

CURRENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF CONTINENTAL EUROPE.

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RANKE'S LAST WORK.

At the close of 1886 the seventh volume of Ranke's *History of the World* appeared. It is the work to which the eminent historian devoted his last labors, and a melancholy interest attaches to its contents. After dictating his last words from his death-bed he, overcome with pain, ended his literary labors with the words: "*Inter tormenta scripti.*" This *History of the World* remains a torso; but it is a lasting monument of the freshness and intellectual vigor of the youthful old man, and is without a parallel in literary history. Ranke was in his eighty-third year when he began the work. He had in manuscript a compend on the same subject, used in former years as a basis of lectures; but as his labors had been devoted chiefly to modern history new researches among the sources were required, and this work is the product of these researches. At an age when men are glad to rest and willingly abandon all toil, he began a task which seems enough for a long life. In 1880, when the author was eighty-five, the first volume was published, and since then a new volume has appeared at the close of each year. When the author entered upon his ninety-first year, Dec. 21, 1885, six volumes had been issued. Until the 12th of May, 1886, when he became too ill for further work, he labored unceasingly on the seventh volume. He died on the 23d of that month. This volume is thus the product of his ninety-first year, and it is not strange that there was much eagerness to learn whether Ranke's great powers remained unimpaired to the last. Like the other volumes, this one is spirited, critical, revealing a mastery of details as well as a remarkable power of grasping events, and giving due prominence to leading facts which have influenced the world's history. In the science of historiography as well as in historic writing, Ranke was great to the last.

In the Preface, Prof. Dove, of Bonn, states that for Ranke life was activity. Immediately after finishing the sixth volume he began the seventh. His usual passion for work was now connected with a spirit of impatience, as if urged on by a presentiment that his labors must soon close; and in spite of physical suffering, he completed, on the basis of new investigations, this volume, embracing four generations, rich in historical development. The volume of 348 pages brings the history down to the close of the eleventh century, and discusses the summit and decline of the imperial power in Germany, and the conflicts between the State and the Church, particularly between Henry IV. and Gregory VII. In view of the ultramontane tendencies of the present, the culmination of hierarchical tendencies under Gregory VII. will be read with peculiar interest, especially the chapter on "Canossa." Peter Damiani called

his friend, the pope, "a holy Satan," probably referring to his eminent talent for worldly affairs. Ranke holds that Gregory revealed neither religious fervor nor profound doctrinal views; but he was absorbed by the supreme authority of the papacy. Henry and Gregory both claimed to rule by divine authority; but dissensions in Germany, gave the pope advantage over the king and made the scenes at Canossa possible. There are, however, two reports of Henry's conduct at Canossa, one by Berthold more favorable to the king, and the other by Lambert, who sided with the princes which opposed the king. Lambert's account of Henry's extreme humiliation at Canossa, has usually been followed by historians; but Ranke finds reasons to question its truthfulness, and regards Henry's conduct at Canossa far more dignified and worthy than is usually supposed. He throws into bold relief the arrogant assumptions of Gregory, who claimed to speak directly in the name of God. Thus he declared the excommunication of the king a sentence of the Holy Spirit, and demanded that the king henceforth regard the Church as his commander, not as his servant. The pope claimed to have absolute temporal as well as spiritual jurisdiction; power to dethrone monarchs, emperors included, as well as to appoint and depose bishops. Not content with the keys of heaven and hell, he arrogated to himself an authority which decided individual as well as national affairs. "The hierarchical conception was his inner life. . . . Gregory's declarations, as already stated, contain no deep doctrines, for nearly all he announced had been stated before; but in him they culminate and form a system."

When a man of Ranke's powers devotes a life of unusual length to the critical investigation of historic documents, we attach more than ordinary importance to his religious convictions. The ninety years of his life include the period during which arose the severest attacks ever made on historic Christianity. Ranke's method, the most critical ever introduced into historical research, naturally led him to consider the historic basis of Christianity and the value of the attacks of the Tuebingen School. In the chapter on the Introduction of Christianity, in his *History of the World* he does not propose to discuss the mysteries of the Christian religion, but the condition of the world when it began its work. In the seventh volume he pronounces Christianity the religion which not only claimed to be universal, but which also had power to meet the religious need of man. Throughout his works there is proof that he had religious convictions as well as profound respect for its influence on individual and national life. In the world's history he pronounces the religious elements the most powerful factors. Before Christ came, God was too remote from human affairs; "in Christ the Highest Divine Being