

April, 1599. For six months the small fleet was forced to shelter, and during that time the crews suffered terrible hardships. Off the coast of Chile, Thomas Adams, brother of Will, the former a servant of the Dutch, had the misfortune to lose his life in an affray with the Indians. Later the Spaniards captured two ships, and another was lost on one of the Sandwich Islands. Of the five ships only two remained, and it was at this stage that it was decided to set a course for Japan, where the Dutch, the first visitors to that country, were the only foreigners allowed to set foot. The other ship disappeared on the voyage, and the "De Liefde" (Loving Charity)—Will Adams pilot—was left to continue alone. On the 11th April, 1600, the "De Liefde" reached the north coast of Kyushu Island, in southern Japan.

The Shogun (Governor) Iyeyasu was in residence at the Castle of Osaka, and suspicious of all foreigners, he commanded that Will Adams be brought before him. Will Adams, first Englishman to visit Japan was kept a prisoner for forty days, but the simple honesty of the sailor appealed to the Shogun, who saw in Adams a man useful in his dealings with the Dutch.

Will Adams entered the service of the Japanese Shogun. Aided and encouraged by Iyeyasu, he built two ships, one of eighty tons, the other of one hundred and seventy tons. Both vessels were modelled on the lines of the English warships that had played havoc with the Armada some years previously. Thus came in to being two ships of the English type, ships that were the foundation of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Almost as important, Adams trained the personnel made available by the Shogun, and in the peaceful waters of the Inland Sea he taught them the first rudiments of sailing and navigating.

Will Adams proved an able instructor, and when his pupils had proved their capabilities as sailors and navigators he took both ships on a training cruise to the south. Heading south, they sailed into waters unknown to the Japanese, visiting such ports as deemed advisable in the East Indies and the Gulf of Siam. After some months both ships returned to Osaka.

For these and other services the Shogun presented Will Adams with an estate at Yokosuka and a residence at Yedo, the last-named town having a street called Anjin-cho, or Pilot, Street.

But in 1605 the call of his homeland prompted Adams to apply for permission to leave Japan. The Shogun refused, and with that refusal went his last chance of leaving the country. Will Adams married a Japanese woman, by whom he had several children, and on his estate at Yokosuka he lived the life of a country gentleman.

In 1611 the English East India Company, learning of Adams's close association with the Shogun, despatched a ship under the command of a Captain John Saris; Saris's mission was to contact Adams and attempt to obtain trade privileges. Saris succeeded, due in a large measure to the efforts of Will Adams.

Will Adams entered the company's service at a salary of £100 per annum. But Saris, ignoring the advice of Adams, established the first factory at Hirado. Here the Dutch were already established, and Saris encountered difficulty from the beginning. Saris appears to have misunderstood Will Adams, having no high opinion of his character or business capacity. Had Saris accepted the advice of Adams, the enterprise may have been successful, but in 1623 the factory closed down with a loss of between £5,000 and £10,000.

From then on Japan closed her doors to the outside world, foreigners were hated and feared, and the Shoguns enforced rigid seclusion on the people of the country. It was not till July, 1853, that Commodore Perry, commanding an American squadron, ended the isolationist policy of Japan.

Will Adams died in 1620, some three years prior to the English closing their factory. He was a man loved and respected by the Japanese people. At Hemi a simple monument marks the spot where his ashes rest. His name is rarely mentioned in English history books, but he was the man who taught the Japanese to build ships in the European way, and indeed may well be said to be the "Father of the Japanese Navy."