ON 15 JUNE 1859, two weeks prior to the official opening of Japanese ports on 1 July, HMS Sampson sailed into Nagasaki Harbour carrying the first British diplomatic representatives to Japan. Nagasaki had been Japan’s only open port for more than two centuries, but the scenes that greeted the foreigners’ eyes gave little indication of the town’s strategic or historic importance. There was no stately castle or imposing fortifications, only narrow streets lined with paper-windowed wooden houses receding to the steps of a few humble-looking temples and shrines poised along the feet of the surrounding mountains. Graveyards stretched up the steep hillsides behind the temples in full view of the town, as if to remind the populace of the impermanence of life. All the colours were natural: the varying shades of unpainted wood, the dull grey of ceramic roof tiles and stone embankments, the whitewashed walls of earthen kura warehouses, and the myriad hues of sub-tropical vegetation heavy with the moisture of the rainy season. The island of Dejima, connected to the town by a short bridge, was still the site of the famous Dutch Factory, but the only reminder of the Dutch presence there was a flag flying from a pole in the background and a few painted buildings hovering over
the embankment walls. Nearby was another bridged island with a cluster of warehouses used to store merchandise from the Chinese trade, and the old Chinese Quarter sprawling up the hillside in the distance.

Among the passengers on HMS *Sampson* was Consul-General Rutherford Alcock, the former China consul and chief planner of the British settlement in Shanghai who would proceed to Edo to establish a British legation there and begin negotiations with representatives of the Tokugawa shogunate. Also on board was C. Pemberton Hodgson, the consul-designate for Hakodate, accompanied by his wife. While still in Nagasaki Harbour, Alcock penned a letter from his cabin to George Morrison, the consul-designate for Nagasaki who had been delayed and unable to join the representation. In the letter Alcock records his surprise at finding Britons already settled in Nagasaki and reports the founding of the first British consulate in Japan:

> As your arrival here may be indefinitely deferred and can hardly be anticipated before the end of next month, I have deemed it expedient to place Mr Hodgson in charge of the consulate at Nagasaki. Since I find a British trade and mercantile community already established, and with every chance of extension after the 1st July, I have only to add therefore to the instructions already conveyed to you … that you should lose no time in gaining your post … I have obtained a temporary location for the consular establishment in a temple pleasantly situated on the edge of the bay and sanctioned the necessary expense of making it habitable. You will find residence there, but no furniture beyond a few chairs and tables for the office.¹

Deposited on the Nagasaki waterfront with his wife and a pile of luggage, C. Pemberton Hodgson moved into the Buddhist temple acquired by Alcock in Ōura Tomachi, the village adjacent to the town of Nagasaki and tentative site for the new foreign settlement. The name of the temple, Myōgyōji (‘temple of mysterious workings’), provided a good indication of the diplomatic skills that Hodgson would need to win the help of the Nagasaki authorities in proceeding with plans for the foreign settlement, establishing rules for commercial activity, and surmounting the linguistic and cultural differences that persistently hindered communication. In fact, the acting consul ran straight into a wall of feudal reticence, his every attempt to advance negotiations thwarted by the Nagasaki officials’ stock answer that