

FREE DOWNLOADABLE PREVIEW

Sir Ernest Satow's Private Letters to  
W. G. Aston and F. V. Dickins:  
The Correspondence of a Pioneer Japanologist  
from 1870 to 1918

Transcribed from the Satow Papers, annotated and indexed  
by Ian Ruxton

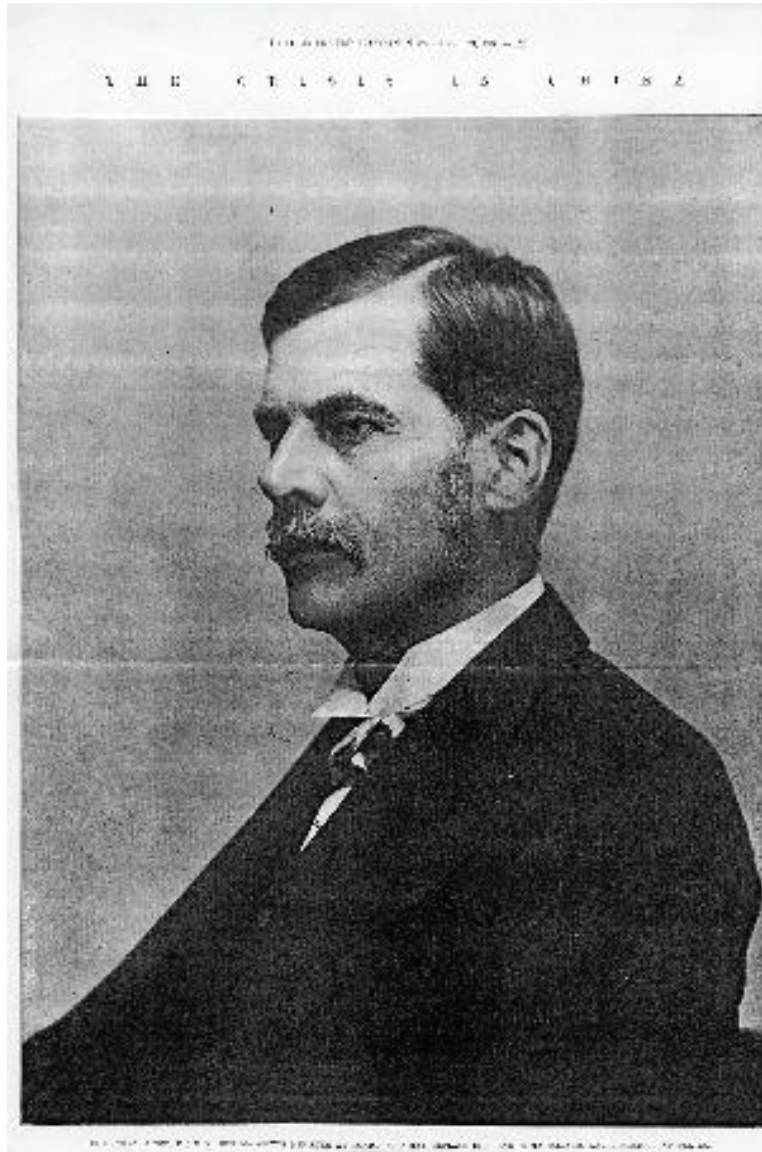
With an Introduction by Peter Kornicki

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Ernest Satow as a young man of 26 years, photographed in Paris during his first home leave from Japan in December 1869 (reproduced with permission of the Yokohama Archives of History)

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Sir Ernest Satow the prominent diplomat, pictured in the *Illustrated London News* dated September 29, 1900 – the date Satow arrived at Shanghai to replace Sir Claude MacDonald as envoy, which was confirmed between them at Peking on October 21<sup>st</sup> (see Satow's diary). Satow's portrait appears here under the heading 'The Crisis in China'. (The Legations had been under siege from the Boxers from June 20th to August 14th, and at one point all had been reported to be massacred.)

