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THE TERCENTENARY OF A GREAT FAILURE

At the very hour of writing, three hundred years ago, namely, at noon on Dec. 24, 1623, a very melancholy little company of men, representing the dissolved English factory of Hirado, wended its way towards the East India Company ship *Bull* and uttered its farewell not merely to the coast of Japan but to all the high hopes which those shores had inspired a brief decade earlier. The acquaintances of these men, Dutch and Japanese—no doubt with varying degrees of sincerity—had endeavored to give the leave-taking some semblance of jollity, in consonance with the season, by presents of many things edible and drinkable. But the hearts of the prospective voyagers could not but be sad, although in ignorance of the full extent of their failure as pioneers in a great and promising venture.

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The tercentenary of the closing of Hirado to the East India Company will, in all probability, have few to call this failure to the minds of men, yet it seems fitting to draw some charitable attention to the event, if only to suggest the degree to which thereby the fortunes of Pacific history have been deflected and to point a moral as to the momentous consequences which may follow upon one man's mistaken decision.

It is not at present popular to say much of the personal factors which shape the course of human history, but it is surely quite impossible to call attention to this particular incident without also suggesting that the action of Sir John Saris in 1613, for which nothing but his own personal obstinacy may be held responsible, not only decided the events of Dec. 24, 1623, but also the turn which the history of the Pacific was to take for the quarter of a millenium.

To tell our story properly it is necessary to go a little further back than the 17th. Century. The early success of the Portuguese navigators and the subsequent Bull of Pope Alexander VI had given the little Peninsula kingdom a practical monopoly in the trade of the Orient. Then the usual Nemesis of monopoly appeared in greediness and pride. Portugal was receiving sufficient revenue from her Oriental business to provide for the administration of the entire kingdom and at Lisbon, as in the days of Solomon, "gold was nothing accounted of," when in 1580 the union of the crowns of Spain and Portugal and the war with the Netherlands led to the closing of the port of Lisbon against the Dutch. This was not only a mistake; it was a very short-sighted one; for the Dutch pilots who had accompanied the fleets of Portugal to the Orient were well acquainted with the opportunities in that direction and, moreover, quite equal to the task of managing vessels of their own in pursuit of the lure. Pilots of other nationality were also ready to throw in their lot with the sturdy Protestants from the Low Countries who, at the risk of being regarded and treated as pirates, were contesting the claims of the Peninsula to the rulership of the waves.

So it happened that with the first "fleete of sayle" which left Holland in 1598 for the Far East by way of the Americas there sailed as pilot that remarkable Englishman, Will Adams. From the fate which overtook and swallowed up the rest of the fleet one ship, the *Liefde*, with but a scant handful of men, including Adams, was cast up on the shores of Japan just at the time the first Tokugawa Shōgun, Iyeyasu, was commencing his career as the dictator of the Empire. It was only natural that the Portuguese friars should accuse Adams and his fellows to the Shōgun as pirates, but it was just as natural that that shrewd judge of men should at once size up the British pilot as a man to be saved and employed. One likes to think of these two men meeting face to face. On the one hand, the most far-seeing and politic of Japanese statesmen, who had learned the wisdom of tightening the strings of his helmet after the battle and was already conscious of the insecurity which lurked in the relations between the Portuguese and the *daimyōs* of the south. In the person of Adams Iyeyasu looked upon a new type of human instrument. On the other hand, there was the bluff Elizabethan sailor, a man who so easily may have seen the Shakespeare who shared with Iyeyasu the year 1616 for his departure hence, a man ready to

use his unusual powers in the service of a leader whom he at once recognized as a master of men. The two of them might have gone far in company had other things been propitious. On my recent visit to Japan I could not help linking together in thought the splendid mausoleum at Nikko sacred to the memory of the great Shōgun and the *Anjin-zuka*, or Pilot's Grave, near Yokusuka, where sleeps the dust of that valiant sailor from the "spacious days" of Queen Elizabeth.

It is not to be forgotten—what is indeed essential to the understanding of our story—that at the opening of the 17th. Century, when the issue of the great battle of Sekigahara had placed all Japan in the hands of the Tokugawa, there was no thought on the part of Iyeyasu of putting a ban upon the foreigner's desire to trade. On the contrary, Will Adams was accepted not so much to be adviser as to be master-ship-builder to the Yedo government. He was rewarded with the rank of *hatamoto* and with the gift of a substantial estate precisely in view of the Shōgun's intention that thereby might be furthered the grandiose designs of trade with China and Manila, and even with Mexico and California. There was certainly no disposition at this time on the part of the Oriental shell-fish to seek security from enemies actual or possible by withdrawal into the fastness of its shell.

