kept awake by raucous noise from the bowling alley, and nightly quarrels. Not only that, Colonel Neale, chargé d'affaires while Alcock was on leave, ordered Satow and his colleague R. B. Robertson "to attend every day at the office (we did not call it the chancery then) to ask if our services were required, and what work we had consisted chiefly of copying despatches and interminable accounts."³⁾ Towards the end of October, after Satow protested that the clerical work was interfering with his studies, he and Robertson were allowed mornings free for study until one o'clock. Also they persuaded the colonel to consent to them getting two lessons a week from the Reverend Brown, and to allow them to engage a native "teacher" at the British taxpayer's expense. They hired one more at their own expense, though Robertson returned home early in 1863 after the Legation in Edo was subjected to an

arson attack by Choshu extremists, leaving Satow to pay for the lessons in full.

The Reverend Brown's lessons were the most useful ones. Brown heard Satow read sentences from his book, and explained the grammar. Takaoka Kaname, a doctor from Wakayama, gave lessons in the epistolary (letter-writing) style. He used to write a short letter in the running-hand, and after copying it out in square character, explained its meaning. Then Satow translated the letter into English, and put it away for a few days. Meanwhile he would read both the copies of the original. Later he took out his translation and tried to put it back into Japanese from memory. This was a laborious process, but Satow managed to learn many of the standard phrases used in letters, and gained a basic competence in reading.

Satow learned a tradesman's writing style from an old man "afflicted with a watery eye". The difficulties of learning while enduring the constant drip from the "diseased orbit", which fell "now on the copy-book, now on the paper I was writing on, as he leant over to correct a bad stroke, now on the table" must have been considerable. To make matters worse, this style was not appropriate for Satow's status. Several years later he learned a more beautiful version of the same 御家流 *on-ye-riu* style, but it was not until after the revolution of 1868 that he learned the picturesque 唐様 *kara-you* (Chinese) style from Takasai Tanzan, described by Satow as one of the half dozen best teachers in Tokyo. He claims modestly that he never came to have good handwriting, or to compose error-free Japanese. Yet there is evidence of greatly improved handwriting. Also Satow points out that most of his work for seven or eight years was the translation of official documents which was "not calculated to ensure correctness, as the translator's attention is more bent on giving a faithful rendering of the original than on writing good Japanese."⁴⁾

In June 1863 a note came from one of the Shogun's ministers, the exact wording of which was important. Ten months after his arrival in Japan, this was Satow's first real chance to test his ability in translating from a text written in the epistolary style. Although no one could say if his version was better than the ones produced by the Japanese Secretary Richard Eusden (from the Dutch), or Alexander von Siebold (from the Japanese with the aid of his teacher), at last Satow's study was paying dividends. Within a short time he was in a position to displace the middlemen, the relatively overpaid interpreters of the Dutch language through whom all correspondence with the Japanese government had been carried on until that time.

Alexander von Siebold was the sixteen year old son of Philipp Franz von Siebold. He had been born in Germany and had been taken on by Alcock as a supernumerary interpreter because of his ability to converse in the language which he had acquired through living in the country with his father since the age of thirteen. Satow soon surpassed him in his ability to decipher documents, and records one hilarious literal mistranslation by Siebold in *Diplomat* (Chapter VI) of "son of a gun" as "teppo no

musuko"!

The Richardson Affair

In the Richardson affair (also known as the Namamugi incident), a British merchant from Shanghai, Mr Charles Richardson, was killed by retainers of the daimyo of Satsuma on the Tokaido highway at the village of Namamugi, near the foreign settlement in Yokohama. This watershed incident which was to demonstrate graphically the Shogun's impotence, happened on September 14, 1862, just six days after Satow's arrival in Japan. The precise details of the affair are difficult to pin down as there are various versions. It seems likely that Richardson had refused to dismount from his horse and had advanced as far as the daimyo's palanquin, so incurring the wrath of the feudal lord accustomed to *dogeza* (prostration so that the head touches the ground) from low-ranking Japanese as he passed.

Satow relates the incident as follows:

"On the 14th September a most barbarous murder was committed on a Shanghai merchant named Richardson. He, in company with a Mrs Borrodaile of Hongkong, and Woodthorpe C. Clarke and Wm. Marshall both of Yokohama, were riding along the high road between Kanagawa and Kawasaki, when they met with a train of *daimio's* retainers, who bid them stand aside. They passed on at the edge of the road, until they came in sight of a palanquin, occupied by Shimadzu Saburo, father of the Prince of Satsuma. They were now ordered to go back, and as they were wheeling their horses in obedience, were suddenly set upon by several armed men belonging to the train, who hacked at them with their sharp-edged heavy swords. Richardson fell from his horse in a dying state, and the two other men were so severely wounded that they called out to the lady: "Ride on, we can do nothing for you." She got safely back to Yokohama and gave the alarm. Everybody in the settlement who possessed a pony and a revolver at once armed himself and galloped off towards the scene of the slaughter."⁵⁾

Satow is in no doubt that the four foreigners were in the right. His claim that they were wheeling their horses obediently is disputed by some Japanese authorities who suggest that the foreigners did not understand (or pretended not to understand) that they were being told to go back.

