

THE EMPEROR'S ENGLISHMAN

(Written for "The Listener" by A.M.R.)

SHOULD Anjin Cho, a small street near the centre of Tokyo, still be standing it is sure to witness on June 15 a local ceremony in honour of the "Pilot" after whom it is named. British Commonwealth servicemen, looking on, will probably regard whatever they see as only a bit of outlandish mummery. But actually it will concern them as much as the Japanese. For Will Adams, to whom June 15 has been set aside since his death in 1620, was a true-born Englishman as well as a Japanese Samurai. Englishmen of to-day are descended from him as well as Japanese; he built ships (and commanded one) against the Spanish Armada, and he founded (and led to the Indies and Siam) the modern Japanese navy.

Will Adams, loyal Englishman and "naturalised Japanner" is the hero of a classical Japanese play, has a monument in the Nihou-bashi and a shrine at Hemi. But among his own countrymen few have heard his story. Here it is.

Born (in 1554, it is guessed), at Gillingham, Kent, one mile away from Queen Elizabeth's Naval yard at Chatham; apprenticed at twelve to Master Nicholas Diggins of Limehouse; commanded in 1588 a 120-ton supply pinace in the Armada campaign; later became a ship-master serving the Worshippfulle Companie of Barbarie Marchants on their Morocco run; appointed in 1598 (being now, we continue guessing, 44 years old) Pilot Major (senior navigation officer) to Generall Jacobus Mahu's five-ship expedition to the Spice Islands under the Dutch East India Company.

Disasters by Land and Sea

So far Adams's career, as you see, had been steady promotion—though nothing spectacular for England's most spectacular sea-days. But in the next two years disaster after disaster overtook him and the entire Dutch expedition. Working down the coast of Africa the five ships (ranging from 75 to 250 tons and crammed with men) twice had to attack and defeat Portuguese garrisons before they could get fresh water. Disease attacked them in turn until, despite landing and establishing a hospital on one of the Guinea Islands, no less than 500 Dutchmen were dead. It was six months after leaving the Texel before they could even begin to cross the Atlantic, and then they must spend another six months anchored off Tierra del Fuego, waiting for fine weather to attempt Magellan's involved and narrow strait and meanwhile racked by blizzards and by terror of Indian attack.

The Pacific, however, belied its name and their anticipations. Only seven days out, the little fleet was scattered by violent gales, never completely to re-assemble. The flagship, with its "Generall" dead, was driven back through the Strait and after nine months of more misadventures crawled into Rotterdam with only 36 men left, all desperately ill. The second lost her captain and 27 men in a battle with Indians off Chile. The third, after raiding a Spanish town



THE SHRINE at Hemi which commemorates Will Adams, who built the first Japanese ships of war over 300 years ago

for food, was pursued and her entire crew impressed into the Spanish navy. The remaining ships, Hope and Charity, reunited by great good fortune, after running into another Araucanian ambush decided to dare the Pacific at its widest traverse rather than remain in Spanish and Indian waters. Somewhere on the four months' journey they parted and it was only the Charity which, 22 months out from Holland, was towed at last into Bungo on Kyushu "having no more but nine or tenne able men to go or creepe upon their knees."

Change of Fortune

Their troubles were over. But not for Adams. For while the local *daimyo* provided hospitality for the crew, and the Shogun later bought their whole cargo of woollens and offered them homes in the country, Adams was sent for for special interrogation in Osaka Castle and then held in prison for some six weeks. But then, just two years (of unrelieved misery and accumulating disaster) after leaving Europe, his fortunes completely changed. The Shogun, after further interrogation, "invited" Will Adams to remain at Court.

What did the Ruler of Japan see in the 46-year-old English navigator to retain him thus for personal conferences which grew more frequent and intimate as the years passed? We can make some conjectures. In the first place Iyeyasu's two great predecessors Nobunaga and Hideyoshi had respectively rescued Japan from anarchy, and organised its national government. ("Nobunaga ground the flour; Hideyoshi baked the cake. Iyeyasu ate it" runs a traditional Japanese cartoon). "Foreign Relations," in short, remained the Shogun's only real problem—but a pressing and complicated problem in that "Portugalls" and Spaniards were intriguing against each other for trading rights, while standing together to exclude all other foreigners and to encourage the third-of-a-million

Christians who already had been baptised. The Shogun himself knew nothing of the world outside Japan. Adams, neither Portugall nor Spaniard, disinterested in that he had no one's trade to push and could call no foreign interference to support him, well-travelled also and apparently shrewd and honest, seemed a Heaven-brought source of information and advice to Iyeyasu.

