

John N. Miner — *The Grammar Schools of Medieval England. A.F. Leach in Historiographical Perspective*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. xix, 355.

I must admit that when I first picked up this book, I knew nothing of A.F. Leach except that he had edited town charters. I was relieved, therefore, to read that Miner began his work with the recognition that Leach "has remained a virtually unknown figure" among historians. This was in spite of having been "an energetic and controversial writer of the late nineteenth century" and, as both writer and public servant, in the center of the controversy over "the place of the public schools in an increasingly democratic society" (3). It is this Leach, the social activist who sought justification in medieval history for his program, who we come to know well as a result of Miner's efforts. Reading this work, we learn as much about Victorian and Edwardian social politics and intellectual history as we do about medieval historiography.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, after a brief survey of Leach's life, discusses his contributions to both the turn-of-the-century British school system and to medieval scholarship. The second part evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of his major works in the light of modern scholarship. There are also appendices which include an unpublished report which Leach wrote as a Charity Commissioner, and transcripts of medieval educational documents.

Leach was born in 1851. Though trained as a barrister, he mostly held various public offices concerned with education until his death in 1915. In addition to articles about contemporary educational needs, he wrote two major histories, *English Schools at the Reformation, 1546-1548* and *The Schools of Medieval England*. His editions include *Educational Charters and Documents, 598-1909* and *The Beverly Town Charters*. He also wrote about the history of education for the Victoria County histories, various county societies, and both scholarly and popular journals. To academics, however, he remained an outsider.

Leach believed that he was a revisionist, setting out to prove that the Reformation actually hurt rather than established English schooling, and that medieval schools were plentiful and run by secular, especially cathedral, clergy. Contemporaries, including Maitland, criticized both his selection of documents in the editions and his interpretations as biased attempts to prove his opinion. Though occasionally defending Leach against such attacks, Miner ultimately agrees with them. However, Miner praises him for "his ability to relate historical study to contemporary issues", for showing "how historical research can respond to the analysis of current issues" (84). Through part one of this book, we get a detailed picture of this very Victorian man, who believed he was bringing enlightenment to his contemporaries, though perhaps, as his critic A.G. Little accused, was really substituting "another set of myths" (104). Thus, by relating this narrative, Miner presents both sides of the case for historians taking an active role in political controversy.

The second part of the book is useful more for Miner's review of the literature written since Leach about medieval grammar schools, and for Miner's own investigation of the evidence, than it is for an evaluation of Leach's work. Miner concludes that the contemporary critics were right — Leach exaggerated the bishops' role in education, while ignoring the monastic contribution. He faults Leach's lack of "patience and the degree of realism of the academic historian" (268). Leach's editing of documents, however, was skillful. Furthermore, his estimate of the numbers of schools, once

thought greatly exaggerated, is now believed closer to an accurate figure. And he “laid bare the essential features of the medieval grammar school” as an institution which provided a common basis of education for scholars and for administrators (264).

The book is well-argued, though perhaps a bit too detailed for the results. The subject is perhaps better suited to a long scholarly essay than to a monograph. Ultimately, the importance of this book is that it shows the use of medieval and Tudor history for the Victorian and Edwardian laws, not the absolute accuracy or inaccuracy of this particular historian’s work. Indeed, Miner appears throughout the work to want to use Leach’s life to explain the strengths and weaknesses of his work, yet he fails to give us any insight into Leach’s private life, only his public one. This omission leaves the analysis slightly flat.

Miner’s all too brief autobiographical account of his interest in Leach (295, note 1, and 135-136) must sound familiar to many of us. In using Leach’s material as a doctoral student, Miner became intrigued by the man. Towards the end of his life, Miner satisfied his curiosity. How many of us have asked, but not investigated, who were the (mostly) men behind these names, the archivists who created the editions relied upon or the ones badly in need of replacement? These autobiographical statements also intrigued me in another way, by the span of the historiography represented here. Leach to Miner’s teachers Richard Hunt and Helena Chew to Miner comprise three generations looking at the same problem. It seems there is another historiographic essay in this material, one examining the changes in the approach of medievalists through this century.

Despite its shortcomings, this is a fascinating work. As an exercise in historiography, it is useful for medievalists who should understand how our source editions were created, for British historians examining the turn-of-the-century society, and for advanced undergraduates learning the history of historical writing.

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Georges Minois — *Histoire des enfers*. Paris : Fayard, 1991, 440 p.

Ayant déjà à son crédit de larges fresques historiques, notamment une *Histoire de la vieillesse de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance* (1987) de même qu’une étude en deux tomes sur *L’Église et la science* (1990 et 1991), Georges Minois a fait amplement la preuve qu’il dispose des moyens requis pour aborder les sujets vastes et complexes. L’enfer est l’un de ceux-là et le traitement qu’il en fournit atteste une fois de plus l’étendue de son information, la netteté de ses vues dans la mise en ordre des matériaux et la fluidité de sa rédaction. La cadence rapide à laquelle la production de l’auteur obéit suggère superficiellement une double réflexion : d’une part, que cela est moins difficile qu’il paraît dans la mesure où malgré la diversité des sujets, ceux-ci ne sont pas sans se recouper et, en outre, appartiennent à la même aire de civilisation, occidentale; d’autre part, qu’en dépit de tout, le travail accompli prend les allures d’une haute vulgarisation, alimenté qu’il est à une multitude d’ouvrages de première main, tant sur le plan de l’information que sur celui de l’analyse.