Satow continues to relate the subsequent reaction of the foreign community and in particular the heroic actions of his friend Willis:

"Lieut.-Colonel Vyse, the British Consul, led off the Legation mounted escort... But amongst the first, perhaps the very first of all, was Dr Willis, whose high sense of the duty cast on him by his profession rendered him absolutely fearless. Passing for

a mile along the ranks of the men whose swords were reeking with the blood of Englishmen, he rode along the high road through Kanagawa, where he was joined by some three or four more Englishmen. He proceeded onwards to Namamugi, where poor Richardson's corpse was found under the shade of a tree by the roadside. His throat had been cut as he was lying there wounded and helpless. The body was covered with sword cuts, any one of which was sufficient to cause death."⁶⁾

Richardson's lacerated body was removed from the scene immediately, and taken to the American Consulate in Kanagawa⁷⁾. Paranoia was rife in the settlement at Yokohama.

"The excitement among the foreign merchant community was intense, for this was the first occasion on which one of their own number had been struck down. The Japanese sword is as sharp as a razor, and inflicts fearful gashes. The Japanese had a way of cutting a man to pieces rather than leave any life in him. This had a most powerful effect on the minds of Europeans, who came to look on every two-sworded man as a probable assassin, and if they met one in the street thanked God as soon as they had passed him and found themselves in safety."⁸⁾

Revenge clouded the minds of many foreigners. The temptation to strike back immediately and teach the impudent Japanese a lesson was strong, but it was the most foolish of options as it would no doubt have led to all-out war.

"It was known that Shimadzu Saburo was to lie that night at Hodogaya, a post-town scarcely two miles from Yokohama. To surround and seize him with the united forces of all the foreign vessels in port would, in their opinion, have been both easy and justifiable, and viewed by the light of our later knowledge, not only of Japanese politics but also of Japanese ideas with regard to the right of taking redress, they were not far wrong. In the absence of any organised police or military force able to keep order among the turbulent two-sworded class it cannot be doubted that this course would have been adopted by any Japanese clan against whom such an offence had been committed, and the foreign nationalities in Japan were in the same position as a native clan. They were subject to the authorities of their own country, who had jurisdiction over them both in criminal and civil matters, and were responsible for keeping them within the bounds of the law and for their protection against attack."⁹⁾

The British Consul called a meeting at which a motion to request the foreign naval authorities to land 1,000 men to arrest the daimyo and his retainers was discussed and rejected. A deputation then went to Colonel Neale, but they failed to sway him.

"The idea had got abroad amongst the foreign community that Colonel Neale could not be trusted to take the energetic measures which they considered necessary under the circumstances. In fact, they found fault with him for preserving the cool bearing which might be expected from a man who had seen actual service in the field and which especially became a man in his responsible situation, and they thought that

pressure could be put upon him through his colleagues and the general opinion of the other foreign representatives. But in this expectation they were disappointed. At the meeting Colonel Neale altogether declined to authorise the adoption of measures, which, if the Tycoon's government were to be regarded as the government of the country, would have amounted virtually to making war upon Japan, and the French Minister expressed an opinion entirely coinciding with that of his colleague. Calmer counsels prevailed, and Diplomacy was left to its own resources, arrangements, however, being made by the naval commanders-in-chief to patrol the settlement during the night and to station guard-boats along the sea-front to communicate with the ships in case of an alarm."¹⁰⁾

Although Willis felt at the time that Neale was an "old woman"¹¹⁾, Satow considered in retrospect that Neale's refusal to yield to the temptation of instant revenge was entirely justified. He shrewdly observed that the foreigners were in Japan to trade, not to engage in senseless tit-for-tat hostilities. Moreover, Neale had no doubt seen many dead bodies at close quarters in his military career, and was not willing to see many more.

"Looking back now after the lapse of nearly a quarter of a century (i.e. from Bangkok), I am strongly disposed to the belief that Colonel Neale took the best course. The plan of the mercantile community was bold, attractive and almost romantic. It would probably have been successful for the moment, in spite of the well-known bravery of the Satsuma *samurai*. But such an event as the capture of a leading Japanese nobleman by foreign sailors in the dominions of the Tycoon would have been a patent demonstration of his incapacity to defend the nation against the "outer barbarian", and would have precipitated its downfall long before it actually took place, and before there was anything in the shape of a league among the clans ready to establish a new government. In all probability the country would have become a prey to ruinous anarchy, and collisions with foreign powers would have been frequent and serious. Probably the slaughter of the foreign community at Nagasaki would have been the immediate answer to the blow struck at Hodogaya, a joint expedition would have been sent out by England, France and Holland to fight many a bloody battle and perhaps dismember the realm of the Mikados. In the meantime the commerce for whose sake we had come to Japan would have been killed. And how many lives of Europeans and Japanese would have been sacrificed in return for that of Shimadzu Saburo?"¹²⁾

Satow then comments on his reaction on first hearing the news of the incident. It is passages like the following which cause some people to regard him as a cold fish. The charge seems more than a little unfair: Satow himself justifies his detachment as that of a professional diplomat, and the fact that he expresses secret shame indicates that he was not so cold after all.