(With thanks to Dr. Nigel Brailey for drawing my attention to this portrait.)

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William George Aston (from the Takeda family collection,  
with permission of the Yokohama Archives of History)



Frederick Victor Dickins  
(By kind permission of Douglas Dickins, F.R.P.S.)

**[Note: Images in the book are in black and white.]**

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### **Acknowledgements by the Author**

- 1) I wish to thank Peter Kornicki for his expert introduction, and many others for their contributions, direct or indirect, to the footnotes. In particular my special thanks are due to Mr. Douglas Dickins who recently celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> year and gave permission for the picture of his grandfather above to be used in a letter to me dated January 18, 2008. (He is the author of *In Grandpa's Footsteps: A 92-Year-Old Shows How to Start a New Career at 60*, published by the Book Guild Ltd. in 2000.)
- 2) Most of the transcription work was done in Japan using microfilms and digital images thereof. (In cases of illegibility or doubt the original letters at the National Archives were consulted.)
- 3) Any errors in transcription and unresolved ambiguities are my sole responsibility.
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- 5) Japanese names in the index are given in the Japanese style, family name before given name.

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### **Relevant Books by the Same Author**

I. Ruxton (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Sir Ernest Mason Satow (1843-1929): A Scholar-Diplomat in East Asia*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1998 (A general introduction to Satow's life and letters.)

I. Ruxton (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Ernest Satow, British Minister in Tokyo (1895-1900): A Diplomat Returns to Japan*, Tokyo: Edition Synapse, 2003, with an introduction by Nigel Brailey

I. Ruxton (ed.), *The Correspondence of Sir Ernest Satow, British Minister in Japan, 1895-1900, Volume One*, Lulu Press Inc., 2005 (Chiefly official letters addressed and sent to Satow from the Foreign Office, the Tokyo legation and consular staff at Kobe, Nagasaki and Hakodate. Satow Papers reference PRO 30/33 5/1 through 5/10.)

I. Ruxton (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Ernest Satow, British Envoy in Peking (1900-06)*, Lulu Press Inc., 2006 (Two volumes. Volume 1 – 1900-03; Volume 2 – 1904-06) with an introduction by J.E. Hoare

I. Ruxton (ed.), *The Semi-Official Letters of British Envoy Sir Ernest Satow from Japan and China (1895-1906)*, Lulu Press Inc. 2007, with an introduction by J.E. Hoare

For these and other books, including translations from Japanese to English, see <http://www.lulu.com/ianruxton> and the amazon websites.



### **Author's Preface**

It gives me much pleasure to be able to publish these important letters of Sir Ernest Satow (1843-1929), written in the period 1870-1918 to his two great friends W.G. Aston and F.V. Dickins, as part of a sustained effort over more than a decade to make the Satow Papers more easily available to scholars and the general reading public. It is hoped that some hitherto unresolved issues relating to this distinguished scholar-diplomat may be cleared up thanks to this publication: for example, Japanese scholars of Satow, beginning with the late Nobutoshi Hagihara (1926-2001) their doyen who first discovered the Satow Papers at the old Public Record Office, sometimes seem to express puzzlement as to why Satow should have effectively turned his back on Japan (but not his Japanese family) in retirement. One answer to this conundrum is surely provided by the relative lack of information and news about Japan which would have been available to Satow in retirement at Ottery St Mary, Devon. There was of course no internet in those days, and Japan was a world away despite occasional visitors. Another lies in Satow's clearly stated preference for and higher estimation of European over Japanese culture explained by Peter Kornicki below, and yet another in the deaths of both his closest 'old Japonian' friends with whom he could and did discuss Japanese culture in letters: Aston in 1911 and Dickins in 1915. As for his Japanese books, he made very large collections and complained of having too many to Dickins (186), and already in 1881 he was planning to 'shut up all Asiatic books' on his return to live in England (140).

