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## Selections from Leopold von Ranke and Clara Graves von Ranke's personal and family papers at Syracuse University

Leopold von Ranke

Clara G. von Ranke

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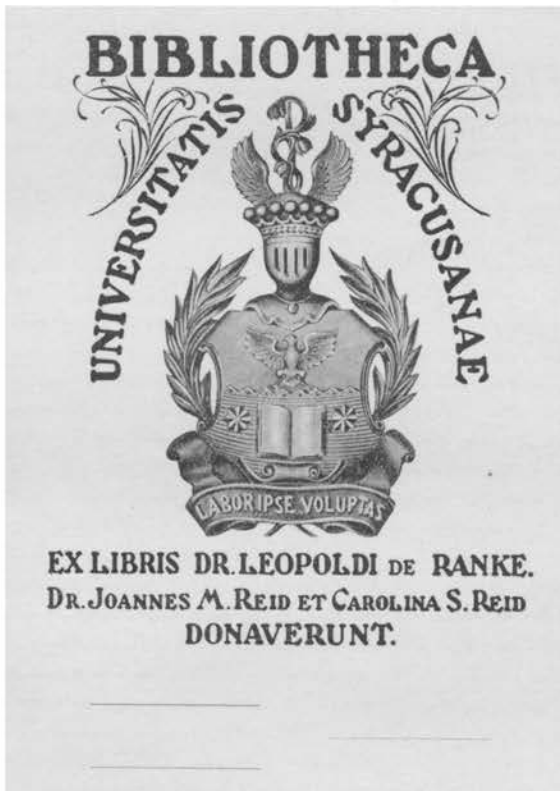
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# Selections

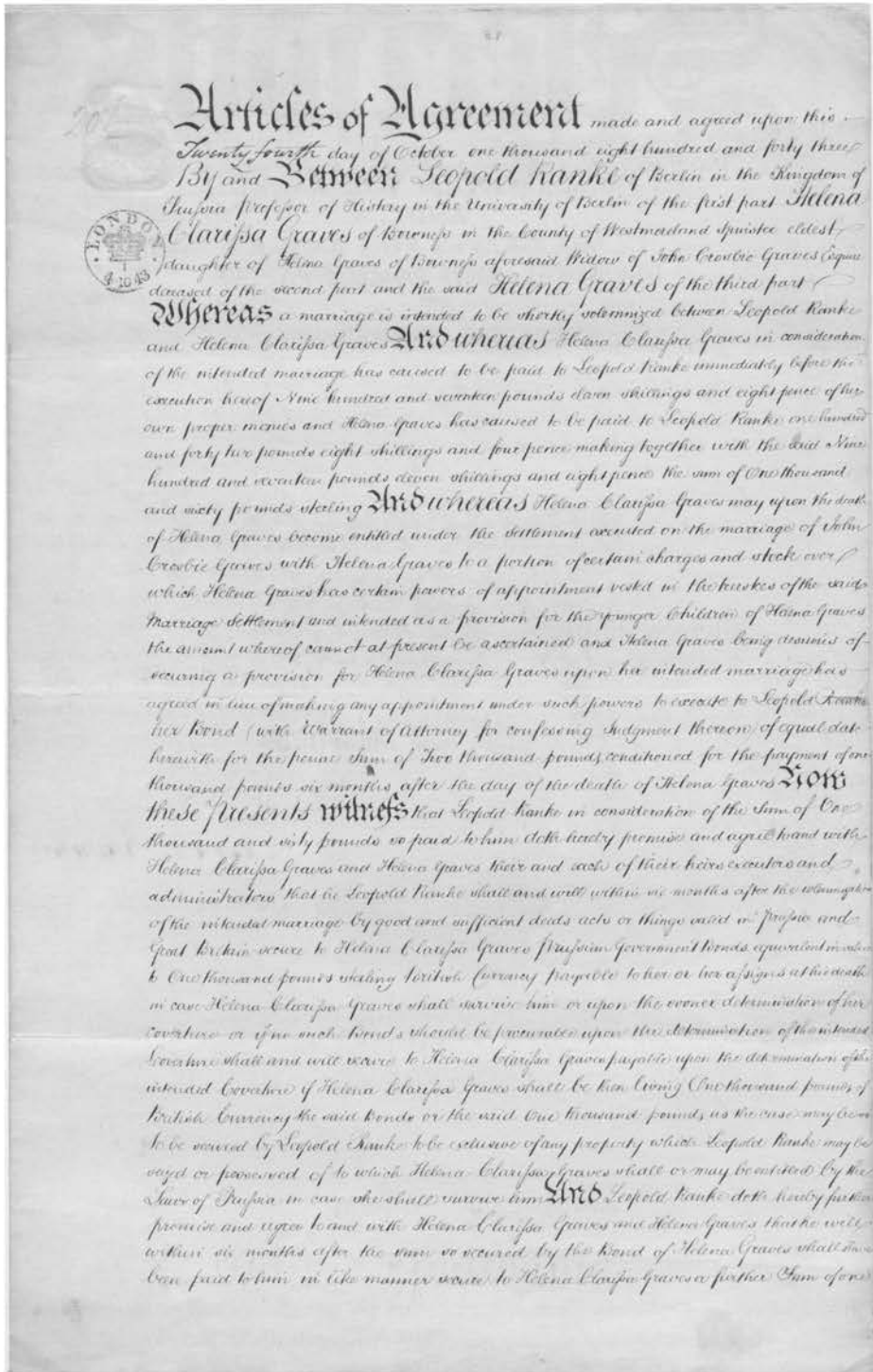
FROM LEOPOLD VON RANKE  
AND  
CLARA GRAVES VON RANKE'S  
PERSONAL AND FAMILY PAPERS  
AT  
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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*Syracuse University bookplate for the von Ranke collection, with the coat-of-arms and motto created for him in 1865 when he was granted the title of nobility by King Wilhelm I of Prussia. John and Caroline Reid are credited as donors.*