"I was standing outside the hotel that afternoon, and on seeing the bustle of men

riding past, inquired what was the cause. The reply, "A couple of Englishmen have been cut down in Kanagawa," did not shock me in the least. The accounts of such occurrences that had appeared in the English press and the recent attack on the Legation of which I had heard on my way from Peking had prepared me to look on the murder of the foreigner as an ordinary, every-day affair, and the horror of bleeding wounds was not sufficiently familiar to me to excite the feelings of indignation that seemed to animate every one else. I was secretly ashamed of my want of sympathy. And yet, if it had been otherwise, such a sudden introduction to the danger of a horrid death might have rendered me quite unfit for the career I had adopted. This habit of looking upon assassination as part of the day's work enabled me later on to face with equanimity what most men whose sensations have not been deadened by a moral anaesthetic would perhaps have considered serious dangers. And while everyone in my immediate surroundings was in a state of excitement, defending Vyse or abusing Colonel Neale, I quietly settled down to my studies."¹³⁾

Satow's single-mindedness about his studies was such that he was able to blot out the horror of the Richardson Affair from his consciousness. He was to witness many more horrors before the Restoration in the same detached and cool frame of mind.

The Bombardment of Kagoshima

Having obtained an indemnity for the Richardson Affair from the Shogunate of 100,000 pounds in accordance with instructions from Lord John Russell in the Foreign Office, the British turned their attention to the exaction of reparation from the daimyo of Satsuma.

The British demands were the trial and execution in the presence of English officers of the murderers of Richardson, and the payment by the daimyo of an indemnity of 25,000 pounds as compensation to Richardson's relatives and to the three other members of the party who had been attacked. Colonel Neale requested Admiral Kuper to convey him and his staff to Kagoshima to present the demands. A total of seven ships headed by the flagship H.M.S. *Euryalus* left Yokohama on August 6, 1863. Satow and Willis were in the paddle sloop *Argus*.

The squadron arrived at the mouth of the Bay of Kagoshima five days later. On the morning of August 12 it anchored off the town. A letter was delivered stating the demands. It had been translated, Satow states disparagingly, "somehow or other"¹⁴⁾ into Japanese by Siebold and his teacher. In the afternoon forty men came on board the flagship with concealed weapons. The British were wisely cautious and only allowed two or three in the Admiral's cabin. They thereby thwarted a scheme which amounted to a hi-jack attempt.

Negotiations broke down and at dawn on the 15th some foreign-built steamers were seized by the British and battle was joined. The *Argus* was involved in seizing the

Sir George Grey (bought by Satsuma from Britain) with two prisoners. At noon the Japanese shore batteries opened fire. After the scuttling of the prize young *Satow* described with jubilation his first experience of being under fire:

"I shall never forget the interest and excitement of the whole affair, from the bursting of the shells high in the air against the grey sky all round the flagship as she lay at anchor before we weighed, until we came into action ourselves and could see... a round black thing coming straight at us."¹⁵⁾ Fortunately the battle did not become too interesting: the *Argus* was struck only three times.

Satow's bravery under fire was later commended by Colonel Neale in a despatch to Lord Russell. However, Satow did not return the compliment. He noted that some disagreement had occurred between Admiral Kuper and Colonel Neale, who had wanted the Admiral to land men and seize some guns as trophies. This Satow regarded as excessive interference in military matters by the Colonel, due to his impetuous nature.

Satow also disapproved of the unnecessary severity of bombarding and destroying large parts of the town by the newly developed breech-loading Armstrong guns and by rockets, which Neale (or Kuper) apparently claimed was accidental. Satow concluded that this was untrue. He had seen with his own eyes the *Perscus* firing rockets into the town after the engagement with the batteries had finished. He had also read the despatch penned by Neale which noted with satisfaction that one million pounds worth of property had been destroyed¹⁶⁾.

