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The Semi-Official Letters of British Envoy
Sir Ernest Satow from Japan and China (1895-1906)

Edited by Ian Ruxton

With an Introduction by Jim Hoare

PREVIEW

The Semi-Official Letters of British Envoy Sir Ernest Satow from Japan and China (1895-1906)

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Acknowledgements by the Author

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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

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)

For these and other books, including translations from Japanese to English, see <http://www.lulu.com/ianruxton> and the amazon websites (search for “Ian Ruxton”).

Notes

1) References in the footnotes to “Kuwata” refer to the following book:

Masaru Kuwata, *Kindai ni Okeru zaiNichi Eikoku Gaikōkan* [The British Diplomats in Japan 1859-1945], Kobe: Mirume Shobo, 2003. This is a useful collection of abstracts in English from the Foreign Office Lists, obituaries in *The Times* and *Who Was Who*.

2) References in the footnotes to “Nagaoka” refer to:

Nagaoka Shōzō (translated and annotated), *A-nesuto Satō Kōshi Nikki* [The Diaries of Minister Ernest Satow in Tokyo, 1895-1900], Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha. Vol 1, 1989; Vol. 2 with Fukunaga Ikuo, 1991.

3) For more about Sir Ernest Satow see his entries in the English and Japanese wikipedias.

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INTRODUCTION

Sir Ernest Satow was a meticulous person. Unlike most diplomats, not only did he keep a diary for almost the whole of his adult life, but he also kept a careful record of much of the informal correspondence that he conducted with the Foreign Office and with other parts of the government in London, as well as many letters to friends and acquaintances. All this material was deposited on loan at the Public Record Office (now the National Archives), and has been freely available to scholars for many years. There are other collections of diplomats' papers, but Satow's have occupied a unique place in the study of those countries with which he was involved. This is particularly true of East Asia, where he began his official career, and where he eventually ended it as Minister to China in 1906, but it also applies to his other postings as well. As a result, there is scarcely a book written in English over the last forty years on East Asia whose author has not used the Satow archive to expand on the official record and to provide Satow's personal insight on the problems and peoples he encountered. This volume, the latest in Ian Ruxton's annotated publications of the Satow archive, which reproduces Satow's record of his outgoing private correspondence to his political masters in London, to the Foreign Office, and to other diplomats will enable many more scholars to benefit from this important collection.

Like all diplomatic heads of mission, Satow recorded his formal actions and gave his considered opinion on issues in weighty despatches (or dispatches, the form preferred by the *Oxford English Dictionary*) often classified 'confidential' or 'secret'. Despatches provided the official record of diplomatic activity, and would eventually form part of the

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public record. They remained in widespread use in British diplomacy until the 1990s, and even today, they have not entirely disappeared. Satow, in his *Guide to Diplomatic Practice*¹, written after his retirement, noted that despatches should be in plain language, without attempts at wit. They could be given a wide distribution, including to the monarch. By the time Satow left Japan in 1900, most despatches were typewritten, although in earlier years they had been laboriously copied out by hand. Once received within the Foreign Office, an elaborate procedure ensured that they received an appropriate distribution.² Today, the original Satow despatches covering the same period as this volume are available in the National Archives, and for a complete picture, those records need to be consulted in addition to Satow's private papers.³

The correspondence in the present volume, although described as 'private letters', was more 'demi-official', in the contemporary jargon. Normally, these letters were a parallel series to the despatches or telegrams, meant to provide some additional information, or to express some relatively controversial opinion that Satow deemed not appropriate for the wide distribution of the official correspondence. These letters were not meant to become part of the formal record, though in practice, an occasional private letter, or an extract from

¹ E M Satow, *Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 2nd revised edition, 1922), as quoted in G R Berridge and Alan James, *A dictionary of diplomacy*, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 62.

²See Zara S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 14-16.

³ Satow's original despatches from Japan (1895-1900), and China (1900-1906), can be found in Foreign Officer records Political and Other Departments, General Correspondence before 1906 at FO46 (Japan) and FO17 (China). After 1906, the system of registering General Correspondence changed. Most despatches were also printed in the Confidential Print series, most of which is available in published versions. The drafts of Satow's despatches from Japan and China can be found in FO228 and FO262.

