



*Richard Owen*

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THE LIFE  
OF  
RICHARD OWEN

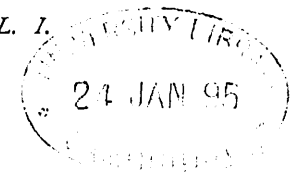
BY HIS GRANDSON  
THE REV. RICHARD OWEN, M.A.

WITH THE SCIENTIFIC PORTIONS REVISED  
BY C. DAVIES SHERBORN

ALSO AN ESSAY ON OWEN'S POSITION IN ANATOMICAL SCIENCE  
BY THE  
RIGHT HON. T. H. HUXLEY, F.R.S.

PORTRAITS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.



LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET  
1894

what do you suppose?—a mysterious bit of sheet-lead, of which I send you a rough sketch.

O P E N  
E D  
I N 1804  
B Y R. C. H.

'Buckland was very great at Stonchenge, and narrowly escaped having to fight a duel with the son of a Mr. Somebody, who, the Dean said, had written a book to prove that the architect of the mysterious ruin was Cain, and had dedicated the book to him to buy his acquiescence in the theory. . . . I both amused and edified myself during the locomotive parts of my trip with studying "Parthenogenesis" and the "Nature of Limbs." I recommended the perusal of them to old Sedgwick.'

In September, Owen suffered another loss in the death of his old friend Frederick Dixon, of Worthing, at whose house he had spent so many happy days. Owen was with him at the time. The value which he set on Dixon's friendship is evident from a letter to his wife, in which he says: 'There was a genuine goodness in poor Dixon that makes me feel bereaved of a true friend, and in many difficulties, though small perhaps, always the best adviser about College and other such matters,

in which I could fully confide in his true heart and judgment. Peace be with him! Few men have better earned it.'

In November the rhinoceros at the Zoological Gardens died, and, 'as a natural consequence,' Mrs. Owen writes, 'there is a quantity of rhinoceros (defunct) on the premises.' Owen mentions this rhinoceros in a letter to one of his sisters:—

'Amongst other matters time-devouring, and putting out of memory mundane relations, sisters included, has been the decease of my ponderous and respectable old friend and client the rhinoceros. I call him "client" because fifteen years ago I patronised him, and took it upon my skill, in discerning through a pretty thick hide the internal constitution, to aver that the beast would live to be a credit to the Zoological Gardens, and that he was worth the 1,000 guineas demanded for him. The Council had faith, and bought him, and he has eaten their hay, oats, rice, carrots, and bread in Brobdignagian daily quantities ever since, and might have gone on digesting had he not, by some clumsy fall or otherwise inexplicable process, cracked a rib; said fracture injuring the adjacent lung and causing his demise. His anatomy will furnish forth an immortal "Monograph," and so comfort comes to me in a shape in which it cannot be had by any of my brother Fellows of the Zoological order. . . . Yesterday I went to the Athenæum, and finished the second volume of

"Shirley." I suppose your good and kind host, to whom give my best remembrances, has read that Yorkshire novel of Currer Bell's lang syne. I like it. I am also reading again Lockhart's "Life of Scott," which I have bought. Let me recommend to you both Hugh Miller's "Footprints of the Creator," 12mo—a book to be bought, not borrowed.'

A constant guest at Sir Robert Peel's dinners, Owen often refers to them in his letters, and in one of these to his sister Eliza (November 28, 1849), he mentions among others, 'Sir William Hooker (with very interesting news of his son, who has climbed to the plateau of Thibet, where he has a chance of catching the "unicorn"—besides a fever), and two or three curates in white neck-cloths (they are always represented at Sir Robert's hospitable table), very like those described in "Shirley." . . . To-day Mr. Horne, the poet, author of "Orion," dines with us, to receive a criticism on a pretty little Xmas book of which he has submitted the proof sheets to me. It is to be called the "Poor Artist," and I can recommend it for a pleasant evening's light reading.'