In the end it was apparently – as with Shakespeare's Mark Antony in his funeral oration for Julius Caesar – not that Satow loved Japan less, but that he loved Europe more. Japan was delightful and fascinating as a subject of work-related study while he was there as a young man. But do not most of us - wherever we come from - ultimately value and cherish most highly the culture in which we were born and nurtured, and seek to return to it? Be this as it may, Satow's deep concern for the welfare of his friends shines through in this long correspondence, and we may feel privileged to be able to eavesdrop on one side of these erudite and thoughtful exchanges.

Ian Ruxton

Kyushu Institute of Technology



## Introduction

Ernest Satow belonged to a small group of Englishmen who arrived in Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century and applied themselves to learning the language with remarkable results. Like William George Aston, Frederick Victor Dickins, and Basil Hall Chamberlain, Satow made his mark as a japanologist with a range of impressive publications, but he differed from them in that he also rose to prominence in public life, with the result that his name is still the best known of them all in Japan. This was, of course, because of his dazzling diplomatic career, which took him from Japan to Siam (Thailand), Uruguay and Morocco and finally back to Japan as Minister Plenipotentiary, followed by five years in Peking in the same position; in both of those two final postings he was head of mission, for neither post was at the time yet considered important enough to warrant an ambassador. He was also showered with honours: on his last visit to Japan, on his way home after relinquishing his post in Peking, he was received by Emperor Meiji and entertained by all the leading statesmen of the day, mostly men he had known as young men when he had been in Japan in the 1860s. In Britain he was knighted GCMG, awarded an honorary doctorate at Cambridge and made a member of the Privy Council. As an indication of his standing in foreign affairs and diplomacy, it is worth remembering that his monumental *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* appeared in 1917; it remained a standard work of reference for young diplomats and was frequently revised and updated, the last edition appearing as late as 1957.

Although Satow has thus many and varied claims to distinction, his correspondence reveals an abiding involvement with and interest in Japan throughout his life, and this is particularly so with the correspondence contained in this volume, for his correspondents were pioneer japanologists like him. Although Dickins left Japan in 1879 and Aston in 1889, neither ever to return, they both continued to write on Japan in their retirement. It was in fact during those years of retirement that they produced some of their finest work as scholars of Japan, such as Aston's *History of Japanese Literature* (1899) and *Shinto (The Way of the Gods)* (1905), and Dickins' *The Old Bamboo-hewer's story* (1889), *Primitive and medieval Japanese texts* (1906) and *The Story of a Hida Craftsman* (1912). While

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they occupied their years back in England with scholarship on Japan, Satow was travelling the world as an increasingly high-ranking member of the British diplomatic service, but that he, too, retained a scholarly interest in Japan is obvious, for example, from his correspondence with Dickins, in which we read of their speculations about the use of the Japanese word *yorô* to mean 'courtesan', their interest in Japanese botany and their criticisms of the writings on Japan of lesser figures, such as August Pfizmaier, W. E. Griffis and John Reddie Black. These and other topics, together with recollections of the Japan of their youth and reflections on contemporary Japan, are of as much interest to Satow when he is writing from Bangkok, Montevideo and Tangier as they were when he was still writing from Japan at the beginning of his career. Nevertheless, after 1900 he wrote very little about Japan for publication, with the principal exception of a section on Japan for his chapter 'The Far East, 1815-1871' in the *Cambridge Modern History* (1909).

After he had left Japan to rise in the diplomatic service, there can be no doubt that he missed his life in Japan: writing from Bangkok in 1884, he wrote, 'I never think of that country without the liveliest feelings of regret. One was so happy there in spite of the distance from England, and the travelling in the interior was so delightful' (146); thus when he needed to leave Bangkok temporarily to recover from a bout of ill-health, it was to Japan that he went. And yet he could also write to Dickins, 'you must not regret Japan, it is not worth it' (129), and he could claim that, 'The Japanese are decorative not artistic' (217). Similarly, complaining of the burden of work as head of mission in Tokyo, he wrote, 'The routine work is killing me mentally, and I must come back to a higher civilization' (219), by which, it is clear from the context, he was referring to Europe. Like many of his contemporaries, he was unable to escape the conviction, or instinct, that European civilization was unsurpassed. And thus it comes as no surprise to find him commenting on a review of Aston's *History of Japanese Literature*, 'Summed up altogether what a very poor show Japanese literature makes' (220). Dickins himself expressed a similar ambivalence about Japan towards the end of his life, and regretted that he had devoted his life to things Japanese. It was, in the end, impossible for any of them to become cultural relativists and discard the cultural yardsticks they held undiminished and unchallenged in their minds for their entire lives.