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Articles of agreement for marriage between Leopold Ranke and Helena Clarissa Graves, 24 October 1843. She was 35 years of age (described in the document as "spinster oldest daughter") and he was nearly 48.

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22.10.1843  
16  
I have received from Mrs Melona Graves  
£ 1000 (one thousand pounds) on account  
of the funeral of her daughter Melona Charlotte  
Graves. This 22 of Octbr 1843  
Leopold Ranke.

Handwritten receipt by Leopold Ranke, 22 October 1843.

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the first March.

My dearest John!

I should long ago have thanked you for your last affectionate letter, had I had <sup>any</sup> particular to tell you, or had I been able to use my own hand. I now write principally to say, that my dear Fred is about making his Abiturientenexamen he has finished all his writing-exercises for which he and his compeers were shut in for five hours every day last week in the stala of the Gymnasium without books, dictionary's or any help whatsoever. So far I believe he has got on very well, on Friday next his oral examination will take place, then he will get his certificate to go to any profession. Poor little fellow, I think the best boy in the world, has been indefatigably diligent and looks as pale as a ghost and nearly as thin. His body has never had time to develop itself properly, he has never had time to

strengthen it by manly exercises and with the spirit of a hero he is small and weak for his age, although quite healthy, at least he has never been sick. What I would give, that his father would now allow him a six months rest before he went to the university! I think, that would be of benefit to him for his whole life, what is your opinion about this? English people think more than the Germans of the education of the body, in your next letter write me something to this effect, that I may show Ranke, and give me your advise about your little Godson. Fred is very clever, his profession for life is soon to be decided, he would like to go to the Bar or to be an historian, only that he will have to be long dependent on his father, therefore I think it is most likely, he will choose to be a soldier and though very brave I think it a pity such fine abilities should be lost. His face is to me very interesting it puts me in mind of my father, of Charles

**Letter from Clara Graves Ranke to her brother John Graves, 1 March 1865:**

the first March.

My dearest John!