On November 27 Owen was appointed member of the Royal Commission on Smithfield Market and the Meat Supply of London. 'The first I heard of it was from the notice in the "Times,"' Mrs. Owen writes, 'for R. has not mentioned to anyone that he was to be on the new Commission.' 'This Commission,' according to

the 'Times' of Tuesday, November 27, 1849, 'has been appointed to inquire into the live and dead meat markets of London, and consists of seven members.' Owen attended the first meeting at the Home Office, on December 5, and shortly afterwards an entry in the diary records of the second meeting that it was of a most satisfactory character, owing to some conclusive and sensible evidence given by a noted West-end butcher: 'This gentleman came prepared with a plan of improvements in slaughter-houses, &c., which was much the same as the committee were struggling to bring about. Richard asked him (his name, I think, was rather appropriate—Giblet) if he was aware that his really excellent plan, which Mr. Giblet was afraid might prove too Utopian to be acted upon, existed and was maintained in most Continental towns. R. made a great point of this, so that the Lord Mayor, who was present, could not plead ignorance of such a fact. There will be a great deal of difficulty in altering the present state of things in London—chiefly in respect to the great sums of money required—but it must come sooner or later.'

'December 4.—Milne-Edwards and Dumas *filis* here this evening. Young Dumas has a very worn, old look, though he cannot be more than twenty-five. He says he understands English, but does not speak it.'

'9th.—We hear that there is a hippopotamus waiting for the Gardens at Cairo. It must be an

of eighteen-pence.<sup>3</sup> The people informed me that when first discovered, about two years previously, it was quite perfect, but that the boys had since knocked out the teeth and had put it on a post as a mark to throw stones at. They showed me the spot where it had been found after a sudden flood had washed down part of the bank. Several fragments of bone and of an armadillo-like case were lying at the bottom of the almost dry water-course. Some of these I collected, but from the disturbed state of the country the box in which they were packed was delayed on the road, and was afterwards sent direct to England.

'For this reason the temporary marks by which I had distinguished these bones from another set, found at the distance of several leagues, were lost, and I am now unable to say which are the fragments. . . . This river (Rio Cancaraña) has been celebrated since the time of the Jesuit Falkner for the number of great bones and large fragments of the armadillo-like case found in its bed. The inhabitants told me that they had made gate-posts of some leg bones, and I myself saw two groups *in situ* of the remains of a mastodon projecting from a cliff. But they were in so decayed a state that I could only bring away small portions of a molar tooth.'

From the same collection Owen described the

<sup>3</sup> This skull would probably entire skeleton is figured in now fetch many pounds. An *Natural Science*, 1894, p. 119.

remains of an extinct animal related to the llama. He also described the scelidotherium, which is related to the ant-eaters; and further determined some disputed points in existing accounts of the skeleton of the megatherium—a gigantic extinct sloth about the size of an elephant. We also find from the Diary that Darwin submitted the proofs of the 'Voyage' itself to Owen.

But while occupied in describing fossil remains he varied his occupation by dissecting the mortal remains of a rhinoceros which had recently died at Wombwell's Menagerie. This he looked upon as a great prize, as a rhinoceros then—dead or living—was a rarity in England. On February 1, Owen had the carcass brought to his house in the College of Surgeons, to his wife's disgust, who thus comments upon it:—'The defunct rhinoceros (late of Wombwell's Menagerie) arrived while R. was out. I told the men to take it right to the end of the long passage, where it now lies. As yet I feel indifferent, but when the pie is opened—'

'February 6.—R. still at the rhinoceros.'

In February the 'Wollaston' Gold Medal of the Geological Society was awarded to Owen, and he thus remarks on it in a letter to his sister Eliza (February 28): 'My first number of Darwin's "Fossils" (strange animals) is out, and most unexpectedly the Geological Society has awarded me the Wollaston Gold Medal for that and other services to geology. Is it not curious that