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‘New Books and New Editions.’

“Stanford’s Compendium of Geography and Travel.” Based on Hellwald’s “Die Erde und ihre Völker.” “Australasia.” Edited and Extended by Alfred R. Wallace, F.R.G.S. With an Ethnological Appendix by A. H. Keane, M.A.I. Maps and Illustrations. Two volumes of this highly valuable series have already been published—Mr. Keith Johnstone having edited “Africa,” and Mr. H. W. Bates “Central America, the West Indies, and South America;” and now Mr. Wallace undertakes to tell his readers all that is known about Australasia. The usefulness and interest of such a Compendium as this can scarcely be over-estimated. The names of the editors afford an ample guarantee of its trustworthiness; and it compresses within reasonable compass the knowledge scattered over libraries. Moreover, these books, are eminently readable. The geographical knowledge conveyed in them is encyclopædic, but the narrative is often as vivacious as a lively volume of travel and as amusing as a romance. The present work is to a large extent original; for Hellwald’s account of Australia is but meagre, and forms little more than a tenth part of the volume. The vast portion of the globe covered by Australasia is pointed out in the first chapter. The actual land area of this division is indeed only a little larger than Europe; but the surface covered by the vast watery domain, with its many archipelagoes and island groups, known to some geographers as Oceania, is said to surpass even the vast extent of the Asiatic continent. Several types of mankind are included in this area. Of the natives of Australia Mr. Wallace observes that they “occupy unquestionably the very lowest social position in the human family.” Elsewhere, however, he allows that the opinions of competent judges differ widely on this subject. Sir Thomas Mitchell, for example, considered that the natives who accompanied him in his journeys were “superior in penetration and judgment to the white men of the same expedition;” and Mr. Eyre considers that the aborigines of Australia have been grossly misrepresented and traduced. The facts against them are undoubtedly strong, and it is scarcely possible to conceive of a degradation more complete than that exhibited in their habits of life. The exploration of Australia is graphically described. Mr. Wallace observes that “exploration for mere discovery’s sake has now done its work in Australia, and the rest may be left to the unaided expansion of agriculture and commerce;” and he adds, with truth, that the work already done in so inhospitable a country and so trying a climate is little less than marvellous. An ample account is given of the Australian colonies; and the energy which has made them what they are may be also termed little less than marvellous. There are about fifty millions of sheep in Australia, six millions of cattle, and half a million of pigs; and so great is the mineral wealth of the country that not only is there an abundant supply of copper, tin, iron, and coal, but the produce of the gold-fields from 1851 to the end of 1875 reached the enormous value of £223,000,000. Readers acquainted with Mr. Wallace’s admirable work “The Malay Archipelago,” will turn with special interest to the nine chapters of the Compendium which treat of those groups of islands. Melanesia and New Zealand receive also due attention; and Mr. Keane’s elaborate appendix adds not a little to the value of a book which seems to have been produced with the utmost care both of editor and publisher. We may add that the work contains fifty-six illustrations and nineteen excellent coloured maps.