I should long ago have thanked you for your last affectionate letter, had I had anything particular to tell you, or had I been able to use my own hand. I now write principally to say, that my dear Fred [her second son] is about making his Abiturienten examen. He has finished all his writing-exercises for which he and his compeers were shut in for five hours every day last week in the Aula of the Gymnasium without books, dictionary's or any help whatsoever. So far I believe he has got on very well, on Friday next his oral examination will take place, then he will get his certificate to go to any profession. Poor little fellow, I think the best boy in the world, has been indefatigably diligent and looks pale as a ghost and nearly as thin. His body has never had time to develop itself properly, he has never had time to strengthen it by manly exercises, and with the spirit of a hero he is small and weak for his age, although quite healthy, at least he has never been sick. What I would give, that his father would now allow him a six months rest before he went to the university! I think that would be of benefit to him for his whole life, what is your opinion about this? English people think more than the Germans of the education of the body, in your next letter write me something to this effect, that I may show Ranke and give me your advise about your little Godson. Fred is very clever, his profession for life is soon to be decided, he would like to go to the Bar or to be an historian, only that he will then have to be long dependent on his father, therefore I think it is most likely, he will choose to be a soldier and though very brave I think it a pity such fine abilities should be lost. His face is to me very interesting it puts me in mind of my father, of Charles when he was a boy, of the old Dean and his son Richard Graves. Otto [her older son] goes on very well, he is quite different from Fred, a quiet, good young man with strong judgement, but he has no shining qualities nor is he very studious, he is childlike in his faith, strong in his political views and content with his own opinions.

when he was a boy, of the old Dean and his son Richard Graves. Otto goes on very well, he is quite different from Fred, a quiet good young man with strong judgement, but he has no shining qualities nor is he very studious, he is shild like in his faith, strong in his political views and content with his own opinions. Fred, on the contrary, is a man to struggle with himself, and to fight inwardly for every opinion he will hold. Maxa's marriage is fixed for the commencement of January next, I wish you could come to it. You will be glad to hear, that my husband is able to give her a fine fortune of twenty five thousand thalers, besides her outfit, which is a very considerable thing. It comprises all the necessary furniture for her dwelling from the kitchen to the garret, all the houselinen for her life and her own trousseau, silver and ornaments, its for myself. I get on tolerably without the use of hand and foot and though the

weather has been very severe, I get carried out into the air sometimes. Leopold has been quite well and has been to a great number of balls and entertainments at the Court and the ministers and Ambassadors. Of course it is no pleasure to him to go, but he has the opportunity thus of speaking with Statesmen and other great men, that he only meets <sup>at such places</sup> there. This is a very selfish letter, but when you write tell me as much of yourself and Emilia as I have done of me and mine, and you will give me the greatest pleasure, that if you can give me good news, and tell me that you are well and happy and enjoy your beautiful house. A Miss Nixon was here a sister of the Gräfin Silen and she told me, she never passed your house without admiring it. If she should call upon Emilia, I hope she may be well received. I think she would suit Emilia very well, she has stricte religious views and is very Lady like. With all our love to you and Emilia believe me your very affectionate sister Clara Ranke.