It is not certain whether Satow had read the article in the *New York Times* of November 24, 1863 headed "British Barbarity" in which Kuper's actions were roundly denounced:

"The crime, which is to stand forever as almost first on the black list of fearful cruelties committed by the strong against the weak, is the recent burning and shelling of an unprepared Japanese city, containing 180,000 inhabitants, against whom there was no war, by the British admiral."¹⁷⁾

The engagement at Kagoshima was by no means a clear cut victory for the British and Satsuma often claimed they had won by beating off the British attack. There had in fact been a number of British casualties, including Captain Josling and Commander Wilmot on the flagship¹⁸⁾. Kuper's despatch printed in the *Times* of October 31 listed 13 killed and 59 wounded. On August 17 the squadron proceeded to return to Yokohama. Satow commented that most of the crew of the *Argus* were bitterly discontented, and he thought the same was true on the other ships. In spite of this, a month later two high officers of Satsuma appeared at the Legation and acceded to the original demands, at least formally. The fine was paid with money borrowed from the Shogunate. Satow concluded that to have enforced the original demands in full it would have been necessary to invade Satsuma and cause the loss of many more innocent lives, an action for which he saw no justification.

Satow and Willis

Dr William Willis of the Legation staff was already in Japan when Satow arrived. Their friendship was to last until Willis died in 1894. Satow introduced him in glowing terms in *Diplomat*. He wrote that he had never met anyone more conscientious in his private or official life. He was a most tender and sympathetic doctor and surgeon, and he exposed himself to personal risks to look after those wounded in battle.

Yet Satow felt that Willis was not merely a good doctor. He was also a most competent administrator, a hard and loyal worker.

"In the chancery his services were indispensable. He it was who "swept the 'Aegean stable'", arranged the archives in order, and brought the register up to date. Always on the spot when he was wanted, an indefatigable worker, and unswervingly loyal to his chief. After nine years service he was promoted to be a vice-consul, but by this time the Japanese had become so impressed with his value as a surgeon and a physician that they begged him to accept a salary more than four times what he received from the Foreign Office, and he went where his great qualities were likely to be of more use than in trying petty police cases and drawing up trade reports of a city [Edo] which never had any foreign commerce."¹⁹⁾

Willis was a man of mountainous proportions. Satow, who is depicted in cartoons by Wirgman of *Japan Punch* as a thin, weedy individual in comparison, was suitably impressed by Willis's size²⁰⁾.

"His gigantic stature made him conspicuous among all the Europeans who have resided in Japan since the ports were opened, and when I first knew him he was hardly five and twenty years of age. A man endowed with an untiring power of application, accurate memory for words and things, and brimful of good stories from the three kingdoms. Big men are big-hearted, and he was no exception."²¹⁾

This last comment is a sentimental over-generalisation, but shows clearly Satow's affection for Willis.

Willis for his part wrote of Satow on September 30, 1865:

"The Satow family seem clever, our member of them translates and writes Japanese now with great ease and in these acquirements has almost no competitor. He is young and this is a great matter in learning a language and he has the genius of industry to a marvellous degree."²²⁾

Satow and Alcock

Sir Rutherford Alcock returned from England on March 2, 1864, and Colonel Neale left the scene. In the period between the Kagoshima bombardment and Alcock's return Satow had devoted himself to language study with his three teachers whenever he was not required by Neale to do the wrist-aching and mind-numbing copying of official

documents known as "chancery work". He had taken a small wooden house with Willis in a back street between the native and foreign settlements of Yokohama.

It is clear that Satow's relationship with Alcock was an harmonious one. Satow avoided mentioning Alcock by name in *Diplomat* as a supporter of the theory that Chinese study was a necessary pre-cursor to the study of Japanese. Alcock was also the diplomat who had caused much bad feeling in Yokohama by describing the foreign merchant community as "the scum of Europe", but again Satow did not name him in his memoirs even though he mentioned the remark. On the other hand in Chapter IX of *Diplomat* Satow wrote that the new head of Legation was popular with everyone²³⁾. What is more Alcock allowed him to escape from clerical duties and devote all his time to Japanese studies.

Alcock for his part was impressed by Satow's language ability, reporting that he was the only student interpreter who was able to read and translate Japanese. Alcock himself tried very hard to become proficient at Japanese, and produced two books devoted to the Japanese language. The first was published in Shanghai in 1861, the second in London and Paris in 1863²⁴⁾.

Among the documents which Satow translated were some notes of a visit to Europe which a subordinate member of the recent Japanese embassy had kept and which, with the normal humility of a junior official, he had called "A confused account of going to Europe like a fly on a horse's tail."²⁵⁾

A letter from home

Satow often left long periods between diary entries, but we find an important entry (not in *Diplomat*) reflecting his ambitious state of mind with regard to his choice of career on March 26, 1864²⁶⁾. It tells of a letter dated December 10, 1863 from his father offering him 100 pounds per annum if he would go back to England and study the law. Satow wrote that he was put "in a great state of perplexity" by the letter. If he remained in Japan his life would continue to be free and adventurous, and he could continue his Japanese studies. On the other hand, if he went home he would probably become rich, get married, travel in Europe, enjoy good music and abandon the immorality of his bachelor life.

On March 4, 1864 Satow asked Alcock about his career prospects. Alcock had only just returned from leave, and lent a sympathetic ear.

