

**HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF
THE SKELETON OF A NEW
SPERM WHALE, LATELY SET UP
IN THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM**

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WILLIAM S. WALL

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HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION
OF THE
SKELETON
OF A
NEW SPERM WHALE,

LATELY SET UP IN
THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

BY
WILLIAM S. WALL, CURATOR;

TOGETHER WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF A NEW GENUS OF
SPERM WHALES CALLED

EUPHYSETES.

TWO PLATES.

Ἡ ἐστὶ ΜΟΙ καὶ κήτος ἐπισσώγ μίγα δαίμων
ῬΕ ἄλδς, εἰά τε πολλὰ τρίψει κλυτὸς Ἀμφιγρίη.
ΟΔ. ε.

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NOTICE.

As it is very desirable that the Collection in the AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM of the Whales, Dolphins, and Dugongs of the Southern Hemisphere, should be made as complete as possible, the Officers of whaling vessels and persons residing on the sea coast are earnestly requested to give notice to the Curator, Mr. W. S. WALL, of all specimens that are procurable, or of which the bones may have been discovered on the beach. Loose bones even are valuable, and particularly skulls.

The Curator will also thankfully receive all Zoological or Geological specimens which the owners may feel disposed to present to the Museum. And the Museums of Great Britain and Foreign Countries may effect an exchange of duplicates, by addressing a letter on the subject to the Secretary of the Australian Museum, Sydney.

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CHAPTER I.

ON THE CATODON AUSTRALIS.

WHATEVER friendship or familiarity whales and dolphins may, according to ancient writers, have had with men in the olden time, it is very certain that the human species, with the exception of a few sailors, have very little acquaintance with their "fat friends" in these days. Even whalers in general know little more of them than their oil. While a lion or a tiger has become quite a vulgar animal in our menageries, there are few persons who have seen a live cetacean in captivity, except Gesner, or rather Rondelet, (whom Gesner, in the passage alluded to, seems to be quoting,) who states, that in his day, his countrymen were in the habit of carrying live dolphins as far into the interior as Lyons! It may indeed, happen, that the veracity of old Conrad's book, is as little to be trusted to in this story,* as in its pictorial representations of the whale tribe. At least, in the present railroad times, when a live hippopotamus is sporting in the midst of London, the most of the external aspect of a cetacean that any Cockney has yet seen, has been presented to his wondering gaze by some distorted skin. And this is one of the reasons why the figures of the sperm whale given by Beale and Frederic Cuvier are so widely different from each other, as to make it almost incredible that they should have been intended for the same species. By such misshapen masses of stuffing so little accurate information is afforded to the zoologist, that he is of necessity obliged to have recourse to the skeleton.

But when he takes this step in search of knowledge, the naturalist finds the osteology of cetaceous animals to be a very difficult pursuit, not merely on account of the general

* *Hist. Anim.*, 1658, lib. iv. p. 387.

unwieldiness of the skeletons, but of the time and trouble necessary to extract the oil with which their bones are saturated, and which makes the preparation of them, as I can vouch, most offensive to the senses. Perfect skeletons of the order of *Cetacea*, or more correctly *Cete*, are, therefore, in fact, very rare in museums. Of animals said to be cachalots or sperm whales, perhaps the most perfect skeleton hitherto described, is the one said by Beale to belong to Sir Clifford Constable, Bart., of Burton Constable, in Yorkshire. Its carcass was cast ashore on the coast of that county in 1825, and was described in the same year by Dr. Alderson, in a paper read before the Cambridge Philosophical Society.

Beale was the surgeon of a whaler, who having made some notes on the habits of the sperm whale of the Northern Pacific, determined on his return to England, in 1833, to give an account of its osteology. This, however, he appears to have studied for the first and only time, not in any of those numerous whales he had seen killed on the coast of Japan, but in Sir Clifford Constable's Yorkshire specimen, the skeleton of which had been set up apparently in a very creditable manner, by a Mr Wallis, of Hull, many years after the animal had been cast ashore. Now, this Yorkshire skeleton, we shall give good reasons for believing to be that of an animal different not merely from our Sydney sperm, but even from the true sperm whale of the coasts of Europe; nor is it likely to be the same as that of the sperm whale of Japan. Beale, was no doubt, led into his mistake by agreeing with most observers since the time of Cuvier, in considering Lacepède's three genera, *Catodon*, *Physalus*, and *Physeter*,* and the

* *Physeter* and *Physalus* are classical words to express the blowing of whales, and, therefore, are names applicable to all *Cetacea*. *Catodon* is a modern name invented by Ardeï, and adopted by Linnæus, to express what is more peculiar to sperm whales, namely, their possession of teeth only in the under jaw. The French name cachalot, is, according to Cuvier, derived from the Basque word *cachau*, signifying *tooth*. It may be here observed, that the Basques had a right to name the animal, as they appear to have been the first professional fishermen of the sperm whale, the valuable products of which were comparatively unknown to the ancients.

several species said to belong to them, as all referable to one species, namely, the *Physeter macrocephalus* of Cuvier. But Cuvier himself was in doubt whether the cachalot of the Southern Pacific might not be specifically different from that of the Northern Atlantic. He says that it is for naturalists to judge whether the differences observed by him in the inferior jaw of an Antarctic cachalot, and the under jaw of a sperm whale cast ashore on the coast of France, result from a mere distinction in age or sex, or from a specific difference. And he says, further, that he does not imagine that naturalists will be able to decide this question until they shall have been in possession of a complete head of the Antarctic cachalot, to compare with that of the Northern Atlantic animal, or until they shall, at least, have been in possession of good drawings of the external figures of both these cetaceans. Mr. Gray, of the British Museum, in No. XIII. of the Zoology of the Antarctic Voyage of the Erebus and Terror, which was made under the command of Sir J. C. Ross,—a work that has more reference to the external appearance, than to the anatomy of whales—also says, in 1846, “I have no doubt, from the analogy of other whales, that when we shall have had the opportunity of accurately comparing the bones, and the various proportions of the parts of the northern and southern kinds of sperm, we shall find them distinct. Quoy gives an engraving of a drawing of a sperm whale which was given him by an English captain, and which is probably the southern whale. He calls it *Physeter polycyphus*, because its back appears to be broken into a series of humps, and Desmoulins re-names it *Physeter Australis*.” Mr. Gray, moreover, makes a family of “the toothed whales,” under the name of *Catodontidæ*, and to this family he assigns three genera, viz., *Catodon*, *Kogia*, and *Physeter*—their types being, respectively, the *Catodon macrocephalus*, or sperm whale of the Northern Atlantic; the *Kogia breviceps*, or short-headed sperm whale of the Cape of Good Hope; and the *Physeter Tursio*, or Black-fish of the North Sea. Now the larger skeleton lately set up by me in the