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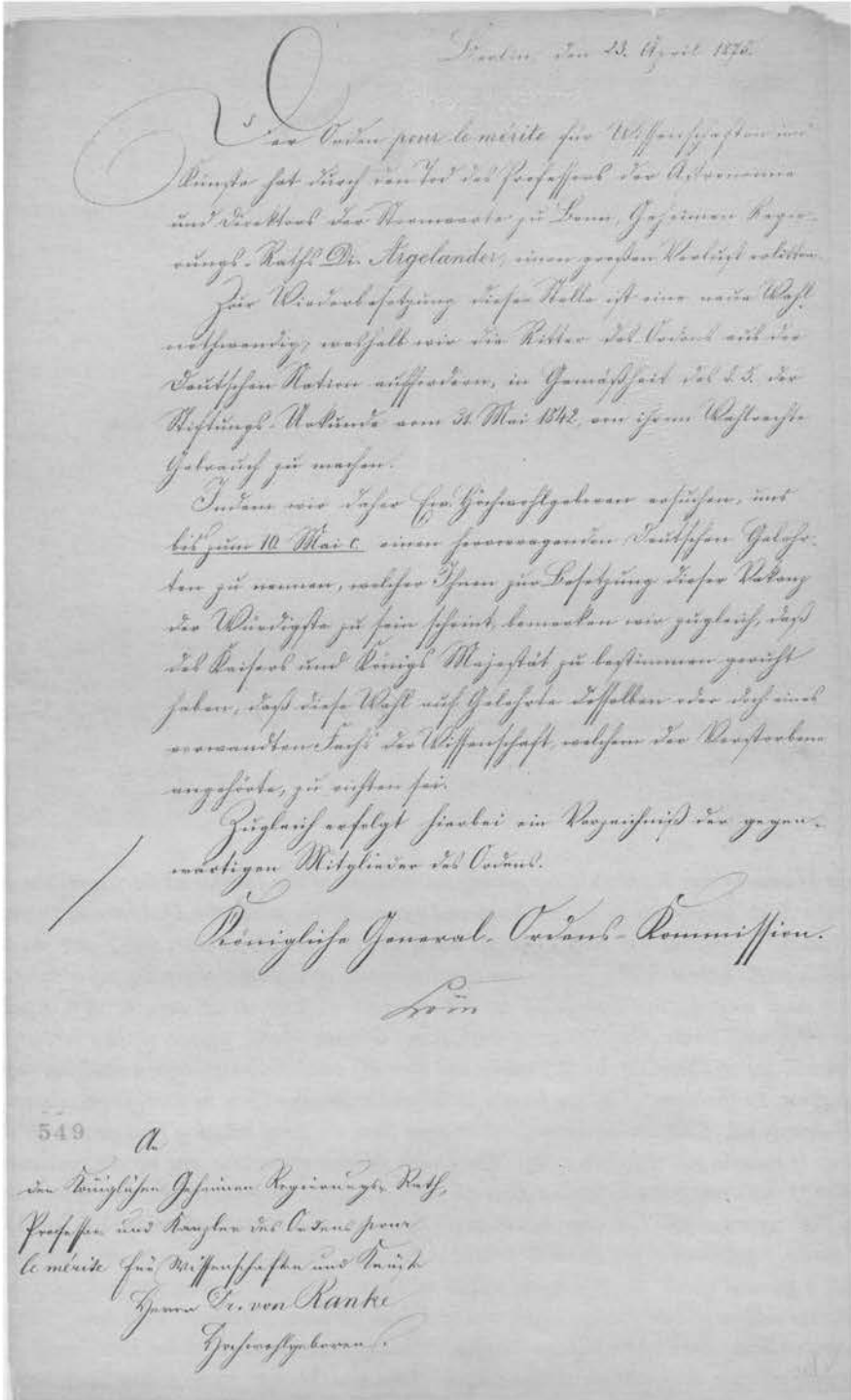
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*Portrait of Leopold von Ranke (1883) by H. G. Herrmann, after J. Schrader's original (done in the 1870s).  
This copy was commissioned for Ranke himself and shows the medallion he received  
when he was inducted into the General Order Pour le Mérite (p. 67).  
The painting is part of the Ranke collection and is displayed in the  
George Arents Research Library.*

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Letter of induction from Königlich General Ordens Pour le Mérite Kommission to Leopold Ranke, 23 April 1875.  
 This is the highest honor awarded for academic and scientific achievement in the German Federal Republic.  
 It is awarded by the government and remains today an honor bestowed upon a very select number of scholars.





Extract from Mad<sup>e</sup> von Ranke's letter giving an account of the Jubilee at Berlin on the 20 Feb 1867 being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her husband's connection with the University there.

"My Husband's Jubileum was such a glorious day of love & triumph - I must try & give you an account of it, for you English people have no idea of the honour that Prussians, & Germans generally, pay to their distinguished men when they reach their 25<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> Jubileum.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> we were all up early, & at 8 o'c received my brother-in-law Ferdinand Ranke (the Director of the College) & some schools, with 16 of their best singing scholars, who sang a Chorale, the 23 Psalm & the Te Deum - and then my brother-in-law made a touching speech of thanks & praise to Leopold, in