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Satow was an inveterate collector and reader of books and the correspondence reveals much about his reading, including a number of Japanese books, which at that time, of course, were entirely woodblock-printed books printed in cursive script. In a letter to Dickins of 1877, for example, he mentions reading Nô plays and the tenth-century poetry anthology *Kokinshû* (114). But Japanese was by no means the only language he was reading in apart from English, and readers of these letters will perhaps be taken aback by the extraordinary breadth of his reading and interests. By 1880 he was learning written and spoken Korean from a Korean resident in Japan and trying to read Korean literature (29-30); it is clear from casual references in these letters that he was regularly reading books in French, Italian, Spanish and German as a matter of course, and in 1916, when already in his seventies, he began the study of Russian in order to read Russian diplomatic documents (309).

It is worth pointing out here that the many activities, including dictionary-compiling, travelling around Japan, reading, studying botany and learning Korean that he mentions in his letters were only possible because his duties in the British legation could not be said to have been exacting. As he wrote in 1879, 'we no longer sit in the Chancery at fixed hours whether there is work or not, which is one of Sir Harry [Parkes]'s favourite ways of making one waste time' (126), or on another occasion, 'official work is not heavy' (143); recalling his early days in Japan with Aston, he wrote, 'we seldom had more than half a day's work each' (42). And even when he returned to Japan as head of mission in 1895 he could afford to spend several months a year travelling or sitting quietly by Lake Chûzenji at Nikkô!

For those who, like myself, first went to Japan in the 1970s, it is not difficult to identify myriad ways in which Japanese society has changed. Gone, for example, are the smogs of the big cities and the student protesters, and no more does a foreigner's competence in Japanese astonish. But in many respects change has been gradual and far from dramatic: the Shinkansen is a bit faster and a bit more stylish, more Japanese are likely to own and use a car, architectural styles are more imaginative and confident. But for Satow and his contemporaries, the changes were colossal, and it requires an effort of the imagination to realise that. Arriving in Japan in 1862, he spent his first years in the Edo of daimyo

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mansions and palanquins, of two-sworded assassins, of woodblock-printed books and of single-storey wooden dwellings. By the time he left, Japan had a navy powerful enough to defeat Russia, an extensive railway network, a publishing industry that used steam presses and churned out masses of newspapers, magazines and books, and magnificent museums, exhibition halls and other public buildings made of brick. By these dramatic changes Satow, like his contemporaries, could not but be impressed but there remained a deep ambivalence about Japan that none of them could shake off. Ian Ruxton's careful transcriptions of these letters offer a valuable opportunity to come face to face with that ambivalence and to see the workings of an educated mind which knew Japan intimately but could not reconcile his European intellectual loyalties either with the Japan he experienced in the 1860s and 1870s or with Japan as a rising power in the twentieth century.

Peter Kornicki  
East Asia Institute  
University of Cambridge  
May 2007

**PRO 30/33 11/2: June 14, 1870 to Nov 29, 1881 (61 letters)**

1.

[undated – checked original at National Archives March 5, 2007]

Dear Aston,

Sir Harry [Parkes, British minister in Japan 1865-83] wants you to translate the documents which he has marked in the margin of the enclosed.

I have been looking more into the Jinkô Shôtôki, and have come to the conclusion that it is not perfectly good Japanese, of the kind we want for the students. Another objection is that I showed one or two passages to Okamoto & Takeda, & they were unable to make them out. This of course only proves that an ordinary Japanese of the kind we get as teachers would probably be unable to explain the book, but that seems to me a sufficient condemnation.