"He replied very kindly, listened to my arguments very patiently, and promised to write home for my promotion. But although I decided to stay, I am not quite sure whether this was the whole reason, for after all it was small comfort. It is more probable that I felt that to leave Japan and return to that dull old England, would be to destroy the real happiness of my life and to cut off all the ties I have formed during the last 2 and a half years. Not only ties of friendship, for they are weak compared with what

I have at home, but attachment to the country, to the language, and to the people. Having now decided which course to take, I must stick to it, and try to win the position of a great Japanese scholar. For to know this language well is my intention, and to this end are all my efforts directed. Very few European books ever open themselves before me, and I am gradually losing every tincture of my original knowledge of ancient learning. The reward, I hope, will be a great one when it comes."

Here young Satow is clearly and movingly setting out his goal of becoming the distinguished Japanologist which he later achieved. In the process he feels he is forgetting his classical education, but this is a price he is prepared to pay for the deferred benefits of mastering Japanese. Was England really so dull? Perhaps so for a man forced back into the bosom of his strict Nonconformist family, as Satow surely would have been.

We may speculate at the nature of the "immoral life" which Satow says he has been living. Undoubtedly he was fond of wine, women and song. Yet there are few details in his diary. At the same time Satow seems to have felt some guilt about the way in which he let his puritanical father down. Later in the same entry he noted that he hoped be able to show his gratitude some day or other to his father, for his constant kindness. "If he knew me now he would I think look upon me with different eyes; but to undeceive him and to let him know straight out that I am no longer the same moral or supposed moral youth I left him would be cruel to him and unpleasant to myself."

Among the reasons for refusal of his father's generous offers Satow felt that the jealousy of his brothers was a significant factor. Yet he also expressed a hope that he might one day pursue a commercial career in Japan. "But I still have another arrow in my quiver. Trade, for which my knowledge of the language ought in some measure to fit me, is a thing which would fit in with all my desires." Here Satow may have been thinking of repaying his father's kindness by following in his footsteps. Fortunately he decided to continue to serve his country as a diplomat, though he never forgot that trade was the main reason for the British presence in Japan.

Shimonoseki : Preliminaries

In the summer of 1863, the Choshu clan, acting under orders from the Emperor to expel the barbarians, had fired on an American merchant vessel, a Dutch corvette and a French despatch-boat as they passed through the narrow straits of Shimonoseki between Honshu and Kyushu. Alcock arrived from England with a mandate to enforce the treaties and protect British trade. Satow thought that only the total defeat of the warlike Choshu clan would suffice to convince the Japanese nation that Britain was determined to enforce the treaties, and to carry on her trade without interference from anybody, irrespective of internal strife²⁷). This was clearly a view influenced by that

of the Minister Alcock, though not shared by Lord Russell, the Foreign Secretary in London, who later called Alcock to account for his actions.

Alcock quickly rallied a coalition of the representatives of France, Holland and the United States, and issued an ultimatum to the Shogunate that if they did not promise to reopen the Straits of Shimonoseki within 20 days, foreign warships would be sent to achieve this end. At about this time, two of five Choshu students who had gone to England secretly with the help of the Scottish merchant Thomas Glover to study the ways and technology of the foreigners firsthand (Ito Shunsuke²⁸⁾ and Inoue Bunda²⁹⁾) arrived back in Japan to warn their clan of the futility of tangling with the mighty foreigners. Both of these samurai had participated in the attack on the British Legation in July 1861, and studied at University College London (Satow's *alma mater*). They were later to distinguish themselves in government and became Satow's intimate acquaintances in latter years. Alcock obtained the consent of his colleagues to sending two warships (*Barossa* and *Cormorant*) to Shimonoseki with the two Japanese on board, bearing a long memorandum for presentation to their daimyo.

Satow met Ito and Inoue for the first time aboard the warships on July 21, and jointly with them and his teacher (Nakazawa Kensaku) put Alcock's memorandum into Japanese. Ito and Inoue were then put ashore on July 27, with Nakazawa pessimistic that they would be executed for fraternization with the enemy. In the event they returned on August 6 with an answer from the daimyo of Choshu. However, there was nothing in writing, and the daimyo requested a postponement of three months so that he could ask the Emperor to rescind the expulsion order. This answer was of course unsatisfactory. The powers under Alcock's lead prepared for military operations, although a despatch dated July 26 was on its way from Lord Russell in London prohibiting such operations in the Japanese interior, and limiting naval operations to defensive measures to protect the life and property of British subjects. However, at this time there was no telegraph beyond Galle in Ceylon, so the message did not arrive until the operations were over³⁰⁾.