the name of all the family, & of all the schools - Then we breakfasted, that is, only Coffee & Cake, were distributed. Then the Minister Mahler came from the King bringing him the Star of the Red Eagle order. The King of Bavaria also sent him a Star. The Queen Mother of Bavaria sent her congratulations in a telegraphic dispatch. Letters innumerable arrived from all parts of Europe, friends, & relations - Every half hour telegrams arrived from almost all the German Universities. Diplomas & addresses came tumbling in! At 11 o'c the University of Berlin, represented by the Rector & principal Professors, visited us - the Rector arrayed in his gold chains & medal made a splendid speech, which Leopold replied to. Then the Royal Academy sent a deputation. Drs. Pertz & Haupt read the Address - Then scholars began to arrive from all parts of Europe - from Jena, Göttingen, Halle, Bonn - from Switzerland - Zurich, Basle, from Vienna, & many from Servia. Prof. Kopke spoke in the name of the Scholars,

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"Lorn & Master" We he at a later hour  
Leopold, his sons, son in law, & brother were  
entertained at a great public dinner  
where people of the most opposite opinions  
sat beside each other in love & concord.  
The Queen herself wrote to Ranke to  
congratulate. The Queen Dowager invited  
him the preceding evening to offer her con-  
gratulations. Prince Carl sent beautiful  
flowers. Prince Albrecht paid me a long  
visit, Ranke not being at home. On  
the 22 I gave a party to all these Professors  
& Scholars, about 200 people. It went  
off famously. Prince George, Lord Augustus  
Loftus, the Marquis of Lorn, the Minister  
von Itzenplitz & many other distinguished  
persons, & fashionable & beautiful women,  
were present. Our rooms looked very  
well. Leopold's new room arranged with  
busts, was much admired. His presents  
of books were laid out, & a picture by  
Hübner of Clio, & all his new diplomas.  
I was very much tired, as you may  
imagine, sitting up in state so long,  
but I have quite recovered. Leopold,

the very happy, took things so quietly  
that he did not feel at all the worse,  
rather the better for so much pleasant excitement.  
He got no letter of congratulation from  
England—but it is not English fashion  
to regard such jubilees. An excellent  
likeness of Ranke, was made from  
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*Article from the Manchester Guardian, 25 May 1886, following Ranke's death.*

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## LEOPOLD VON RANKE.

Leopold von Ranke, the famous historian, after lying unconscious for some days, died at his house in Berlin on Sunday night, in his 91st year.

Few men have enjoyed, like Ranke, the rare good fortune of living to see their pre-eminence in their own sphere unreservedly acknowledged throughout the whole of Europe. Such recognition is not readily accorded, and Ranke won it by no appeals to popular interests, but by the intrinsic merits of his work. It is easy to dissect his labours and point out that he was surpassed by others in each point of detail. His method of historical criticism was borrowed from Niebuhr; his research was rarely exhaustive in any subject; his skill as a writer is below that of Macaulay or Mr. Froude; but in the combination of these qualities he is unrivalled. His method is always intelligible; his research is ample, and his power of literary presentation prevents his pages from ever being dull. He is inspired by a commanding sense of the dignity of human affairs, and makes his reader feel that the true interest of history lies not in personal details, but in the realisation of the importance of great issues. Moreover, these issues are never approached in the spirit of partisanship. Ranke's own personality is never visible; he rarely pauses to explain, never to moralise, but is anxious only to present the actual facts and let them tell their own meaning and importance. It has been truly said that French historians were journalists and English historians were politicians till Ranke supplied historical writing with a scientific basis of its own. It is noticeable that in a little address which Ranke delivered on his ninetieth birthday he attributed his interest in history to the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which first taught him how much was to be learned from the old chroniclers and showed him the way in which the past could be made real. It would almost seem as if he transferred Scott's stories of battles to a large historic field. His earliest work, published in 1824, was called "A History of the German and Romance Peoples." It began with Charles III.'s invasion of Italy, and set forward the conflict of principles in which modern civilisation took its rise. Ranke disregarded the divisions of national history, and sought that battlefield of European civilisation, but he soon found that the problem swelled into such vast dimensions as to be incapable of united treatment. He was driven to abandon his large canvas and work in detail, but his principles remained unchanged. His earliest volume is the key to the central idea round which his chief works were grouped. The series—which consists of "The Ottoman Empire," "The Spanish Kingdom," "The Popes of Rome," "Germany in the Period of the Reformation," "France in the Sixteenth Century," "England in the Sixteenth Century"—is arranged in a connected scheme, so as to show the ever-widening circles produced by the movement of which Charles's invasion was the beginning. Besides setting forward a new principle, Ranke's first book also disclosed a new method, or

