John Call Dalton Biography

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Biography

John Call Dalton was one of the first modern American experimental physiologists. While choosing a career path unique to an American physician of the eighteenth century, Dalton's experimental research led to important contributions in anatomy, physiology, and medical education.

Dalton was born in Chehnsford, Massachusetts, and after his primary education, attended Harvard University, obtaining his medical degree in 1847. After graduation and serving as a house surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital for almost four years, Dalton was awarded a prize by the American Medical Association for his essay, "Corpus Leuteum." Dalton then diverted his efforts to physiology and experimentation, traveling to Paris to study with Claude Bernard (1813-1878), widely regarded to be the scientist who defined the principals of experimental medicine. In Paris, Dalton continued his stdies of the anatomy of the placenta, and began research on the physiology of the cerebellum and intestinal digestion. Years later, Dalton would confirm Bernard's experimental results on the sugar-making functions of the liver.

Dalton returned from France to accept an appointment as professor of physiology at the University of Buffalo in 1853. While at Buffalo, Dalton was the first in America to illustrate the concepts of physiology using live experimentation on animals. He remained a staunch advocate of live animal research throughout his career. Dalton left Buffalo for a professorship at the Vermont Medical College in 1854, followed by a position as physiology chairman at the Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, where he served until 1859. In that same year, Dalton published his physiology textbook, *A Treatise on Human Physiology,* that served as a standard in medical education through seven editions.

During the Civil War, Dalton briefly returned to surgery, serving first in Washington as surgeon of volunteers for the 7th New York regiment, then holding other key medical corps posts until 1864. In 1865, Dalton returned to New York to become professor of physiology and miscropical anatomy at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, where he also served as president of the faculty until his death.

Other contributions by Dalton to the scientific literature of physiology include *A Treatise on Physiology and Hygiene for Schools, Families, and Colleges*(1868), *The Experimental Method of Medicine*(1882), *Doctrines of the Circulation* (1884), and *Topographical Anatomy of the Brain* (1885). Dalton was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1864.