Shimonoseki: Naval Operations and Peace concluded

On Sunday, August 28, 1864 a combined fleet of seventeen ships set sail from Yokohama. Satow was delighted to be appointed interpreter to Admiral Kuper on the flagship *Euryalus*. He messed in the ward room and slept on a sofa for lack of a cabin. The photographer Felix Beato was the only other civilian on the ship. Satow's teacher Nakazawa had been secretly taken away from him by the Shogunate, but Willis lent his teacher whom Satow thought was greatly inferior to Nakazawa³¹⁾.

On September 5 the bombardment began at ten minutes past four. It lasted for one hour. The following day Satow took part in the landing of a mainly British force of almost 2,000 men who were sent ashore to make sure the Choshu batteries were

silenced. In *Diplomat* Satow has left a graphic description of his experiences. It was clearly a great adventure for the young civilian, and a resounding victory was won for the loss of only eight killed and thirty wounded. As at Kagoshima the year before, Satow records some friction between the chief diplomat and Admiral Kuper. Alcock wanted Kuper to attack Hagi on the Japan Sea coast, which intelligence indicated was the stronghold of the daimyo. However, the Admiral refused because he believed his mission was complete as soon as the Choshu forts were destroyed and the straits were opened³²⁾.

Peace was concluded with Choshu soon after on the conditions that the batteries should not be reconstructed, the straits should be kept open to foreign shipping, and a punitive indemnity should be paid, ostensibly for sparing the town of Shimonoseki from bombardment, but actually to cover the cost of the allied expedition. On October 22 the Shogunate signed a convention agreeing to pay three million dollars in settlement of all claims, the money to be divided among the foreign powers.

After Shimonoseki Alcock honoured his promise made to Satow on March 4. He wrote home to recommend that he should be promoted to the position of interpreter, released from all other duties and have his salary doubled from 200 pounds to 400 pounds a year. Accordingly from April 1, 1865, B. M. Allen notes that Satow took the rank of "Interpreter for the Japanese language" attached to the consulate of Yokohama.

Gunboat Diplomacy

Alcock himself was initially not so fortunate. In November 1864 Lord Russell recalled him to London to explain his warlike actions, much to the disgust of most Japan residents. Russell was no advocate of gunboat diplomacy, unlike the forceful and popular Lord Palmerston, who as foreign secretary had defended the bombardment of Athens (the so-called Don Pacifico affair) in a dusk-to-dawn speech on July 8, 1850, and thus thwarted then prime minister Russell's intention of removing him from office. However, in a despatch dated November 19, 1864 in answer to Russell's despatches which he saw as censuring his conduct, Alcock wrote:

..."What has been done was necessary to avert our expulsion from Yokohama, and war as a certain sequence. My whole defence and justification is there, so far as the motive, the object, and the means employed are concerned. The results speak for themselves. A catastrophe has been averted, the danger of war indefinitely deferred, if not altogether prevented, and our position at Yokohama secured from all immediate risk. Trade nearly extinguished has been restored with increased vigour."³³⁾

It seems that the final sentence weighed most heavily with Lord Russell, who accepted Alcock's justification and even congratulated him in a reply dated January 31, 1865. Russell also sought to conceal the initial reasons for Alcock's recall:

“ You were ordered home that you might in person give to Her Majesty’s Government fuller information as to the state of things in Japan than mere despatches could convey....”³⁴⁾

The final ironic twist in the tail was that, when the success of the Shimonoseki attack in protecting British trade was made clear, Alcock received promotion to become H. M. Minister at Peking. That Alcock was lucky is shown by Satow’s note in *Diplomat* of the experience of Vice-Consul Gibson³⁵⁾. When transferred to Formosa (the old Portuguese name for Taiwan) he got into difficulties with the Chinese officials and ordered the commander of a gunboat to bombard the Custom House. He was sharply reprimanded by the Foreign Office and soon afterwards died of a broken heart.

Baldwin and Bird

Alcock’s departure for England was briefly delayed when on November 20, 1864 two officers of the 20th regiment (Legation Guard), Major Baldwin and Lieutenant Bird were hacked to death in Kamakura after visiting the “Daiboots” (*Daibutsu* or Great Buddha). Satow attended the execution of two supposed accomplices on December 16, and of one of the murderers (Shimazu Seiji) on December 28. His language skills were in demand as both witnesses and Shimazu himself were interrogated.

In his last moments Shimazu chanted a verse which Satow translated :

“I do not regret being taken and put to death,

For to kill barbarians is the true spirit of a Japanese.”

Satow reports that the executioner had to hack the head off (“ a most horrible sight ”) and concludes in his memoirs that he was forced to despise the assassin, but at the same time he regretted that a man who was “evidently of such heroic mould ” should have believed that Japan would be helped by this action.