rather carried out the application of a method already existing. What Niebuhr had done for the sources of Roman history Ranke showed to be needed for the sources of all history. His work on "The German and Romance Peoples" contained an appendix headed "A Criticism of Modern Historical Writers," in which Ranke briefly discussed the value of the authorities existing in every country for the history of the sixteenth century. It is a remarkable proof of the sureness of Ranke's judgment that almost every subsequent inquiry into these authorities begins with a discussion of the few pregnant sentences in which he then expressed his own opinion. This critical appendix was the beginning of a new method of writing history—a method to which Ranke's fame is chiefly due. He did not only write history, but he showed his reader how it was written. He gave the reasons for his judgments and laid down canons of criticism, and by so doing raised history from being a branch of literature to the position of an independent science.

It is not too much to say that Ranke applied to history the doctrine of evolution before that doctrine had been formulated by the students of physical science. He sought the principles which underlay the movement of affairs, and showed the results of the interaction of great forces. He lived the peculiar life of a student, and each year, as it added to his knowledge, increased his power of mental grasp. It was a bold undertaking for a man at the age of 84 to publish the first volume of a universal history which was to contain the result of his mature perception of the forces which had made the civilised world. Though the work is left unfinished, the six volumes which have appeared have given a bold sketch of events till the fall of the Empire of Charles the Great. Not only did Ranke popularise a new method and give an example of work in detail, but he has also shown how previous labours may be summarised and broad generalisations may be founded on the basis of special knowledge.

In speaking of Ranke's merits it is only fair to say that he had, in the eyes of many, serious defects. His interest lay in the accomplished fact, not in tenable but futile aspiration. He was no student of tendencies or ideas which did not manifest themselves in definite forms. He gives little care to the history of institutions, the growth of popular opinion, or the course of social life. His history is mainly diplomatic and political history; he seeks and finds the forces at work where they are strongest, and does not stop to inquire how they came into being. His views are sometimes pronounced to be superficial, because he does not go deep enough to discover the inner life of the times which he portrays. Perhaps the fact that these objections are raised is only a testimony to the thoroughness of the work which Ranke has done. He would have been the last man to believe that his views were final or that his principles could not be carried further. He worked within limits which are always clearly visible to his reader, and it is useless to demand of a writer what he does not profess to give. It is significant that in England

Ranke is chiefly known as the author of the "Popes of Rome," and that his "History of England," though excellently translated, has never been a popular book. The ordinary Englishman shrinks from regarding England as part of a European commonwealth, and prefers to think that the great Rebellion and the Revolution were entirely uninfluenced by any impulses from outside. Perhaps, however, his national pride would lead him to admit that English politics influenced the Continent, and Ranke's pages certainly assign to Cromwell and Charles II. an importance which we do not find in any English writer. A story is told that Ranke sent a copy of the translation of his "English History" to Lord Beaconsfield, saying that he was the only Englishman who had acted upon the conception of the European importance of England which the book set forth. A reader of the book might accept Ranke's picture of the past without agreeing to this judgment on the events of his own time.

Ranke's labours have been fruitful in founding a new school of historical writing in almost every country of Europe. There is no German historian who does not owe much to his teaching or his example. The rising school of French historians is founded upon his principles. In England he has long been recognised by all historical students as their master. Never before has a historian exercised such universal influence; never has a student left an example of such an uninterrupted course of literary activity.

