

JOHN BUNYAN AND WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

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To the

Very Reverend the Dean

of the Abbey Church of Westminster.

Sir.

We, the undersigned, being admirers of the Writings and Character of our great English Allegorist, John Bunyan, wish respectfully to lay before you this expression of our opinion and feeling, that the time seems to have come when some form of Memorial tablet, bearing his name, may fitly be placed in the great Abbey under your care.

By common consent, Bunyan has taken a high and enduring place of honour in our national literature, and has an assured rank among the illustrious men of the past.

In urging our plea, it may not be out of place for us to recall the judgments of some eminent men, to show there is a considerable consensus of opinion on which we may rely for a favourable issue to our request. And foremost among them we may recall what a former Dean of Westminster has said as to Bunyan's literary rank and greatness. On the occasion of the unveiling of the Bunyan Statue, at Bedford, Dean Stanley gave a memorable Address in 1874. In the course of that Address

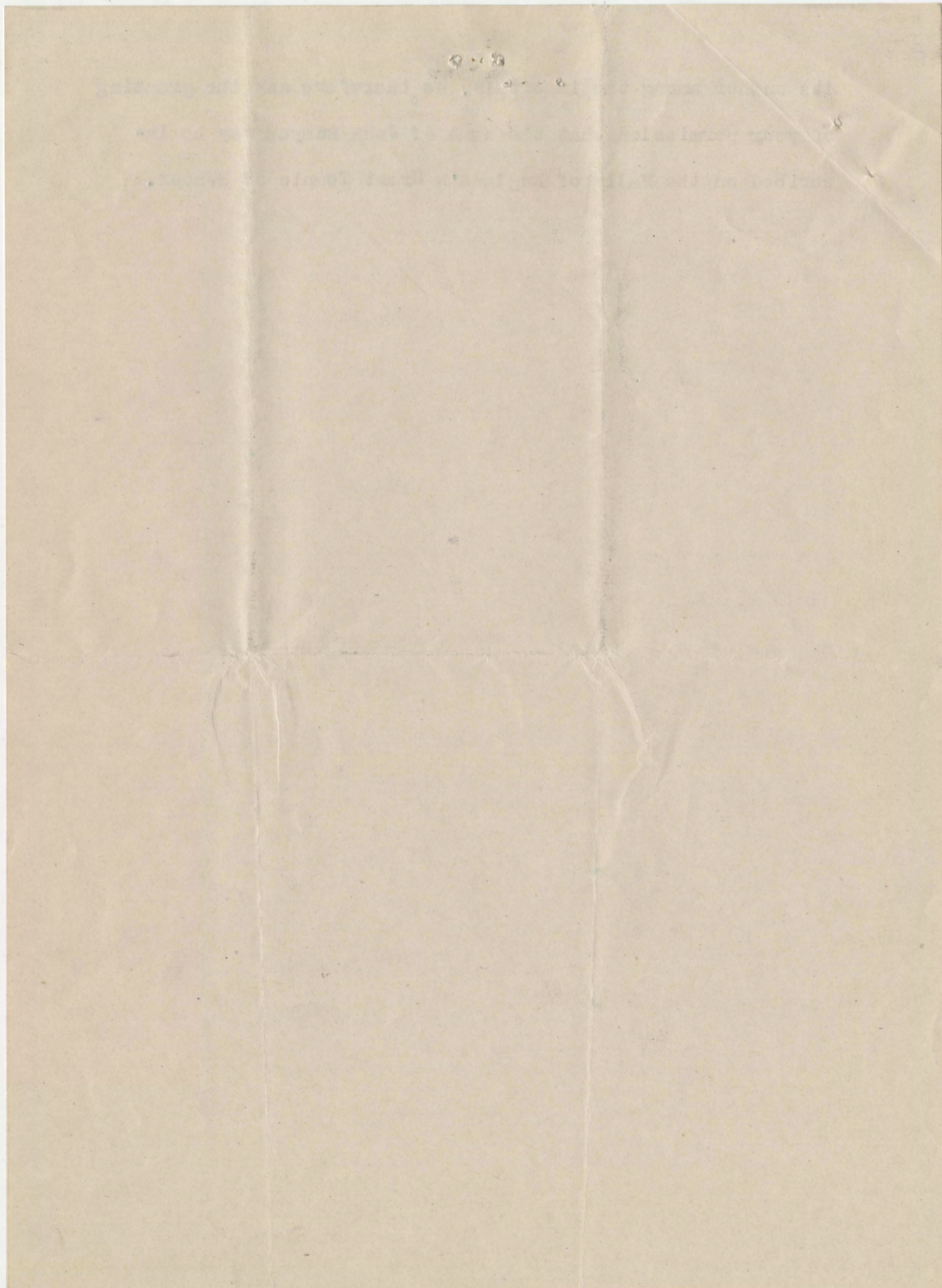
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he said that the "Pilgrim's Progress" "is one of the few books which act as a religious bond to the whole of English Christendom." He went on to say: "It is, perhaps, with six others, and equally with any one of the six, the book which, after the English Bible, has contributed to the common religious culture of the Anglo-Saxon race It is one of the few books which has struck a chord which vibrates alike amongst the most fastidious critics." The Dean further expressed his own feeling when he said that it was most fitting that St. Peter's Green, in Bedford town, on which that Statue was erected, "should in this way have been annexed to the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, and should contain the one effigy which England possesses of the first of human allegorists."