He then adds a horticultural image culled, no doubt, from the garden of his Devonshire retirement home. In the end he felt nothing was wasted, as “the blood of the foreigners who fell under the swords of Japanese murderers, and the lives which were sacrificed to avenge it bore fruit in later days, and fertilised the ground from which sprang the tree of national regeneration.”³⁶⁾

Satow and Parkes

Alcock left for England in December 1864. For the period between Ministers Winchester as Secretary of Legation was *chargé d'affaires*. Sir Harry Parkes was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary for Japan in March 1865 and arrived at Yokohama in July. From this time on until they both left Japan in 1883 Satow served under Parkes. The relationship was never an easy one. Satow records in *Diplomat* that Parkes was “strict and severe in service matters, but in his private relations gracious to all those

who had occasion to seek his help, and a faithful friend to all who won his goodwill." Unfortunately, Satow was not one of these, and the result was that from the beginning to the end of their relationship they were never friends. However, Satow made sure that Parkes never had reason to complain of sloth or unreadiness to take his share of the work³⁷⁾.

Sir Hugh Cortazzi wrote a chapter about Parkes in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits* (Japan Library) in which he addressed the question of Parkes's character and evaluated his success as British Minister in Japan for eighteen years. Broadly his conclusion was that while Parkes's achievements could not be dismissed lightly, he would not have wished to serve under such a man. He further surmised that Parkes disapproved of Satow's private life (Satow had a Japanese common law wife, who was perhaps the daughter of the legation gardener, and two sons by her), and that he resented Satow's independent ideas.

Parkes was born in 1828, making him Satow's senior by fifteen years. When arrived in Japan in 1865 he was 38, a young age for a Minister. Despite the lack of a university education he had worked as Chinese interpreter under Alcock who became Consul in Amoy in 1844. Parkes then became Consul in Amoy, Canton and Shanghai. He had been a member of Lord Elgin's mission to Peking in 1860, during which he had been arrested and imprisoned by the Chinese authorities for three weeks, chained for eleven days and threatened with execution. In short, his reputation as a tough but seasoned diplomat preceded him. Satow wrote of him that his prestige was that of a hero in the eyes of all European residents in the Far East³⁸⁾.

A new biography of Parkes has just been published in which the claim is made that he is so well-known in Japan that "it would be difficult to find anyone unaware of his name and his perceived role in the creation of the modern Japanese state."³⁹⁾

Ratification of the Treaties

It was for the thorough and formidable, but also often irascible and hectoring, Parkes that Satow was obliged to work as interpreter in many difficult interviews with the Japanese. The first of these concerned ratification of the treaties of 1858 by the Emperor. Alcock and Winchester had both grasped the importance of ratification for British trade, especially as there was a possibility that the Shogun might be overthrown in a civil war. Satow credits Winchester with the suggestion in April 1865 to the Foreign Office that ratification by the Emperor and the reduction of import duties to a uniform 5 per cent would be a fair exchange for remission of two-thirds of the Shimonoseki indemnity. Russell instructed Parkes to submit this proposal to the foreign representatives in Japan. In a conference on October 26 their agreement was obtained, and a squadron of nine ships (five British, three French and one Dutch) left Yokohama on November 1. Satow, Macdonald and Siebold travelled with Parkes on Admiral King's

flagship⁴⁰).

The ships arrived off Hyogo (Kobe) on November 4 where they stayed for three weeks of intense negotiations, the details of which are exhaustively covered by Grace Fox in *Britain and Japan 1858-1883*⁴¹. In between composing and presenting letters for negotiation, Satow joined the Admiral and Sir Harry in exploring the neighbourhood with a view to selecting a site for the foreign settlement. The locals were friendly, contrary to the expectation given by the Shogunate. Satow concluded that the Shogun's officers were afraid that fraternization between foreigners and the townspeople would undermine their authority.

As negotiations dragged on Parkes sent Satow with Hegt (a young Dutchman) to Osaka to inspect a house that had been assigned for the accommodation of the foreign representatives. There they met with bumbling officials and a large hostile crowd, in contrast to the ones in Kobe. Hegt was on the point of losing his temper when Satow wisely made him return his revolver to its pouch. Satow observed that they were in no danger, and could not afford to commit a murder for a trivial reason⁴².

On another occasion there was a curious "rencontre" (meeting) with a Satsuma steamer captain who lamented that he could not provide an "onna gochiso" (literally "feast of women") and showed his cabin fitted up for the entertainment. Satow commented that this gentleman was too civil by half, but still the contrast to the aloofness of the Shogun's officials was very agreeable⁴³.

Finally in the afternoon of November 24 the foreign envoys were informed of the Emperor's consent to the treaties. The tariff was to be revised to 5 per cent, and the indemnity would be paid promptly. Another demand for the early opening of the port of Hyogo was rejected, so the date was still set at January 1, 1868. However, Satow noted that the opening of Hyogo two years early was a concession which few people had expected, and the merchants at Yokohama were not yet ready to open a branch in other Japanese cities⁴⁴.

The success of the negotiations caused general rejoicing among the foreign representatives and their governments. Yet Satow notes in *Diplomat* that the payment of the indemnity was never in fact completed and survived the Restoration to be a constant source of irritation and ill-feeling between the Meiji government and the British Minister⁴⁵. (E. H. House noted in his article on Shimonoseki that the indemnity was finally paid in full in July 1874)⁴⁶.

