THE JAPANESE EMBASSY IN LONDON AND ITS BUILDINGS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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The history of the Japanese Embassy can be traced as far back as 1870, when Mr Hisanobu Samejima was appointed as the envoy of the Government of Japan to the Court of St James’s at the young age of twenty-four. He resided in Paris and was concurrently Japanese envoy to France and Germany. The first Japanese representative to come to Great Britain, therefore, was Mr Munenori Terashima, who succeeded Mr Samejima in 1872.

The first four Japanese envoys to Great Britain, Messrs. Hisanabu Samejima, Munenori Terashima, Kagenori Ueno and Arinori Mori, were all from Satsuma-han or Satsuma clan (presently Kagoshima Prefecture) which was one of the most powerful and influential provinces and which was largely responsible for the Meiji restoration and the establishment of a new government. It is interesting to note that of these four envoys, three were from among those 15 young men who had been sent to Great Britain in 1865 by Satsuma-han in order to learn at first hand the political, economic, and social situation in this country. Mr Terashima later became Foreign Minister and Mr Mori became the first Minister of Education. In contrast, the fifth envoy Mr Kawase was from Chōshū-han or Chōshū clan (presently Yamaguchi Prefecture), which was the rival of Satsuma-han, and which was equally responsible for the creation of a new government. He served as Minister Plenipotentiary of Japan for nearly ten years which is the longest tenure of office in the history of the Japanese Embassy in London. It was Minister Kawase who attended personally the inaugural ceremony of the Japan Society of London in 1891. In his congratulatory address, he conveyed a
message from the Emperor Meiji which was sent from Tokyo specifically for that occasion.

The conclusion of a new Treaty of Commerce and Navigation in 1894 marked a significant milestone in the early years of Anglo-Japanese diplomatic relations. The Treaty was signed by Minister Shūzō Aoki who was concurrently Japanese Minister in Germany. This treaty restored to Japan the right of jurisdiction over foreign residents in Japan. Until then, Japan's sovereign rights in this respect were not recognized by major countries of the world. The recognition of this sovereignty by Great Britain, the most powerful and influential nation of the world, had far reaching effects in Japan's favour. About a dozen other nations, mostly in the Western world, followed suit and by the end of 1897, all countries had concluded with Japan a similar treaty.

The conclusion of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation almost coincided with the Sino-Japanese War. During and after the war, Japanese diplomatic activities in Great Britain were of necessity expanded and intensified. In order to cope with this situation, the Government of Japan appointed as head of mission the youthful, resourceful and brilliantly capable Mr Takaaki Katō, who was then thirty-six years of age. Mr Katō graduated from Tokyo Imperial University as first in his class and was married to the eldest daughter of Mr Yatarō Iwasaki, the founder of the Mitsubishi conglomerate. Up to that time, the Japanese Legation was located at No. 8 Sussex Gardens. Minister Katō moved the Legation to No. 4 Grosvenor Gardens so that he could receive and entertain more people at his residence.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance can be regarded as a glorious symbol of the happy relations seen in the early years of this century.

After the Sino-Japanese War, Japan was forced to return the Liao-tung peninsula to China by the intervention of Russia, France and Germany. Then, the Russian move towards the south became conspicuous and proved to be a threat to the Korean peninsula which had in turn dangerous implications for the security of Japan. It was therefore the genuine desire of the government of Japan to strengthen her position by entering into an alliance with Great Britain and with such a strengthened position to negotiate with Russia with a view to finding solutions to settle the issue amicably and peacefully. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed by Minister Tadasu Hayashi and Lord Lansdowne, His Majesty's Foreign Secretary, in 1902. When the war broke out in 1904 between Japan and Russia, Great Britain gave valuable support to Japan in every possible way, be it military, financial or otherwise. The great alliance was no doubt one of the important factors which contributed to Japan's victory in that war.

Almost immediately after the Russo-Japanese War, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was revised and further expanded. In the revised text, ties between the two countries were made yet closer and further strengthened. The revised text was also signed by Minister Tadasu Hayashi and His Majesty's Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne.

In December 1905, the year which saw Japan's victory over Russia and the conclusion of the revised Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Japanese Legation was elevated to an Embassy and subsequently Minister Hayashi became Ambassador Hayashi. Thus, theoretically speaking, the first Japanese Ambassador to the court of St James's was Mr Tadasu Hayashi. Likewise, the British Legation in Tokyo became the British Embassy and the Minister, Sir Claude MacDonald, became His Majesty's Ambassador to Japan. In this connection, it is of interest to note that Japan was the eighth country with which Great Britain exchanged