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it, might be copied into the official record or reproduced in the Confidential Print. After Satow's departure from the Diplomatic Service, this type of letter would become a much more common method of communication, and increasingly part of the official archive, until replaced in recent years by the all-consuming e-mail.

Those who have looked at the official correspondence or at Satow's diaries for the period will notice many familiar themes. Meetings noted in the diaries often produced a letter to London; many of these linkages are highlighted in the notes accompanying the text of the letters. From Japan there is much about the consequences of the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War, growing Japanese self-confidence, and the lead up to the introduction of the revised treaties in 1899. The earlier part of the China letters are naturally dominated by the Boxer settlement, and later the growing tension between Japan and Russia becomes evident. Railway and missionary issues also frequently feature in the correspondence. Some of the acerbic comments on his diplomatic colleagues that are such a feature of his diaries can also be found in the letters. Some of the standard prejudices of the period are very much in evidence; there are a number of thinly disguised anti-Semitic comments directed at businessmen whom Satow did not like.

In both Japan and China, questions relating to the consular service occasioned much correspondence. As a former consular official himself, Satow might have been sympathetic to his former colleagues' concerns and complaints, but he often expresses some exasperation at their ability to find 'extraordinary collections of mare's nests' over consular

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commissions and like matters. The letters, like the diaries, reveal that he could be somewhat inconsistent in his judgements. As I noted in the introduction to his 1900-1903 diaries, Satow was godfather to one of William Ker's children,¹ and he seems to have been on good terms with Mrs Ker, but this did not stop him dismissing Ker as only fit for work 'in a maritime port' in 1900, rather than in the Chinese Secretariat in the Legation. Later, however, he refers to Ker as an efficient officer, and by 1906, refers to him as a 'capable little man, who takes trouble'.²

Another theme from the diaries reflected in these letters is Satow's poor state of health. He was 57 when he took up the China appointment, and by that age, many of his consular contemporaries were either already retired or were seeking retirement on health grounds – indeed, quite a number of his letters are taken up with the state of health of various consular officers and their wives. In Satow's own case, most of his service had been in what were deemed unhealthy posts, and he too might well have been ready to go by 1900. He certainly seems to have been by late 1905, when he wrote to F. A. Campbell in the Foreign Office that his health 'cannot stand [the Beijing] summer any longer', and that the pleasures of earlier years, such as book buying, curio collecting or gardening were either no longer available or no longer appealed.³ Whether or not Satow was ready to leave the Diplomatic Service in 1906, he was certainly ready to leave China.

J. E. Hoare, H.M. Diplomatic Service 1969-2003

¹ See Ian Ruxton, ed., *The Peking Diaries of Sir Ernest Satow* (Lulu.com, 2006) vol. 1, viii.

² See below, pp. 202, 477, 578.

³ See below, p. 551.

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Satow Papers: PRO 30/33 14/8

Letter Book. Moroccan and Japanese missions, mainly the former. Book labelled by Satow "Private Letters from 30 November 1894 to 29 October 1895".

[Note: The letters from Morocco have been omitted.]

Japanese mission (p.68 et seq.)

1. Satow to Sir Arthur Bigge ¹

Tokio

Aug. 15, 1895

Dear Sir Arthur (Bigge),

When I went yesterday to pay my respects to Their Imperial Highnesses Princes Komatsu Akihito & Yoshihito, the latter speaking English fluently, said that he remembered vividly the kind reception he had experienced fr. the Queen & the Prince of Wales when he was in Engl. in 1893, & he specially requested me to let this be known to H.M. & to HRH.

