

THE REFORMATION SCHOOLS.*

"NEVER was a great reputation more easily gained and less deserved than that of King Edward VI. as a founder of schools." Thus Mr. Leach announces a complete reversal of a traditional opinion. It must be admitted that he supports his views in great detail, upon a first-hand examination of original documents and an independent and incisive criticism. He wisely puts before his readers the means of following his argument and judging for themselves as to its sufficiency. About two-thirds of this volume is devoted to a reprint of pertinent documents—the Commission of Inquiry, the Commission for Continuance of Schools, etc., and extracts from a very large number of Certificates and Warrants under the Chantry Acts, 37 Henry VIII. c. 14, and 1 Edward VI. c. 4. The preliminary matter, occupying about one-third of the book, deals with the significance of the facts, under about a score of heads. Mr. Leach does not, of course, profess that his investigation is complete, in the absence of much necessary material. But, so far as the available materials go, he comes to decided conclusions. He definitively dethrones King Edward VI. from his pride of place as the founder of our national system of education, even by proxy. The only foundation with which Edward VI. is even reported to have any personal connection is Christ's Hospital, and that institution was founded, not as a grammar school, but as a foundling hospital, and Edward gave it little but his name. And as for his ruling councillors, they, says Mr. Leach, "can at least claim the distinction of having had a unique opportunity of

reorganizing the whole educational system of a nation from top to bottom, without cost to the nation, and of having thrown it away."

Henry VIII. cannot be charged with any intention to damage education. But he was in straits for money. Other people, it was found, were devouring the chantries without license; why, then, in the intolerable drain of the wars, should not the king rather put the plunder in his own sack? That is the substance of the argument of the first part of the Chantry Act, 37 Henry VIII. c. 4. The second part deals with unsuppressed institutions. It does not give the colleges and chantries to the king out and out at once, as the first part does; it only empowers him to issue commissions, and take what he pleases. Only such chantries, hospitals, brotherhoods and guilds as were liable to first-fruits might be dissolved, but all colleges might be destroyed, whether they paid first-fruits or not—and so the colleges in the Universities, and Winchester and Eton, which only ten years before had been expressly treated as non-ecclesiastical, "were deliberately swept into the net." It may be that the purpose was to sweep away the "superstitious uses," and thereafter to refund the colleges. Anyhow, the Act passed in 1545 or 1546; Henry apparently took a turn of reaction, and died in January, 1547; and the power to seize the chantries died with him unexecuted.

A new Act was therefore necessary. The advisers of Edward VI. based their action, not on lack of money, but on religious opposition to the objects of chantries. Much might be advanced in justification of that view. The Act of Edward apparently intended that the same Commissioners should first inquire into and then

* *English Schools at the Reformation, 1546-8.* By Arthur F. Leach, M.A., F.S.A.. (Constable & Co.)