

A Tribute to John Bright by John Greenleaf Whittier

The following letter written by Whittier the year he died, recently came into the possession of C. Marshall Taylor, with whose permission it is printed here and to whom we are indebted for the further information.

Newburyport
2 Mo. 19. 1892

My dear Friend

W. Walker Jubb ;

No one can have a higher estimate than myself of the character, and public services of John Bright. As an orator, he had no equal among the public men of his time. The beauty, strength, and adaptability of our grand old English tongue was scarcely ever better exemplified than in some of his great speeches. As a statesman he believed that "Righteousness alone exalteth a nation," and that justice is always expedient. He had all the courage which his strong convictions required, and having once taken what he regarded as his rightful position, he stood immovable as a firm-rooted old English oak, let the winds of public opinion blow as they might. Time has vindicated, and justified his approval, or disapproval of the important measures which claimed his consideration, during his long and brilliant parliamentary career. His strong healthful nature tolerated no cant, or affectation, and he made no special professions of personal religious experience, or attainment, but his Christian faith was always manifest, and he made the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount the rule of his speech, and action. He was a member of a small religious society, but he was too broad and liberal to be a sectarian. He was just, and even generous towards all other nationalities, but he was proud of his own birthright, and we love him none the less that he was a true and loyal Englishman. As Americans, we owe him a debt of gratitude, which can never be paid for his unwavering advocacy of the Union Cause during our Civil war. But for him the Confederacy might have been recognized by the British Government.

Can we better express our gratitude for his invaluable services, than by keeping his example before the young men of our land, that when called to participate in the affairs of State, they may be influenced by the same purity of motive, and prove themselves as uncompromising defenders of the right ?

Very sincerely thy friend

John G. Whittier

There are two self-explanatory notes signed by S. T. Pickard, attached to the letter :

“ 401 Newbury St
Boston Jan 21/03

My Dear Mr Midge :

This letter is genuine, & I recognize the hand of his amanuensis. The date shows that it was written when he was seriously ill at the house of his cousin Gertrude Whittier Cartland, in Newburyport. My wife was then nursing him. He died eight months after it was written.¹

Unable to sit up, except in his bed, Gertrude wrote the letter at his dictation, & he signed it in his best style. It is the only dictated letter of his I have ever seen . . .

Yours sinc

S. T. Pickard ”

“ I think this letter to Mr. Jubb an excellent specimen of Mr. Whittier’s prose style. It is probable he wrote it, in first draft, in pencil while in bed, & that Gertrude copied it for him, & he appended his signature, which is a fine one. It is one of the best tributes to Bright I have seen.

S. T. Pickard ”

For relations between John Bright and J. G. Whittier, see J. T. Mills: *John Bright and the Quakers*, II, 307-11, and compare Whittier’s sentiments expressed 3.iv.1889 in a letter to Annie Fields just after John Bright’s death :

“ We had much in common—in our religious faith, our hatred of war and oppression. His great genius seemed to me to be always held firmly in hand by a sense of duty, and by the practical common sense of a shrewd man of business, . . . his eloquence was only called out by what he regarded as the voice of God in his soul.”²

C. MARSHALL TAYLOR.

¹ S.T.P.’s error, should be seven months.

² Quoted from S. T. Pickard’s *Life of Whittier*, 738-9.