I shld. be much obliged if you wld. kindly mention this, when you can find a convenient occasion to H.M. & to HRH.

y.v.t. [yours very truly]

2. Satow to Lord Salisbury (prime minister and foreign minister)

Aug. 15, 1895

Dr. Ld. Salisbury,

Since the occasion reported in my desp. I have not seen the Min. Pres. ² again, for the past 10 days he has been invisible, endeavouring to avoid accepting the title of Marquis and

¹ Sir Arthur Bigge, private secretary to Queen Victoria, responded that the Queen and Prince of Wales had seen Satow's letter and were gratified at Prince Yoshihito's remarks. (Bigge to Satow, October 5, 1895, PRO 30/33 5/2, letter no.4)

² Itō Hirobumi, Minister President for the second time, 8 August 1892 – 18 September 1896.

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a Grand Cordon wch. had been conferred on him by the Emperor. It is the custom at this court for honours not to be notified beforehand to the recipients. There has been a good deal of talk abt. the affair, as some people could not understand the motive of his refusal & the 'Times' correspondent laid it to the acct. of an intrigue on the part of the Satsuma men to drive him fr. office. It wld. be a great misfortune for Japan if he were to go out, as he is almost the only really intelligent and coolheaded man in the Cabinet.

As far as I can learn the 3 PP [Powers] have said no more up to the present on the subject of the Liaotung peninsula. The Fr. Germ. & R. ministers were here last wk, but did not go near the F.O. & the Japse. think that Germany is beginning to be lukewarm, & [German minister Freiherr/Baron von] Gutschmid's way of talking shows that he, at least, is no advocate of the recent policy. But I am not sure that he knows much, and Itō has no confidence in him.

As Y.L. [Your Lordship] is aware I came out here without any special instructions. Ld. K. [Kimberley] was good enough to give me his ideas of the situation, & repeated to me what he had said to Katō abt. the desirability of a close understanding betw. Engl. & Japan, in order to frustrate Russian plans for the acquisition of an ice-free port. But there is no official record of this. Perhaps Y.L. may think it worthwhile to give me some directions as to the line I shld. take.

One or two Japse. officials have expressed their desire for joint action c. G.B., but I have not heard anything wch. wld. lead me to suppose that this is the wish of the Cabinet. Fr. what I know of their character I shld. expect them to prefer trying to get out of the mess by their own skill in temporising, & that they wld. not readily enter into an alliance in wch. they wld. have to play second fiddle. But England is a favourite at present, on acct. of her general attitude during the war, & my reception by the Court & members of the Govt. has been particularly cordial.

I recd. an anonymous letter today ¹ informing me that it was the intention of the writers to remove the faithless ministers of the Emperor & that they wld. begin by burning down the city. They requested I wld. cause B.Ss. [British subjects] to withdraw, & added that they had made a similar request to the U.S. minister. If however I divulged their plans they wld. cut me in pieces. I am going to give the letter to the Acting Min. for F.A. to do what he thinks best with it. I do not imagine there is any danger of these threats being carried out.

The Japse. have got hold of a hornets' nest in Formosa, & are raising their forces there to

¹ This letter is mentioned in Satow's diary. (Ruxton, 2003, p.16)

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45,000 men. The Min. Pres. told me that it was to be 45,000 in addition to the 15,000 already sent. Climate and disease have no doubt been working havoc. As the local English papers have been talking of massacres of women & children by Japse. troops, I have drawn the attention of the Min. for F.A. to the statements, while carefully avoiding saying that I believe them. But as there seems to be little doubt that Chinese begging for quarter were slaughtered at Port Arthur,¹ it is quite possible that similar things may go on in Formosa. That is one reason why I am anxious that [military attaché] Capt. du Boulay shld. go there. It wld. also be useful if we cld. form an idea of how far Formosa is likely to be a drain on the Japse. army.

I fancy the Spaniards are anxious to get all the help they can to defend the Philippines agst. supposed ambition of the Japanese; as they have profited by our support in Morocco, they hope, if I may judge fr. what Ojeda said to me before I left Tangier & de la Rica's language the other day², they look mainly to England to join them in preventing a further Japse. advance to the South.

y.v.t.

¹ See D. Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and his world, 1852-1912*, Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 491-495.

² Satow met Don Jose de la Rica, the Spanish minister, in Yokohama on August 12, 1895. (Diary, Ruxton, 2003, pp. 13-14).

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END OF PREVIEW