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Cyclopaedia of Australasia

or Dictionary of Facts, Events, Dates, Person and Places, connected with Discovery, Exploration and Progress of the British Dominions in the South from the Earliest Dawn of Discovery in the Southern Ocean to the Year 1881.

by David Blair, in one volume. Published by Fergusson and Moore, Printers and Publishers, 48 Flinders Lane East, Melbourne, 1881.

Description

The volume contains six preliminary unnumbered pages followed by a six page Introduction (reproduced below). It contains pages numbered [1] to 780. An Index commences at page [i] and runs to page xv.

The body of the volume is in alphabetical order and covers both persons and subjects e.g. page one begins: Abbott, Major; A'Beckett, Thomas Turner; A'Beckett, Sir William; Aborigines etc. It covers all manner of items including places, rivers, mines etc.

Capturing the Text and the Data for the Biographical Database of Australia

Gould Genealogy www.gould.com.au scanned this volume and gave permission for the Biographical Database of Australia (BDA) to incorporate the biographical sections of it into the Database. The CD produced by Gould contains all sections from the volume and is fully searchable. It is available from the BDA Shop

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BDA extracted names and vital data from all the volumes so that linking could take place, which enables the user to view a biography published in this volume, as part of a BDA Biographical Report on the selected individual.

Original Introduction to the Book

1. The present volume is the result of many years of diligent labour, and is the first attempt that has yet been made to systematise the entire range of facts bearing on the past history and present condition of the British possessions in the Southern Ocean.

2. In the prosecution of his duties as a Victorian journalist, during the past thirty years, the compiler has felt, almost hourly, the necessity of a work of this kind. The information he required was, he found, either not accessible at all, or it was scattered over a large mass of fugitive - and for the most part worthless - publications. The compilation of a "Cyclopaedia of Australasia," therefore, occurred to him at a very early date as a task to be undertaken when the fitting time should arrive. The year that witnessed the two Grand International Exhibitions at Sydney and Melbourne distinctly marked that period. Australasia, for the first time, took its rightful place amongst the world's great dominions. Up till that time it was generally regarded as nothing more than a group of detached

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settlements belonging to Great Britain, situated "at the antipodes," quite destitute of any distinctive history, and not of any great interest or importance in the eyes of foreign nations. And in this injurious estimate of their magnificent territory Australians themselves were only too willing to acquiesce.

3. The bulk of the adult population in all the colonies, excepting New South Wales, was up till a very recent period composed of immigrant adventurers, who had come hither to better their fortunes, but *not* with the fixed intention of becoming Australian citizens. They clung to the conviction that they still belonged to "the old country," which was always their "home," and that they were merely temporary sojourners here, whose chief object in life was to return and settle down in their native land. There was an unwillingness to admit that they were permanent residents here, or should ever become such, and an impatience of all solicitation to take an active personal interest in the history and concerns of Australasia. There was even, in some cases, a positive determination to remain ignorant of everything relating to this part of the world, beyond the limited range of knowledge needful to carry on commercial or other business transactions. These feelings still linger in the breasts of some of the older generation of colonists, and- many amusing instances might be cited by the present compiler. The result is a general unacquaintance with the past history and present condition of the land they live in, which is certainly not creditable to the Australians as a people.

4. But, in the meantime, a new generation has sprung into existence, and the effects of this indifference of the fathers are being witnessed in the children. The sentiment of patriotism has not yet been kindled in their breasts. They have no noble pride in the land of their birth. They speak, as their elders do, of the "old country" as their "home." They affect rather to despise their native land. They cherish a dim conviction that they, too, will some day leave Australia altogether, and go to Europe "with a fortune." They mentally associate the idea of all that is worth living for with a residence in London or one of the other great European cities; this fresh, splendid, and bountiful new land not counting for anything at all in their estimation. On the other hand, their minds are of necessity destitute of all those fine associations which are, so to speak, born with every English boy. What can result from a mental condition so defective, on both its positive and negative sides, but a type of character blankly commonplace, wanting in all noble enthusiasm, empty of everything that gives dignity and innate nobleness to the human being ?