Von Ranke, born in the year 1795 at Wiehe, in Thuringia, was the eldest of a family of seven children, five brothers and two sisters, all of whom he outlived except his youngest brother, some twenty years his junior, and now professor of theology in Marburg. Though his father was a lawyer, his ancestors for many consecutive generations had been connected with the Church, a profession which he himself in his youth was for a while inclined to embrace. Of his school life at Donndorf and afterwards at Pforta he always retained a grateful recollection. Both these places are situated amid beautiful scenery, and at neither of them was any over-pressure exerted on the boys, who were encouraged to read by themselves and given free scope for the development of individual tastes. He had already won distinction when he left Pforta and, at an earlier age than most students, began his studies at Leipsic. Theology and philology were the subjects to which he first devoted himself, but on renouncing his intention of taking orders he embarked on those historical researches which have made his name famous. While still a young man he was appointed *Oberlehrer* to the Gymnasium at Frankfort-on-the-Oder. In 1824 appeared his first important work, "History of the Germanic and Latin Nations in the Reformation Period," accompanied by an essay on some of the chief modern histories, which at once convinced scholars that a writer of remarkable power had arisen. He was summoned to the Chair of History in the University of Berlin in 1825, and afterwards rarely quitted the Prussian capital. He

may be said to have revolutionised the existing methods of studying history, and to have founded a new school based on the conscientious investigation of national and foreign archives and the practice of travelling to visit countries before writing about them. Thus the admirably clear account of the Battle of the Boyne given in his "History of England" (Clarendon Press Translation, vol. iv., p. 604) is due to his having personally made a thorough survey of the battlefield, on the occasion of his visit to Ireland in 1865, in the company of his brother-in-law, the Bishop of Limerick. In what the latter has described as "a very bad kind of ferry-boat"—namely, an Irish jaunting car—he drove across the identical ford by which William sent a detachment under the younger Schomberg to turn James's left, a manœuvre which led to the sudden collapse of the Jacobite forces. In addition to this personal inspection Von Ranke had the advantage of unearthing Lauzun's detailed narrative, which Macaulay could not find.

In 1827 he was commissioned by the Government to examine the archives of Vienna, Venice, Florence, and Rome. He spent nearly four years over this tour of discovery, and the result was seen in the publication (1827-36) of "The Princes and Peoples of Southern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." The first volume of this work was a striking and brilliant account of the rise of the Ottoman power in Europe; the last three volumes contained the "History of the Popes," which at once gave him a European reputation. In 1841 Ranke was appointed Historiographer Royal to the King of Prussia, Frederick William IV. It was at the special request of the King that Ranke wrote his "Nine Books of Prussian History" in 1847, which he followed many years later by a study of Frederick the Great, and of his own patron, Frederick William IV. In 1848, for the only time in his life, the Professor took some part in public affairs, becoming a member of the famous Frankfort Parliament. He met, however, with but little success in that Assembly, and he speedily gave up active politics and devoted himself with fresh ardour to his studies and lectures. Among his later works may be mentioned his "History of France at the Period of the Reformation" (1859-62); his "Biographical Studies," chiefly on Italian and Spanish statesmen (1871); and his history of Germany from 1780 to 1790, published in 1871. Ranke's "History of England, chiefly in the Seventeenth Century," traverses a good deal of the ground occupied by Macaulay. It has been translated by a committee of Oxford tutors, and is regarded as the standard history of England for the period of which it treats. In 1880 Ranke astonished the world by announcing that he was going to publish its history from the earliest times. It was a bold enterprise for a man of 84 to undertake, but he was within measurable distance of completing it at the time of his death. Issuing the volumes at the rate of one a year, he had already taken the reader well into the Middle Ages, and in three years more the gigantic task would have been finished. In this marvellous work no traces of age or weakness are



visible; and the style of the historian is nowhere so perspicuous and attractive as in the last volume of his last published work.

A lady who spent four months in his house in the year 1866 has supplied us with an interesting account of the historian and his mode of life, from which we make the following extracts:—

He was a little man, with one shoulder much higher than the other—a physical peculiarity caused, I imagine, by excessive writing. He had strongly marked features; bright piercing blue eyes, which in moments of excitement he used to dilate to the utmost; a sharp nose, and a mouth seldom in repose; altogether a most mobile expressive countenance, deeply marked with smallpox. I think “spiritual” conveys the best notion of his expression and conversation; indeed, he was very unlike what I expected him to be—a thorough German philosopher. He spoke somewhat indistinctly, and with such extreme rapidity that I used constantly to feel left far behind, both physically and mentally, and was proportionately humiliated and disappointed. However, a German lady who frequently came to the house consoled me by saying that she experienced just the same difficulty, and although he spoke in her own language she could not keep pace with his lightning rapidity of speech.

