

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ENGLAND.

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We have now reached the great group of Elizabethan schools, to which indeed Shrewsbury may also be said to belong, as it was not opened until the Queen had been three years on the throne. The two metropolitan schools of Westminster and Merchant Taylors' were in fact founded in 1560, two years before the opening of Shrewsbury. Westminster as a royal foundation must take precedence. It is a grammar-school attached by the Queen to the collegiate church of St. Peter, commonly called Westminster Abbey, and founded for the free education of forty scholars in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The Queen, with characteristic thriftiness, provided no endowment for her school, leaving the cost of maintenance as a charge on the general revenues of the dean and chapter, which indeed were, then as now, fully competent to sustain the burden. Other boys have always been taught with the foundation scholars, the number being fixed by statute at eighty; but this limit has not been observed. The scholars are elected by a system of competition called the challenge, of the nature of the old academical disputations. The candidates, generally about thirty in number competing for ten vacancies, come up by twos before the head master beginning from the lowest. The junior proceeds to challenge the other to translate some portion of Greek epigram or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* prepared for the occasion. If he can correct any fault he takes the other boy's place, who becomes challenger, and attacks in his turn. Their "helps," senior boys who have prepared them, stand by and counsel their "men," and the head master moderates, deciding the point in issue when there is any doubt as to the correctness of an answer. The boy who remains successful now challenges the candidate next in seniority, and so the struggle goes on for some six or eight weeks, the boys who are highest at its close getting the vacant Queen's scholarships. These carry them either to Christ Church,

Oxford, or Trinity, Cambridge, the heads of which colleges are on the governing body of the school, with the dean and chapter, and six laymen, four named by the Crown and two by the governing body. The monitorial system is in force in college. The four head boys, as captain and monitors, are formally intrusted with the maintenance of discipline by the head master before the whole school. The system of fagging was onerous until quite recently, so much so that its severity was noticed by the Commissioners in their report in 1864. It has since been lightened by the appointment of servants to do part of the work (such as calling in the early mornings, providing hot water, and making up fires). There is no school chapel, the boys attending the Abbey services. The hall is the room in which Henry IV. is lying sick in Shakespeare's play, and the dormitories and schools form the southern side of Dean's Yard. The playground is in Vincent Square, half a mile from the school, and the neighbourhood is not a healthy one in any sense for boys to frequent. Moreover, the headquarters of rowing, for which the school was justly celebrated, have migrated of late years to quieter and safer waters at Putney, six miles up the river. Having regard to which facts, and the constant closing in of the city, efforts have been made to remove the school out of town. These, however, have failed through the opposition of old Westminsters, fearful of breaking the school traditions and the connection with the abbey, and of abandoning the privilege which the upper boys possess of entrance to the galleries of the Houses of Parliament to hear the debates. Up to the last generation Westminster was the school of several of the great political families. Two premiers, Lords Aberdeen and Russell, were educated there, and many other statesmen; and, though this is no longer the case, the old tradition gives way so slowly that it will probably take at least another generation to transplant the school to a healthier and more eligible site.