5. The evil is intensified by the kind of instruction given to the young Australians, both in the elementary and the higher schools. They are not taught as Australians at all, but as foreigners. English books, English lessons, English methods of study are those alone in use. Up till a very recent period the children in the State-schools, indeed, were assumed to be Irish peasant children, living amongst the bogs, and fed upon potatoes and milk! That is to say, such were the assumptions tacitly made in the very books the children were taught from, beginning with the lessons in words of one syllable. The sole reason for this preposterous inversion of common sense in elementary education was the beggarly plea, that the Irish National School-books were the cheapest that could be procured! And when the present writer took in hand the task to remonstrate publicly against the absurdity, he awakened keenly resentful feelings in the breasts of both governing persons and booksellers. Some reform has been introduced in respect of the school-books, as the consequence of that remonstrance; but the fitting books have not yet been placed in the hands of the pupils. They are still English books, written from the point of view of the antipodes, and are therefore swarming with errors in Geography, Natural History, the course of the Seasons, General History, and even Astronomy. Errors of a kind, moreover, that permanently affect the growth of intelligence in the child. In afterlife he has to unlearn or revise all that was taught him in youth. He has to learn that he was *not* born, and does *not* live, in a little Island in the Northern Sea; that June is *not* the month of fright and flowery summer, and December the month of chilling ice and snow; that Asia does not lie to the eastward; that "the

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Continent" is *not* divided from the land he lives in by a narrow "strip of silver sea;" that France does *not* lie just across the narrow channel to the southward; that the Great Bear and the Aurora Borealis are *not* visible at certain seasons the year; and in a word, that he is in Australia, not in Europe. One would suppose that this false teaching would be most carefully kept from the children, and that accurate conceptions of their real place on the globe, and of the relations of their native land to the rest of the world, would be impressed with equal care upon their minds. But the plea is at once put in bar of such a suggestion that the books in use are cheap! A few pence of difference in the price of a dozen copies is apparently the sole consideration that comes home to the intelligence of governing persons in Australia. Any proposal to put Australian school-books into the hands of Australian children would probably be resented as an impertinence. At all events, such is the experience of the present writer. A very painstaking attempt to compile and bring into use a set of Australian school-books was baffled by the action of the "authorities" in more than one of these colonies. The new books, it was objected, would cost a pence more per dozen copies than some Scotch publishing firm could supply Scotch school-books for, in quantities!

6. Nor is there any improvement in this regard in the instruction imparted to the scholars in the higher schools. From first to last the whole routine is foreign. The pupils are painfully drilled in the geography - even in the minute topography - of ancient Greece and Rome; but they are not taught anything at all about Australia. It is held to be of the last importance to their mental culture that they should know all about the internal quarrels of the Greek republics two thousand years ago, and all about the mutual rivalries and wars of the Romans and Carthaginians of about the same date; but it is held to be a matter of perfect indifference that they shall be allowed to grow up in blank ignorance of every fact relating to the discovery, progressive settlement, and history of the land of their birth. To know every particular of the founding of Rome, and to be able to discriminate minutely between the legendary and the actual - the historical and the unhistorical - elements in the story told by the Roman annalists, is held to be essential; but the Australian boy is not required, nor even expected, to know anything about Cook's discoveries, or Flinders' heroic adventures, or Sturt's explorations, or the melancholy fate of Burke and Wills, or of the rise into independence of the colony of Victoria, or of the natural history and physical characteristics of this continent. The antiquated scholastic superstition, moreover, is still cherished in our Grammar Schools and Universities, that there are lessons of profound political wisdom to be learned by Australian boys from the history of the old Greeks and Romans. Now, it is allowable for the young Englishmen pursuing their studies at Oxford or Cambridge to hold that conviction; but it is even ludicrously inapplicable in a country where both the natural and political conditions are as unlike those of ancient Greece and Rome as an Australian summer is unlike an English winter. Richard Cobden once stated his conviction that there was, for an English boy of the present day, more solid teaching in a single number of the *Times* than in all the writings of Thucydides. It is even truer to assert that the value of the present volume to any Australian boy infinitely outweighs that of the entire mass of the writings of all the Greek historians, from Herodotus to Grote; and of the entire line of Roman historians, from Livy to Mommsen. Even in English history there is no true teaching for Australian boys. He sees nothing in the human life around him at all corresponding with what he reads in Green and Froude and Macaulay. The story of the Great American Republic is vastly more to the purpose for him. It would be, in truth, much better teaching for him to learn his English history from Shakespeare and Scott than from the standard historians. What conceivable lesson can the boy draw from the narrative of the Wars of the Roses, for example, however brilliantly written? What imaginable bearing on the condition of things around him has the history of the Plantagenets, or the fortunes of the Stuarts, or the characters of the Four Georges? All these things are, and must always be, for the Australian boy, matters of pure romance. To speak to him gravely of the "lessons of history" he is to find in them is merely to repeat an antiquated and, for him, meaningless traditional formula. Born the simple citizen of a primitive democracy, into which no