The Kita Ezo Dzushi is much better. I have tried to make a translation of the first page or so, and find it not difficult. There are one or two odd constructions, but the book is an interesting one, and that quality will get the student over many a rough place. I have asked Okamoto to consult with Kobayashi & Tamaki (Gubbins' & Woolley's teachers) about the selection of a suitable book. Kasu Kabé is not learned in any way, and I will look among my own books. The great difficulty, after having selected the book, will probably be to find enough copies.

Yours very truly  
Ernest Satow

2.

London

June 14, 1870

My dear Aston,

Forwarded the enclosed in your note of April 12 to the Sanjos. It is decided that I leave Marseilles on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October and I ought to arrive at Yokohama about the 18<sup>th</sup> November. It is perhaps very selfish of me to remain so long away when there is such a great necessity (as I understand from Mitford) for your getting leave of absence. But it is very hard to tear oneself away from European life, just as one is beginning to like it; and besides my parents were so anxious that I should stop with them a few months longer, that I was almost forced to apply for leave. The Legation must be terribly shorthanded.

I quite share your feeling of disgust with Japan. For at least a year before I left I had ceased to take any interest in the work. The natives may be making progress there, but we foreigners only fall back I think. The railway scheme and the loan will, I am afraid, be a damned nuisance to the Legation.

Remember me kindly to Adams.

Yours very sincerely  
Ernest Satow

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3.

Yedo,

Aug. 19, 1872

My dear Aston,

Many thanks for the copy of your Grammar of the Written Language which with the others intended for [J.C.] Hall <sup>1</sup>, [J.H.] Longford <sup>2</sup> etc. arrived last mail. As we have not yet seen any copies of your Colloquial Grammar but those sent to Lane & Crawford for sale, we began to think you had forgotten our existence. I like your grammar very much indeed and it is of immense use to me as I am just now studying the Kojiki. I am afraid that the public in Japan will hardly take any large number, but the learned philologists at home ought to greet it with joy, for it must be much more acceptable to them than Hoffmann's unwieldy book.

I am engaged in printing my exercises, with a few additional ones, and have found your Colloquial Grammar very convenient to refer to. The paradigms I have remade in the Yedo Colloquial, upon your system, with one or two exceptions. Howell is printing it with very much the same type as has been used for your new colloquial grammar, of which he happened to have got out a stock for a book by somebody else, who has given up the intention of publishing. There is to be a Japanese text cut on blocks, the first 14 exercises in hiragana and the other 11 in Giôsho [semicursive style] with kana at the side. I do not expect it will be out before the end of the year, even if then, as it can only be printed in the slack moments of Howell's office. From the proceedings of the Japanese Embassy [led by Iwakura Tomomi] we do not expect to see either them Sir Harry or yourself for another year: you are certainly an enviable man to be kept on duty in Europe. We are all very sorry to lose Adams; he was the kindest of chiefs and I think he thought less of himself and more of his duty than any other man I have ever served under. His promotion was quite unexpected by him. Lowder has accepted a temporary appointment in the Japanese service, and sits at the receipt of custom in Yokohama. What the precise nature of his engagement is I do not know, for I am not particularly eager to be acquainted with his affairs. By the way, Terashima <sup>3</sup> coolly told me one day that as soon as you arrived he intended to get you into their service. I told him that of course you were the person to decide such a matter, but that I certainly should not help him to get your services. Having got hold of Siebold and

---

<sup>1</sup> John Carey Hall (1844-1921). M.A. of Queen's University, Ireland. Appointed student interpreter in Japan, December 1867. Called to the Bar at the Middle Temple, 1881.