Lessons in Shipbuilding

But, politics apart, "the Emperor" (as Europe called him) had scientific interests, both personal and national, to which Adams's seamanship could minister. Far ahead of contemporary England in agriculture, culture, and "civile

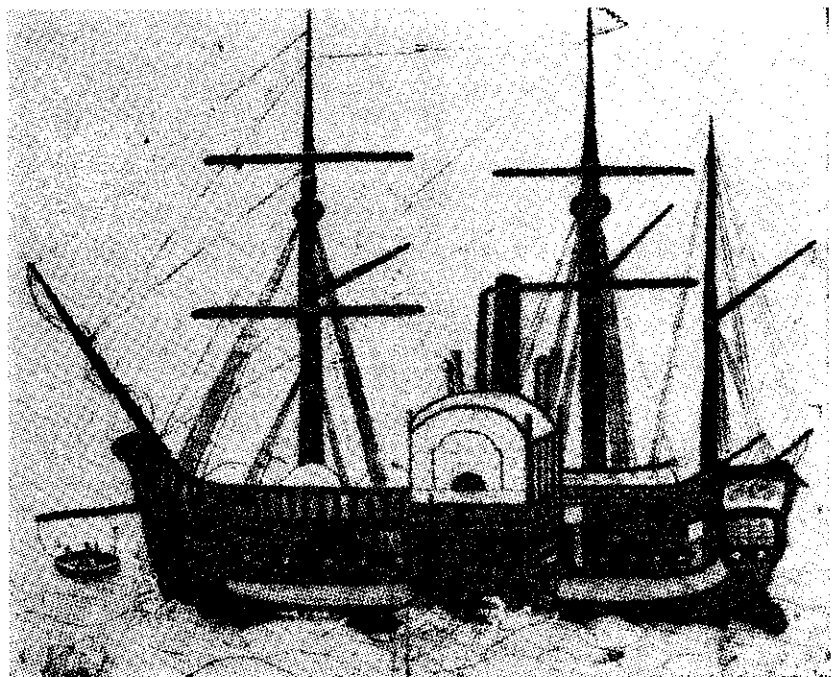
police" (i.e., efficient government), Iyeyasu's Japan lacked the knowledge of mathematical theory which, applied later in the "Industrial Revolution" changed North-west Europe from something very like the Japan of its time (though a good deal cruder) into its present condition. Adams's interests and education had been practical. But he had used geometry in shipbuilding and mathematics in navigation. He instructed the Shogun in both.

Behold therefore the condition of William Adams from Kent in his forty-seventh year, after reaching, via incredible hardships, a Japanese prison. He is ennobled—a samurai with the title of Anjin Sama, "Honourable Pilot" or "Lord Director of the Wandering Needle." He is a land-owner—holding the estate of Henni-mura, with its pleasant manor house overlooking Tokyo Bay. "Eighty or ninety husbandmen that be my slaves or servants" tend his property and his "living is like unto a Lordship in England." His obligations in return are whatever personal service the Shogun may ask, and in fee-token for the estate, one sea-bream per day delivered to the Shogun's table. (Adams's descendants continued to send the fish daily for 250 years until Commodore Perry's Jerichosalvo of guns brought tottering the walls of Japan's isolation and with them the Shogunate which had built them shortly after Adams's death). For all this Adams was incompletely happy. He grieved for his family in England—to which Iyeyasu refused him permission to return—and found devious Dutch ways to remit them money and letters.

Box-Office Melodrama

Legend got quickly to work, of course, upon such a Joseph. A drama, still sometimes played, recounts how the *Ronin Iwai* (a *ronin* is a "masterless knight")

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THE FLAGSHIP of the American Commodore Perry, who finally opened Japan to the Western World in 1854, as it appeared to a contemporary Japanese artist