# Oxford, Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts. Jowett Papers III.N.415

Extract from III.N.414, Benjamin Jowett to Florence Nightingale. Oxford, 4 Mar 1874, ALS [1 leaf]

‘I am very much pleased with my Japanese student – he is remarkably sagacious and intelligent. He tells me that the Japanese have lost their religion and he is very anxious to know whether morality can exist without religion. He tells me that he talks about these matters with his father, the Prime Minister of Japan. I enclose a paper which he brought me this morning, which appears to me very remarkable.’

Transcript of III.N.415: Essay (?), ALS [1 leaf] by Tomatsume Iwakura expressing his thoughts on Britain.

[page 1] Since we came to England, Furusawa, a friend of mine who wrote a part of this paper, my brother and I myself have been for a long time inquiring the cause of the peculiarity of the West, which becomes more striking to us the more we become acquainted with it. My wonder is not at the enormous capital of this country, nor at those magnificent public buildings which are found in almost every quarter of it, not at the wealth displayed by the people throughout the kingdom, nor at the steam-engine nor the electric telegraph. It is only at two words which are so common not only among the English but in all nations of Christendom and of which I, as a member of an Asiatic nation, never dreamed before I commenced the stuff of Western knowledge; These two words are Freedom and Independence; I wish to lay my wonder before anyone and shall be very much obliged to those who will have the kindness to give me information on one or two questions connected with them. These questions are; first, how it happens that they exist only on this side of the world, and secondly, what connections they have with Christianity inasmuch as wherever Christianity is spread, there and no further are spread the glory of liberty and the love of independence. I assert a fact when I state that before the study of western knowledge became [page 2] the fashion among ourselves, there were not only no such words or phrases among the nations of Asia, but the very ideas which they represent were not dreamed of. And are not now dreamed of, except, as we flatter ourselves, in our own country.

In Japan the spirit of liberty and the love of independence are making progress side by side with the revolution in her political institutions. For example, let me here briefly refer to China, our nearest neighbour, with whose written language we are well acquainted, a country which after the nations of Europe, has attained the highest degree of civilization of any in the world. In China in spite of the tremendous number of its letters, there is not a single word which can be justly employed in its original use to translate either liberty or love of independence, so as to convey the same impression as those words give to us in English. If I do not go too far, let me briefly reflect upon the history of England. All Englishmen are proud of the great liberty that they enjoy as compared with the rest of the world, even greater than that under the republic of the United States of America. But how has it sprung up? It can be traced first to Magna Charta, which was exacted from King John by the discontented barons by force of arms, secondly to the Great Rebellion at the close of which Charles the first was executed, and thirdly [page 3] to the resolution of 1688 which drove the king out to die in exile on the continent. These are reckoned among the most glorious events in English history, as the special blessings which have secured the royal family from the fear of sharing in the fate of other dynasties on the continent, and the nation from shedding any more of its blood in civil war. But if these events which are held on this side of the world as the very pride of the nation had occurred in an Eastern nation, what would not be their condemnation? Magna Charta would be held void by universal consent, as kings or Emperors being only second to heaven could not be bound by any contract with their people, the more so as an oath made on compulsion is naturally void, and those barons, those Roundheads with Cromwell at their head, and those Whigs would have been thoroughly deserving of execution in the most cruel manner possible, without the shadow of a trial as the greatest traitors against this sovereign, and their names would be held in execration by their posterity as having brought a national disgrace upon their family character. What causes the very same action to be looked upon in such different light in the two hemi-spheres? Why are these ideas found in the one half of the world and absent from the other?

For myself, I am convinced that only the glory of freedom and the love of [page 4] independence can uphold or promote the dignity of human beings, of men on whose patriotism the country can with safety rely. But I wish to know whether or not these are peculiar to Christianity, whether a nation can be inspired with them only through the propagation of that religion, or whether independently of religion, these are original characteritstics of the European races, endowed by nature with more judgement to perceive their true welfare than are the rest of the nations of the earth.

Yours obediently,

T. Iwakura, March 4 1874.

Transcript by Anna Sander

[archivist@balliol.ox.ac.uk](mailto:archivist@balliol.ox.ac.uk)