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element of aristocratic dominancy can ever enter, what can he understand about the Feudal system, which even now prevails - at least in form - in England? As reasonably expect the Australian boy to apprehend keenly the existence of the political state of things existing in Russia, as bearing on that of the people he lives amongst. The whole system of teaching, in fine, both primary and superior, is based upon a thoroughly false conception. It is purely traditional, not fresh and original as it ought to be, and as it must become in time. The present writer is fully aware that in giving expression to these daring sentiments he is exposing himself to very grave reprehension from the scholastic "authorities" in Australia. Be it so! But he is in the right for all that; and the time is close at hand when universal acknowledgment will be made that he is so.

7. Nor is the intellectual misleading and mental confusion to which the young Australians are subjected at school the sole evil arising from the wrong system pursued. The historical lessons, and even the lessons in social and political economy, impressed on their youthful minds are of a kind that is calculated to produce very serious social and political evils in the future. For, ignoring altogether the equality of social and political conditions which, of necessity, exist in their native land, their minds are filled with ideas of the strife of classes in society; of the rich oppressing the poor, and the poor hating the rich; of the "proud nobility" and the "humbler orders" of society; of the "upper classes," the "middle classes," the "lower classes," and all the customary cant expressive of inequality of conditions, indefinitely extending through society; of the mutual struggles of capital and labour; of the wide gulf separating the wealthy employer from his impoverished workmen; and of the impassable distance between the titled landowner and the tenant farmers and labourers on his estate. No doubt the young Australian ought to be taught that all these distinctions and facts of society prevail in other countries; but it ought at the same time to be carefully pointed out to him that nothing of all this applies to the land of his birth, and probably never will apply. From the very first it ought to be impressed on his mind that there is no *real* distinction between rich and poor in this country; that the road to and influence is open alike to all; and that every expression, either in word or in deed, of enmity against *any* section of his fellow-citizens is to the last degree unpatriotic and wicked.

8. Such, then, are the principles upon which this volume has been compiled. It is designed, first, to supply a manifest want. Secondly, to place the Australasian colonies in their proper aspect before the world. Thirdly, to make the Australasian people acquainted with the land they live in and possess. Fourthly, to foster in them a spirit of patriotic pride in their glorious country. Fifthly, to aid in revolutionising the whole system of teaching as at present conducted in Australian schools and colleges.

9. The volume has been compiled with infinite pains and care. The writer has been particularly careful in the matter of historical facts and dates. The printing of the volume was commenced in 1879, and the information given in the latter part of it extends to August, 1881. With this explanation made, the author may add that he is not aware of a single error in the volume. He will feel under an obligation to any reader who will be good enough to point out to him any inaccuracy that may be detected, in order that it may be corrected in a future edition.

10. With the object of saving space, all honorary titles have been omitted in the biographical articles. It is meaninglessly monotonous to repeat "Mr." and "Esq." times without number.

11. The biographical articles are, as a rule, written in a tone of dispassionate impartiality. Judicial estimates of character are rarely given. There is not a single statement in the volume calculated to give reasonable cause of offence to a single human being.

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12. All purely domestic details in the lives of the persons noted are suppressed, as being of no imaginable interest to the world at large. There would be an element of the burlesque in minutely repeating the family register of a man whose sole claim to celebrity is that he was an explorer, a Minister of the Crown for a short time, a successful wool-grower, or a famous cultivator of the vine.

13. To avoid the constant repetition of the names of the several colonies, they are usually indicated by the initials:- N.S.W., V., S.A., Q., W.A., N.Z., and T, respectively meaning New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania.

14. The dates following the name of a person indicate the year of birth and death, or of the former only, as the case may be.