It would be easy to show that in these words Dean Stanley was really summing up the opinions of some of the most eminent judges of our literature. In the 18th Century we find Dean Swift saying he has "been better entertained and more improved by a few pages of the 'Pilgrim's Progress', than by a long discourse on the Will and Intellect." Horace Walpole evidently felt he was paying Edmund Spenser a compliment when he spoke of him as "John Bunyan in rhyme." We all remember that Dr. Johnson said that Bunyan's book was one of three which all their readers wished had been longer. In the next century, Southey, too, thought so well of this book that, in

1830, he himself issued a new edition of it, adding thereto a considerable biography of the author. Then, in a letter to Mr. Justice Coleridge, in 1836, Dr. Arnold said: "I have left off reading our Divines I held John Bunyan to have been a man of incomparably greater genius than any of them, and to have given a far truer and more edifying picture of Christianity." On reading the "Pilgrim's Progress" again, in later years, one of his foreign tours, he adds: "I have always been struck by its piety; I am now struck equally, or even more, by its profound wisdom." Lord Macaulay's estimate will be in everyone's mind. "The style of Bunyan", he says, "is delightful to every reader and invaluable to every person who wishes to obtain a wide command over the English language. . . . There is no book in our literature on which we would so readily stake the fame of the old unpolluted English language; no book which shows so well how rich that language is in its proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed." To the same purport John Richard Green has said: "In no book do we see more clearly the new imaginative force which had been given to the common life of Englishmen by their study of the Bible." While pointing out that it is in the amazing reality of impersonation that Bunyan's imaginative genius specially displays itself, he maintains that this is far from being his only excellent: "In its range, in its directness, in its simple grace, in the ease with which it changes

from lively dialogue to dramatic action, from simple pathos to passionate earnestness, in the subtle and delicate fancy which often suffuses its childlike words, in its playful humour, its bold character painting, in its sunny kindliness, unbroken by one bitter word, the 'Pilgrim's Progress' is among the noblest of English poems." In this matter the common people did not so much follow in the wake of learned critics, as that they by a sound instinct anticipated their judgment. Within the life-time of its author, that is within ten years of its first appearance, the "Pilgrim's Progress" went through eleven editions, and this in addition to many pirated editions. Within the same period it was translated into Dutch, Walloon, French and Gaelic, and also reprinted in New England. Altogether, up to the present time it has been translated in to no fewer than a hundred and three different languages and dialects. It has been well said that "it follows the Bible as the singing of the birds follows the dawn," making for itself a Home in the affections of all the peoples to whom it comes. Its influence among our own people still continues, as is seen by edition after edition still issuing from the press; and it is one of the most powerful links in that chain of a common literature which forms so strong a bond between ourselves and the great American nation on the other side of the Atlantic. As an universal book it may well place



its author among the immortals. We therefore ask the granting
of your permission that the name of John Bunyan may be in-
scribed on the Walls of England's Great Temple of Honour.

J. N. PRESTRIDGE, Editor.
W. E. HATCHER, Cor. Editor.

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Mr. Mangles
Pres. University of Chicago,

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir;

Dr. John Clifford sends me an elaborately wrought petition of which I enclose you a copy. I am asking a few institutions like yours, to join in the petition. I suggest that you address an official letter to the "Very Reverend the Dean," which I may attach with others to the original petition.

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J. M. PRISTBRIDGE Editor
W. E. HATCHER, Cor. Editor

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W. E. Hatcher