

William Beaumont (1785–1853)

Experiments and observations on the gastric juice, and the physiology of digestion Plattsburgh, 1833

J Dallas

Rare Books Librarian, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

This book is one of the most important works in physiology. In 1822, William Beaumont was a United States Army surgeon stationed at a lonely outpost on the northwest frontier. He was called to treat a French-Canadian scout for an accidental shotgun wound. The blast had blown a hole in the man's side and Beaumont did not expect him to survive more than a few hours. The patient, however, recovered but his wound left him with a permanent gastric fistula. Beaumont wrote, 'When he lies on the opposite side, I can look directly into the cavity of the stomach, and almost see the process of digestion.' For over 8 years Beaumont carried out experiments and observations with his patient before publishing his findings in the above book. It revolutionised the prevailing theories of the physiology of digestion and Beaumont became famous throughout the scientific world. Sir William Osler called him 'the pioneer physiologist of the United States, and the first to make a contribution of enduring value. His work remains a model of patient, persevering research.'



This engraving represents the ordinary appearance of the left breast and side, the operation being with the valve; the subject is in an erect position.
 A A A The circumference and edge of the opening, within which is seen the tube.
 B The attachment of the tubular portion of the stomach to the superior part of the opening.
 C The nipple.
 D The anterior portion of the breast.
 E The mark where the opening was made with the scalpel, and the cartilage taken out.
 F F F The outline of the original wound, around the opening. D

An illustration from Beaumont's work showing the gastric fistula through which he observed the process of digestion

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William Beaumont (1785-1853) was a surgeon in the U.S. Army who became known as the "Father of Gastric Physiology" following his research on human digestion. He wrote in the Preface to this 1833 book, "I had opportunities for the examination of the interior of the stomach, and its secretions, which has never before been so fully offered to any one. This most important organ, its secretions and its operations, have been submitted to my observation in a very extraordinary manner, in a state of perfect health, and for years in succession. I have availed myself of the opportunity afforded."

William Beaumont was born in Lebanon, Connecticut, on November 21, 1785. He grew up on the family farm and attended village schools until 1806, when he left home to become the village schoolmaster in Champlain, New York. He began studying medicine in his spare time, and in 1810 he became an apprentice (one who works for another to learn a profession) to a doctor in Vermont. These experiments led to Beaumont's *Experiments and Observations on the Gastric Juice and the Physiology of Digestion* (1833). The book is divided into two parts, one which details the experiments themselves, and another that discusses the processes of digestion. Beaumont had additional experiments in mind, but he returned to Canada forever in 1834.

Experiments and Observations on the Gastric Juice and the Physiology of Digestion, Plattsburgh, 1833. Find this Pin and more on vintage illustration by Jacki Putnam. Tags: For dreams about spiders, captivity, venomous words, cruelty, patience, intelligence, and the archetypal Self are all possible interpretations. Read on to discover which meaning fits the spider in your dream.

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