It may be added here that Von Ranke spoke a number of European languages with great fluency but a sublime disregard for grammar. His mode of life was characterised by an almost Spartan simplicity, and varied hardly at all throughout his career. It has been well said of him that “he ate, drank, exercised, in fact lived altogether with a view to enabling himself to get through the greatest possible amount of good literature.” For the earlier part of his life he was in the habit of only eating one regular meal in the course of the day, merely taking a cup of coffee in the morning and tea in the evening; but towards the close of his life he found it necessary to supplement this by a glass of good wine in the middle of the day. His daily routine in 1866 is thus described by his visitor:—

He rose at six even in the dark cold March mornings, and only drank a cup of coffee, never taking the *semmel* (roll) along with it, like the rest of the family. In winter he used to walk for a couple of hours before dinner at four p.m. Then the newspaper was read aloud to him, and he had a cup of coffee and a nap before retreating to his study. He had three rooms opening one into another, completely lined with books—doubly lined, I should say, for the books were two deep. A small iron bedstead in the outer room, with a washing stand and wardrobe, completed the furniture of what cannot be called a comfortable bedroom; but he always spoke of these apartments collectively as his bookrooms. At eight p.m. he came into the sitting-room for tea and perhaps a scrap of cake; friends used to come in at that hour, and he was always very sociable. How he managed to work at his books, to take long walks, and to talk with such marvellous energy and only eat once a day used to amaze me; and he was a moderate eater too. In the summer we dined at two p.m., and after his cup of coffee and the reading of the newspaper and his nap he used to walk from four to eight, when he came in

as brisk and bright as possible, when others were feeling languid after the heat and glare and dust of a Berlin summer's day. He used often to dine with the late Prince Albrecht, the Emperor's brother; with Prince Karl, and with the Dowager Queen Elizabeth—“the Queen,” as he used to call her. Though Von Ranke was so keen and brilliant, he liked to meet with those who were not afraid of him or of saying what they thought. A well-known Oxford professor, speaking of his “History of England in the Seventeenth Century,” characterised it as “a monumental work.” This was a remarkable criticism upon the writings of a man who was the liveliest, keenest, most quick-witted of mortals in every-day life, and shows how many-sided and apparently contradictory human character may be.

Even at the age of 88 he was still capable of long walks, and hardly relaxed his ascetic mode of life in any particular. Originally he was in the habit of doing all his writing himself, but with advancing years and failing sight found it necessary to employ one and then two amanuenses—one for the morning and one for the evening's work,—luckless scribes who never satisfied the inexhaustible energy of their master. Von Ranke became more intensely Protestant and Conservative as he grew older. Hence it will be more easy to appreciate the point of his remark, made to a relative, that he felt a satisfaction at having written his “History of the Popes” at an early period, because he was conscious that he could not have treated the subject so impartially from the standpoint of his later years. In the later years of his life, although, as one of his family writes, “he did not like to be continually bothered by politics,” he retained a keen interest in his old friends and in all that was going on in the world. His own methods naturally predisposed him in favour of research; and when the scheme was first mooted as to the expediency of publishing the ancient laws and institutes of Ireland, Von Ranke threw the weight of his authority into the right scale, and by the testimony which he bore, concurrently with Guizot, Hallam, and Jacob Grimm, as to the value of such an undertaking, lent material aid in inducing the English Government to authorise the translation and publication of the Brehon laws. (See Parliamentary Papers, 1859, session 2, vol. xiii., part 2, where the letters of these four distinguished scholars are printed in the report made by the Commissioners for the Publication of Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland.)

Von Ranke was married in October, 1843, at Windermere, to Clara Graves, an Irish lady of considerable cultivation and strong literary tastes. She died many years before her husband, leaving two sons and a daughter, who all inherit their father's vivacity and intelligence. X C. L. G