

BEAUMONT AND ALEXIS ST. MARTIN.

BY

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A few hundred years ago Thomas Fuller, in "The Holy and The Profane State," said that "Learning hath gained most by those books by which the printers have lost:" and though, in touching on William Beaumont and his "Experiments and observations on the Gastric Juice and the Physiology of Digestion," published at Plattsburg, in 1833, it is not my intention to dwell upon anything of a financial nature, this thought of Fuller's expresses the idea that a great many of the books which have proved invaluable in the advancement of learning in general, and perhaps of science in particular, are not known and read as much as they deserve to be.

Especially in these days of modern text-books, are we, as students, apt to regard with horror any volume, though it be intimately connected with our work, that has the stamp of a few score years on it, forgetting that in many cases we can in this way read, in simple language, facts and observations which form the groundwork of nearly all our standard works; it is just as Chaucer tells us in the "Canterbury Tales":

"For out of the old fieldes, as men saithe,
Cometh al this new corne fro yere to yere,
And out of old bookes, in good faithe,
Cometh al this new science that men lere."

What sentiments more ennobling than those contained in William Beaumont's "Preliminary Observations?" "I consider myself but a humble inquirer after truth—a simple experimenter," yet these prefaced the description, in a most accurate manner, of a series of unique experiments which required a great deal of patience and work, embracing, as they did, observations on the human stomach, extending over a long period, and which enabled him to give what was perhaps the first real demonstration of gastric juice outside the human body, as well as its proper description.

In the winter of 1806-7, William Beaumont, then in the twenty-second year of his life, being filled with a desire to seek fame and fortune, set forth from his home in Lebanon, Conn. Among his modest belongings was a horse, as well as a cutter, and by means of these, he jingled over the western part of Massachusetts and Vermont. In the spring of 1807,