Furthermore Satow, ever the keen-eyed linguist, claims that the existing treaties were not in fact explicitly sanctioned due to the absence of the definite article in the Japanese language. The difference between "treaties are sanctioned" and "the treaties are sanctioned" is a material one in English⁴⁷. However the negotiations had allowed Satow to prove his worth to Parkes.

Notes

- 1) There is another much abridged translation entitled *Bakumatsu Ishin Kaisouki* translated by Shiojiri Kiyochi and published in 1943 in the possession of Mr Shozo Nagaoka of Kamakura.
- 2) Diplomat, p. 55
- 3) Diplomat, p. 55-6
- 4) Diplomat, p. 59
- 5) Diplomat, p. 51-2
- 6) Diplomat, p. 52
- 7) A photograph of Richardson's body was taken by an unknown photographer (not Beato who had not yet arrived in Japan). It has been included in various books and is in the albums of van Polsbroeck possessed by Leiden University. It was recently shown in the exhibition 'Yomigaeru Bakumatsu' put on by the Asahi Shinbun.
- 8) Diplomat p. 52-3
- 9) Diplomat, p. 53
- 10) Diplomat, p. 53-4
- 11) See Cortazzi, *Dr Willis in Japan*, p. 30
- 12) Diplomat, p. 54
- 13) Diplomat, p. 54-5
- 14) Diplomat, p. 85
- 15) Diplomat, p. 88
- 16) Diplomat, p. 92
- 17) *Gaikoku Shinbun ni Miru Nihon* Vol 1 (Genbunhen), Mainichi Communications, p. 326
- 18) The names of the British casualties are recorded on a plaque at the Yokohama Archives of History (formerly the British Consulate).
- 19) Diplomat, p. 31
- 20) See Charles Wirgman's cartoon *The Substance and the Shadow* in an early issue of the *Japan Punch*, reprinted in Cortazzi, *ibid.* p. 52
- 21) Diplomat, p. 31
- 22) Cortazzi, p. 54
- 23) Diplomat, p. 95
- 24) Cortazzi, 1994, *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan (TASJ)*, p. 17-18
- 25) See articles in the *Chinese and Japanese Repository*, Nos. XXIV to XXIX, July to December 1865; continued in the *Japan Times*, September 15, 1865 to March 9, 1866. Only four out of six sections of the diary were translated.
- 26) PRO 30/33 15/1
- 27) Diplomat, p. 96
- 28) Later known as Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909). Preeminent statesman of modern Japan from Choshu. In a career that spanned nearly the entire Meiji period (1868-1912) he played a leading role in guiding Japan in its formative years as a modern nation-state. The chief architect of Japan's first constitution, he served four terms as prime minister.
- 29) Later known as Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915). Meiji politician who held several governmental posts. Eventually he became an influential elder statesman (*Genro*).
- 30) Diplomat, p. 101
- 31) Diplomat, p. 102
- 32) Diplomat, p. 115
- 33) F. O. 46/47, Alcock to Russell, Separate, No. 97, Yokohama, 19 Nov. 1864; quoted by Grace Fox in 'Britain and Japan 1858-1883' p. 146, and F. V. Dickins in 'The Life of Sir Harry Parkes'

Volume II p. 32-33.

- 34) Dickins. *ibid.* p. 33
 35) *Diplomat*, p. 20
 36) *Diplomat*, p. 140
 37) *Diplomat*, p. 142
 38) *Diplomat*, p. 141. On the same page Satow generously praises Parkes, and further seems to suggest that he was (privately) in favour of the restoration of the Emperor in 1868, with a decisive impact on the course of events. However, Parkes remained officially neutral.
 "And whatever may have been his faults and shortcomings, especially towards the latter part of his career, it must be acknowledged that England never was represented by a more devoted public servant, and that Japan herself owes to his exertions a debt which she can never repay and has never fully acknowledged. *If he had taken a different side in the revolution of 1868* (my italics), if he had simply acted with the majority of his colleagues, almost insurmountable difficulties would have been placed in the way of the Mikado's restoration...."
 39) See *Sir Harry Parkes-British Representative in Japan* p. 204
 40) *Diplomat*, p. 143-4. Satow only names four British ships, but there were five. See Fox, p. 165.
 41) See Fox, p. 164 et seq.
 42) *Diplomat*, p. 149
 43) *Diplomat*, p. 149-150
 44) *Diplomat*, p. 153-154
 45) *Diplomat*, p. 153
 46) See the first page of House's privately published 'Simonoseki' (Tokyo, 1875). Edward H. House was an American journalist, editor of the *Tokio Times*, whose enmity to Britain and Parkes in particular was well known. (see Fox, p. 547).
 47) *Diplomat*, p. 155

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