The responsibility for the change of policy must be shared by a number—Portuguese, Dutch, and the *daimyos* of the southern island included—but the actual incident which brought about the fateful decision (whether for good or ill we will not surmise) is something for which one man, the Englishman John Saris, must accept the blame.

Many great English captains had set the Papal Interdict at defiance before the end of the 16th Century, but the founding of the London East India Company in the last days of the year 1600, for "the discovery of Cathay and divers other regions, dominions, islands and places unknown" was provoked by nothing more ideal than a rise in the price of pepper, a mistake on the part of the Dutch due to overconfidence in the permanence of their monopoly. Yet, strange to say, it was some time before the London merchants really awoke sufficiently to their opportunity to get busy. One of the first ventures was that under Capt. Waymouth which left in 1602 to go to "the kingdom of Cataya or China" by the Northwest Passage. John Cartwright, a preacher of London, was engaged as chaplain at the extravagant salary of three pounds a

year, of which sum, however, he was to get but half if the expedition did not return by way of China. Even of this magnificent moiety the unfortunate cleric was balked, since the voyage failed, and the failure was attributed to the half-hearted exhortations of the ill-used chaplain. His patrons were even unkind enough to demand back the gown and other apparel in the splendor of which he was to have appeared at the Chinese Court.

Thus it was not till the 11th of June, 1613, that the first English ship appeared in Japanese waters. This pioneer vessel was the *Clove*, under the command of Sir John Saris.

Often in history has English obstinacy proved valuable to the plans and purposes of the race, but on this occasion an Englishman's obstinacy turned out to be the undoing of something more than personal fortune. Saris was, as Brinkley describes him, "self-opinionated, suspicious, and of shallow judgement," and he seems from the first to have underestimated the capacity of Will Adams. He had already received advices as to the Pilot's influence in the Empire, but he wrote of him "he is only fit to be master of a junk." In all this he was, as his contemporaries acknowledged, "quite wrong and unjust." Perhaps we may qualify what was said above to the extent of confessing that circumstances are to some slight extent responsible for Sir John's ill-temper. Adams had written to the captain of the *Clove* to Bantam some months previously, but the letter had miscarried, so that when the ship arrived at Hirado some tedious weeks had to elapse before Adams could be found and brought from Yedo. Once arrived, the English pilot was not slow to impress on Saris the necessity of setting forth as speedily as possible for the capital, especially as he was the bearer of a Royal Letter from King James I to the ruler of Japan. The start was made on August 6, 1613, and on the 8th of September the captain of the *Clove* was admitted to Iyeyasu's presence. The letter was first transliterated into *kana* by Adams, then into the ideographic style by the Japanese scholars, and so passed into the Shōgun's hands.

The point to which our attention should at this juncture be especially directed is the large knowledge the Tokugawa showed of geography and of world affairs, and the intelligence with which he appreciated the opportunity which fortune and the experience of Adams had placed within his grasp. He asked about the Englishman's knowledge (little enough in truth) of Yezo, Saghalien, Kamchatka, and so on, and spoke sympathetically of the difficulties

incident to making the North-west Passage. He then proceeded to draw up a Charter and Agreement which constitute one of the most liberal and remarkable trade documents ever proposed between East and West. Had it been accepted and acted upon by Saris and the Company, much subsequent trouble and display of Occidental belligerency would have been saved. The main provisions of the Agreement, which was signed on Oct. 1, 1613, are as follows:

1. The *Clove* might carry on trade of all kinds without hindrance, while subsequent visits of English ships would be similarly welcomed.
2. Ships might visit any ports in Japan they chose and, in case of storms, put into any harbor.
3. Ground would be given in Yedo for the erection of factories and houses, and, in event of the return of the factors to England, they were permitted to dispose of the buildings in any way they wished.
4. If any Englishman committed an offence on Japanese soil, he should be punished by the English general "according to the gravity of his offence." (Note here the first recognition of the rights of extra-territoriality in the Far East).

Now Saris has no excuse whatsoever for not understanding the liberality of the concessions thus offered. For four days he stayed with Adams at the latter's house at Uruga, surveyed the harbor, which he found to be excellent, and otherwise looked the gift-horse in the mouth.

But, alas for the future of the Company in Japan, he obstinately clung to his earlier commitments with the Dutch and with the Hirado *daimyō*. The Hirado factors, too, were becoming impatient and incensed with Adams, the sincerity of whose recommendations they doubted since to them he was but "a naturalized Japanner." So relations between the two Englishmen grew more and more strained and unpleasant. The *Clove* eventually sailed from Hirado on her homeward voyage, Dec. 5, 1613, after having started the factory at that place with a capital of some seven thousand pounds. The departure left also in the breast of Will Adams a certain sense of disappointment, not unmingled with a little homesickness.

