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Leopold von Ranke Edited and translated by George Walter Prothero

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### Universal History

'No apology can be needed for introducing to English readers the latest work of Leopold von Ranke', states the editor's preface to this English translation, first published in 1884. Ranke (1795–1886) is well known for pioneering the modern historical method which advocates empiricism, rather than a focus on the philosophy of history. Emphasising the importance of presenting history exactly as the surviving evidence, both documentary and archaeological, reveals it to have happened, Ranke asserted that different eras need to be understood in their own contexts rather than in relation to each other. Though it is limited to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, this work takes a broad overview of 'the oldest historical group of nations and the Greeks', beginning with ancient Egypt and concluding with Alexander the Great and his immediate successors. Other works by Ranke in English translation are also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection.

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# Universal History

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EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY  
GEORGE WALTER PROTHERO



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*THE OLDEST HISTORICAL GROUP OF  
NATIONS AND THE GREEKS*

BY

LEOPOLD VON RANKE

EDITED BY

G. W. PROTHERO

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



LONDON

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

NO APOLOGY can be needed for introducing to English readers the latest work of Leopold von Ranke. Even if the name of the author were not sufficient justification, it might be found in the fact that no similar attempt to present a connected view of Universal History exists in the English language. The scope and aim of the work, of which only a first instalment is here presented, are explained by the author in his preface. All, therefore, that is incumbent on the editor is to describe the way in which the translation has been produced, and to point out some slight departures from the original.

The first half of the present volume was translated by the Rev. D. C. Tovey, Assistant Master at Eton College; the second half and the preface were translated by the editor. Both portions have been carefully revised by Mr. F. W. Cornish, Assistant Master at Eton College. The whole work when in proof was finally gone over again by the editor, who is solely responsible for the form in which it eventually appears. Great care has been taken to represent the ideas and thoughts of the author with the utmost fidelity, and even, wherever the nature of the language permits, to preserve his actual expressions. Whatever other defects may be noted, I feel confident that here, at least, the reader will seldom have occasion to complain.

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I have ventured to depart from the original in two particulars, namely, the spelling of proper names, and the treatment of the notes. In the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Jewish proper names which occur in the Bible, I have adopted the Biblical form as being more familiar to English readers, adhering in other cases to that adopted by Herr von Ranke. In Greek names, while the author preserves the Latinised forms which were in ordinary use till our own time, I have preferred, in deference to modern opinion, to attempt a nearer representation of the original. In the transliteration of Greek names it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be quite consistent; and I do not pretend to have solved the problem. Believing, however, that in a work of this kind it is well to avoid so complete a transformation as would be involved by an attempt exactly to reproduce the original, and that an approximation to the correct sound is more important than philological accuracy, I have adopted the following rules.

In those cases where the word is completely disguised by the Latin form, as Aias or Odysseus, it is easy and on every ground desirable to restore the Greek form, and I have accordingly done so without hesitation. But the great majority of Greek names have not suffered so violent a metamorphosis, and in these cases a return to the Greek is not so indispensable. Nevertheless, here too some approximation seems to be called for. The most important departure from the Greek is caused by the substitution of the Latin C for the Greek K. Accordingly, where the Greek K occurs, I have used the corresponding English letter, retaining the ordinary spelling wherever it does not pervert the sound of the word. Thus, I write Alkibiades and Kimon, but Critias and Pericles. The only exceptions to this rule are those words, which through Biblical or other usage, have been, in a sense, incorporated in

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the English language, as, for instance, Cyrus, Cyprus, Cilicia. The sibilant which gives to English ears so false an idea of the Greek tongue is thus, as a rule, avoided. Secondly, I have endeavoured to indicate not only sound but quantity by restoring the diphthong in words like Dareius, Aristeides, Nikæa, Ægæan. In the terminations, however, I have generally retained the ordinary form, as Menelaus, Phalerum, not thinking it worth while to make a change in this respect.

In dealing with the notes, I have acted on the conviction that it is important in a work of this kind, treating of the broad facts of history rather than its details, and edited for an English public, to trouble the reader with as few notes as possible. I have, therefore, in the first place, generally incorporated the chronological notes in the text, retaining, however, in their former position such as indicate any divergence of authority with respect to dates, or touch on disputed points of chronology. I have thought it unnecessary to reprint mere references to ancient writers in support or illustration of accepted facts in Biblical or Greek history, while keeping those in which Herr von Ranke acknowledges his obligations to modern authors. All notes containing any controversial matter or anything additional to the text have, of course, been retained in full. In no case has anything been added. The second volume of the German edition concludes with an appendix on the chronology of Eusebius, which has not been translated, since those readers who wish to go deeply into the subject will doubtless be able and willing to consult it in the original. Lastly, the quotations from the Old Testament which occur in the text, have been given as they stand in the English Authorised Version, and therefore differ slightly here and there from the form given by Herr von Ranke.

For the index to this volume, and for other valuable assist-

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ance, I have gratefully to acknowledge my obligations to my wife.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the work, in the German edition, already extends to about the end of the sixth century of our era, occupying altogether a space equal to four volumes similar to that now presented to the public. The author intends to complete the work by bringing it down to our own day, and when finished it will probably occupy some six or seven such volumes. It must depend on the reception of this instalment by the public whether the translation will be continued.

G. W. PROTHERO.

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## P R E F A C E.

HISTORY cannot discuss the origin of society, for the art of writing, which is the basis of historical knowledge, is a comparatively late invention. The earth had become habitable and was inhabited, nations had arisen and international connexions had been formed, and the elements of civilisation had appeared, while that art was still unknown. The province of History is limited by the means at her command, and the historian would be overbold who should venture to unveil the mystery of the primeval world, the relation of mankind to God and nature. The solution of such problems must be entrusted to the joint efforts of Theology and Science.

