Joseph-Bienaime Caventou Encyclopedia Article

Joseph-Bienaime Caventou

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Joseph-Bienaime Caventou

1795-1877

French pharmacist known for his research on phyto (plant) chemicals and for discoveries in alkaloid chemistry. Caventou advanced clinical medicine from crude plant extracts to the use of natural and synthetic compounds. The son of a pharmacist, he completed his internship in hospital pharmacy and received an appointment to Saint-Antoine Hospital. From 1817-20 he and fellow scientist Pierre-Joseph Pelletier (1788-1842) discovered many natural products, including chlorophyll, the green pigment in plants. They also recognized the nature of morphine, strychnine, and caffeine. Their most dramatic discovery was quinine, a drug derived from the cinchona tree that found use as a treatment for malaria. By age 26 Caventou was established as a gifted investigator and, in 1830, became professor of chemistry, a post he held until his retirement in 1859.