But of far more fatal moment was the impression left upon the mind of Tokugawa Iyeyasu. It must be remembered that this great statesman was still engaged in consolidating the position of

his clan in regard to the Shōgunate. Determined not to invite the fate which had befallen the family of Yoritomo, he resolved that no weak links in the line of his descendants should break the chain of power he had forged for controlling the destinies of Japan. Partly to ensure this he placed the supreme authority in the hands of his son years before his own death. For the same reason he is believed to have formulated the famous policy embodied in the so-called "Legacy of Iyeyasu." In his path were many formidable obstacles, among which the loyalty of most of the southern daimyos to the house of Toyotomi, whose power the Tokugawa had temporarily crushed, was the most considerable. There was beside the difficult situation brought about by the presence of the Portuguese friars and by their quarrels with competitive propagandists from Spain. Undoubtedly, however, the most menacing danger lurked in the independent spirit of the clans who were destined nearly two and a half centuries later to play so large a part in the dissolution of the Tokugawa dominance. These great and warlike families resented the centralization of authority at Yedo and were ready to use any methods by which its permanence might be destroyed. Moreover, the great strength of these clans lay in the possession of a practical monopoly of trade with the foreigners, as this trade had hitherto been conducted at such places as Nagasaki and Hirado. Foreign trade had brought them wealth, military equipment, and the spirit of independence which the possession of these things engendered.

Therefore, the question which burned like fire in the heart of Iyeyasu during these last years of his life was this. Failing to secure a share of foreign commerce through the presence of English ships in Uruga Bay and their association with his own designs, would it not be the part of wisdom to close the portals of the Empire against the foreigners altogether and so counter-act by one stroke of policy alike the ambitions of the rebel *daimyōs*, the designs of the missionaries and all the intrigue, actual or potential, of Portuguese, Spanish, and all the rest?

That Iyeyasu answered this question in the affirmative and that his successors in the Shōgunate carried his answer into effect is one of the important facts of Oriental history. The decision was a momentous one. Some have regarded it as a wise and statesmanlike policy which saved Japan from the absorption which became the fate of some other lands. Others have esteemed it

foolish and short-sighted. In any event, it determined largely the course history was to take in the Pacific in the centuries to follow. And the ultimate responsibility, as we have seen, rests not after all with Iyeyasu or with his descendants, but with one obstinate English captain who failed to discern, what is so obvious to us all today, that the acceptance of the invitation to establish trade at Yedo was an opportunity at which foresight should have leaped without a second thought. That acceptance would have spelled a long career of English supremacy in the commerce of the Pacific and the avoidance, on the part of Japan, of the policy of segregation which has only in recent times been discontinued.

It remains to be said that the factory of Hirado turned out to be a moribund concern almost from the start. The good words of the Dutch proved to have little sincerity behind them, since the Holland merchants at once lowered their prices to offset the new competition. The goods brought by the English ships proved for the most part unsaleable in Japan; Richard Cocks, the English agent, made about as many mistakes as were possible in the time; and ere long one Wickham wrote that unless the merchants opened up trade with the Moluccas and with China, or engaged in plundering expeditions like the Dutch, "the Japan trade was not worth continuing."

The last suggestion, namely, that a policy of plundering might recoup some of their commercial losses, was even adopted in company with the Dutch at Manila and elsewhere, but the end was now not far off. In 1619 the English factors had gone so far in their *facilis decensus* that they were mobbed in the streets of Hirado by Dutch and Japanese alike, and the sight of English prizes brought by the Dutch into the harbor must have caused the iron to enter deeply into their souls.

At last came, from the Oriental headquarters of the Company in Batavia, the letter to "Mr. Cox and the rest" ordering the dissolution of the factory. That the letter was signed by "Your loving Friends, Richard Fursland, Thos. Brockenden, Aug. Spalding" did not diminish the humiliation of the moment.

So let me conclude as I commenced: At noon on Dec. 24, 1623, just three hundred years ago, the English factors of Hirado sailed away in the *Bull*, and the curtain was rung down upon the story of a great opportunity rendered "frustrate and vagabond" by one man's wilfulness.

The Portuguese hung on in Japan precariously a while longer and were then turned out bag and baggage. The Dutch resigned

themselves to an ignominious accommodation with fortune and clung to their little foothold of a prison at Deshima till the re-opening of the Empire. But, from Dec. 24, 1623, Japan was, with these exceptions, straitly shut up against the commerce of the outside world.

I have wondered whether, from some purgatorial or celestial residence, the two English seamen I have mentioned, Will Adams and John Saris, may not have sometimes looked down upon the scene of their former adventure. If so, I wonder again whether the Pilot could have refrained muttering to the Captain: "I told you so!"

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