15. The volume is a compilation, but a compilation equal in all respects to original composition. Not a line of it has escaped careful revision and verification, sometimes repeated again. and again.

16. To enumerate the author's sources of information would be to transcribe the entire Australasian Library. The essence of all that has ever been printed about the Australasian colonies is enclosed within the covers of this volume. The expenditure of £1000 on books, and years of research, would scarcely be adequate to collect the information it contains. In some few cases of direct quotation the sources are acknowledged. But it may here be added that special use has been made of Wallace's *Australasia*, Gordon and Gotch's *Handbook* (for statistics and topographical details,) the Government Handbooks of the various colonies, and the *Argus* newspaper.

17. The Cyclopaedia of Australasia thus supersedes and renders obsolete all previous books upon the British dominions in the South. It is a complete Australasian Library in itself. It cannot itself be superseded by process of time, since the historical information it contains is of permanent value, and the current (mostly statistical) information can be readily brought up to date at any time with a pen by the possessor of the volume.

18. The book will, in no case, neither now nor at any future time, be sold in the ordinary way. Its value, in mere money, is at least one-half greater than the price charged for it, since nothing is charged for wholesale and retail bookselling profits. A small margin between the actual cost of production and the price charged leaves (profit with which the author is contented. The possessor of the volume may fairly assume that it will rise in value as time progresses. It never can become a second-hand book, since the only copies that go into circulation will be those supplied by the author himself. Not a single copy will be printed "on speculation;" neither will copies be gratuitously dispersed to the newspapers for review. Not indifferent to kindly encouragement, or to words of friendship, the author is utterly indifferent to critical opinion. The book, to the full extent that it sells, must sell itself.

19. It is an INDISPENSABLE BOOK in every public office, government department, public library, newspaper office, reading room, exchange, club, respectable hotel, bank, and counting-house, in the British dominions. All "grotesque geography," all ignorant misconceptions of the Australasian colonies and their people, all gross errors and blunders respecting this part of the world, become henceforth unpardonable. With this manual at hand the old ignorance becomes as disgraceful as voluntary illiteracy.

20. For the same reasons the book is indispensable in every AUSTRALASIAN HOUSEHOLD. The young Australian will find here, told in the simplest style, all that he can require to know respecting the splendid land he was born in, and of which *he* also is an heir. No better reading-book

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could be provided for the Australasian household. No more fitting present can a father make to his son or daughter on attaining the fourteenth birthday than a copy of this CYCLOPAEDIA. For every Australian lad and lass it is a possession for life.

21. The book, then, marks an epoch in the growth of these magnificent outposts of the British empire. With justifiable pride and pleasure the author offers it to, and commends it to the favour of, his Australian fellow-citizens.

22. No pecuniary profit he may gain from the book - and he owns that he anticipates a very extensive circulation for it all over the civilised world - will give him a tenth of the pleasure that the work of compiling it has afforded him. It is the last great task of his life; it was executed in the intervals of unusually busy years of journalistic work; and never, for one moment, did the task pall or grow repellent.

23. "The labour we delight in physics pain." The author has been for forty years an indefatigable and unwearied searcher after knowledge. He has now reached the last stage of his life; and he would snatch this opportunity of impressing on the minds of his young Australian readers that, within his own experience, there are no earthly pleasures (apart from the exercise of the religious and the domestic affections) to be named in comparison with those of pure intellect. They are ever fresh, and never failing. The fountain springs as freely at sixty as it did at twenty. There are no dull hours, sense of loneliness, fretful anxieties, harassing cares - there is nothing but perennial and measureless delight - in assiduous intellectual culture. Neither wealth, nor fame, nor public honour, nor exalted station, nor success in one's pursuit in life, yields either in degree or in kind any pleasure comparable with the pleasures of the intellect.

24. Such is the author's final, and emphatic, personal testimony. He dismisses the task he has now completed with a fond reluctance. He bequeaths this volume as his legacy to THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALASIA - THAT GLORIOUS INHERITANCE OF A YOUNG, VIGOROUS, AND NOBLE NATION, WHICH WILL ONE DAY RANK AMONGST THE MIGHTIEST OF THE WORLD'S STATES.

DAVID BLAIR.

This Information Page was compiled by Malcolm Sainty June 2013.

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