From this primeval world we pass to the monuments of a period less distant but still inconceivably remote, the vestibule, as it were, of History. These monuments have hitherto excited the admiration and defied the intelligence of successive generations, but during the last hundred years we have obtained more accurate information and a clearer understanding of them than were possessed before. In our own day the ruins of buried cities have been disinterred, and buildings have been discovered, on the walls of which the mightiest monarchs of their day caused their deeds to be inscribed.

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Archæological investigation is now everywhere pursued with a sort of filial affection, and every new fact brought to light is greeted as a fortunate discovery, while art and antiquity have become almost identical conceptions. These monuments of the past are naturally connected with the relics, unfortunately but too fragmentary, of the ancient religions, rituals, and constitutions which have survived to our own time. Around the various centres of investigation groups of studies have grown up, each of which forms a department by itself and demands the devoted attention of a lifetime. Lastly, a universal science of language has arisen, which, based upon learning as minute as it is extensive, undertakes with success the task of distinguishing and contrasting international relationships.

For the direction of all who are interested in these researches, as well as for the instruction of the public at large, nothing could be more desirable than a scientific synopsis and correlation of these various studies. Such a work would fittingly adorn an encyclopædia of historical knowledge, but it cannot be introduced into Universal History, which claims as its province only the ascertained results of historical research. History begins at the point where monuments become intelligible and documentary evidence of a trustworthy character is forthcoming, but from this point onwards her domain is boundless. Universal History, as we understand the term, embraces the events of all times and nations, with this limitation only, that they shall be so far ascertained as to make a scientific treatment of them possible.

The historians of by-gone days were satisfied with the conception of the four great empires of the world, drawn from the prophetic books of the Bible. As late as the seven-

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teenth century this conception prevailed, but in the eighteenth it was upset by the general progress of civilisation. Through the revolution in ideas which then took place the notion of Universal History was, as it were, secularised, a result chiefly due to the publication of a voluminous record of different nations under the title of a 'Universal History,' which, appearing in England, was welcomed by German scholars and incited the latter to a display of similar industry. But it was impossible to remain content with the history of individual nations. A collection of national histories, whether on a larger or a smaller scale, is not what we mean by Universal History, for in such a work the general connection of things is liable to be obscured. To recognise this connection, to trace the sequence of those great events which link all nations together and control their destinies, is the task which the science of Universal History undertakes. That such a connection exists a glance is enough to show.

The first beginnings of culture belong to an epoch whose secrets we are unable to decipher, but its development is the most universal phenomenon of those times concerning which trustworthy tradition is forthcoming. Its nature cannot be expressed completely by any one word. It embraces both religious and political life, with all that is fundamental in law and society. From time to time the institutions of one or other of the Oriental nations, inherited from primeval times, have been regarded as the germ from which all civilisation has sprung. But the nations whose characteristic is eternal repose form a hopeless starting-point for one who would understand the internal movement of Universal History. The nations can be regarded in no other connection than in that of the mutual

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action and reaction involved by their successive appearance on the stage of history and their combination into one progressive community.

Culture or civilisation, by whichever name we choose to call it, contains one of the most powerful motives of internal development. To forecast its ultimate aim would be a fruitless task, for the movement of Universal History is infinite in the range of its results. The limits of historical enquiry confine our attention to the various phases in which this element of culture appears, side by side with the opposition which in each of them it encounters from the inveterate peculiarities of the different nations and tribes with whom it comes in contact. These peculiarities, again, have their original justification and possess an inextinguishable vitality.

But historical development does not rest on the tendency towards civilisation alone. It arises also from impulses of a very different kind, especially from the rivalry of nations engaged in conflict with each other for the possession of the soil or for political supremacy. It is in and through this conflict, affecting as it does all the domain of culture, that the great empires of history are formed. In their unceasing struggle for dominion the peculiar characteristics of each nation are modified by universal tendencies, but at the same time resist and react upon them.

Universal History would degenerate into mere theory and speculation if it were to desert the firm ground of national history, but just as little can it afford to cling to this ground alone. The history of each separate nation throws light on the history of humanity at large; but there is a general historical life, which moves progressively from



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one nation or group of nations to another. In the conflict between the different national groups Universal History comes into being, while, at the same time, the sense of nationality is aroused, for nations do not draw their impulses to growth from themselves alone. Nationalities so powerful and distinct as the English or the Italian are not so much the offspring of the soil and the race as of the great events through which they have passed.

We have therefore to investigate and understand not only the universal life of mankind, but the peculiarities of at any rate the more prominent nations. In this attempt the laws of historical criticism, which hold good in every detailed enquiry, may on no account be neglected, for it is only the results of critical investigation which can be dignified with the title of history at all. Our glance must indeed be always fixed on the universal, but from false premisses only false conclusions can be drawn. Critical enquiry and intelligent generalisation are mutually indispensable.

In conversation with intimate friends I have often discussed the question whether it be possible to write an Universal History on such principles as these. We came to the conclusion that perfection was not to be attained, but that it was none the less necessary to make the attempt. Such an attempt I now lay before the public. My point of view throughout has been the following. In the course of ages the human race has won for itself a sort of heirloom in the material and social advance which it has made, but still more in its religious development. One portion of this heritage, the most precious jewel of the whole, consists of those immortal works of genius in poetry and literature, in science and art, which, while modified by the local conditions

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under which they were produced, yet represent what is common to all mankind. With this possession are inseparably combined the memories of events, of ancient institutions, and of great men who have passed away. One generation hands on this tradition to another, and it may from time to time be revived and recalled to the minds of men. This is the thought which gives me courage and confidence to undertake the task.

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