Appointed Assistant Japanese Secretary at Tokio, April 1, 1882. Consul at Hiogo (Kobe), 1896-1902. Consul-General for Kanagawa at Yokohama, 1902-14. (from F.O. List, 1921)

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Henry Longford (1849-1925). B.A. of Queen's University, Ireland. Appointed student interpreter in Japan, February 1869. Appointed Vice-Consul at Tokio, May 1886. Called to the Bar at Middle Temple, May 1889. Consul in Formosa, 1896. Consul for Nagasaki, 1897-1902. Retired 1902 and became a Professor of Japanese at King's College London, 1903-16. Wrote many books about Japan. See I. Ruxton's portrait in H. Cortazzi (ed.) *Britain & Japan: Biographical Portraits*, Volume VI, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Terashima Munenori (1832-93) from Satsuma. Politician and diplomat of Bakumatsu and early Meiji period.

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Dubousquet, they think they can get hold of everybody, but in the case of those two men, there was very good reason why they should do it, as they were certain never to rise where they were. Hall has turned out [a] very good Japanese scholar, and his translations generally read very well. McClatchie makes great progress, especially with the written language. [Joseph Henry] Longford I do not think much of: he is intensely vain and lazy. I am told that he has good latents [sic. concealed talents?], but he certainly has not yet displayed them. Of the last batch of students I think Gubbins will do well, but at present the other two Paul & Woolley show no signs of distinguishing themselves. [James Joseph] Enslie, to my surprise, seems to speak very fairly, but is quite ignorant of the written language.

Believe me,

Yours very truly

Ernest Satow

P.S. The Mikado has just returned from his tour round Japan in a coat covered all over with gold lace. Nothing doing in the political world. No shaves. I have given up Nishimura some time. He brought nothing but what I found in the newspapers or on the notice boards myself.

4.

S.S. Volga

February 7, 1874

My dear Aston,

I placed to your account with the O.B.C. [Oriental Bank Corporation] a cheque for \$40 that the chief gave me for my pony, before leaving, and Plunkett promised to pay over to you other \$40, so that you will have altogether \$230 to meet the payments you have kindly undertaken to make for me.

I think I forgot to leave behind me a memo about the Buddhist canon which is wanted for the India Office library. Mr. Wade's letter about it to the chief has been mislaid, but might be answered nevertheless. He wanted to be informed whether we could obtain a copy and for how much. Idzumiya Bunsuke, the dealer in old books in Kita-daimon chô can find a copy for \$250 to \$300. But I heard or read in a newspaper just before I left, that a copy had been bought by the Gaimushô [Foreign Office] to send to Germany, by which statement may be meant the copy which the Gaimushô intended to buy and present to the India Office. Anyhow, Tanabe Taiichi of the Gaimushô will be able to tell you, for he assured me some months ago that they still harboured the intention, but had not yet found a copy.

Young Tôyama turned up at Yokohama the day I left, and I sent him back as soon as I discovered it. His excuse was that he had asked Tora to look out for him! I gave him a scolding, and told him that he ought to have asked your leave. I am afraid that he is an incorrigible idiot.

Hongkong, February 9. We got here in the "Volga" yesterday morning at half past eleven after a very rough voyage down the China Sea. The steamer rolled fearfully, and as the berths are placed athwartships it was impossible to sleep in them. I got a few winks by placing my bed outside on the floor of the saloon. There were 12 cabin passengers, of whom the Mexican Transit of Venus people were five, Atkin the late superintendent of melting at the Ôsaka Mint, & his wife, two, a man named Dennistoun who says he has



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never gone to bed sober once during the last forty years another, and the list is completed by Schwartz & his wife, who had a store at Yokohama next to the French Church. This does not make up a dozen, so that my total must be wrong. I have been very kindly received by the Hayllars. Hong Kong seemed to me a city of Palaces when I landed, but I am now beginning to get over the feeling. The weather is of course warmer than at Yedo, but not so warm as I expected. I leave in the Tigre on Thursday at noon. Kind regards to Mrs. Aston to Mrs. Plunkett & Plunkett, Lawrence and Dohmen.

Believe me

Yours very truly

Ernest Satow

## END OF PREVIEW

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