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The geography of biography, the biography of geography: rewriting the Dictionary of National Biography

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Abstract

The Dictionary of National Biography (1882–1900) is compared with its second edition, currently being prepared at the University of Oxford. The original edition is an important work of scholarship, but its view of the British nation now seems male (a result of its systematic subordination of the private sphere to the public): metropolitan (a result of its roots in the London literary establishment which saw Britain and its empire through London eyes) and mesmerized by celebrity. The scholars working on the new edition have tempered these biases to produce a national history whose geography extends to the private as well as the public sphere, the periphery as well as the metropole, and whose views are those of the subaltern as well as the celebrity. The history of geography as told in the first edition, though focused on the male, the metropolitan and the celebrated, is a useful contrast with *“internalist”* views of

the subject's history. Its history in the new edition will be fuller, more varied and ^{â€™}messier^{â€™}, but will remain an accessible outsider's view of the discipline.



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Keywords

Geography; Biography; Dictionary

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1870, vocabulary is unstable.