

**Thomas Baynton, 1761-1820.**

By J. A. NIXON, M.B.

THE chance discovery of a contemporary biography of a surgeon who saw further ahead than many men of his own time is my reason for bringing to the notice of this Section the name of Thomas Baynton. I thought his name was quite unknown at the present day until I found in Von Bergmann's "Surgery" that the familiar method of strapping varicose ulcers of the leg by overlapping encircling strips of plaster was there described as Baynton's method. This contribution to the art of surgery might not by itself form a sufficient claim to be remembered by posterity. But the criticisms of Baynton's practice contained in the memoir with which this paper concludes led me to a further study of his writings. From these it is evident that the modern treatment of spinal caries was introduced by him. Baynton was the first surgeon (in England at any rate) to advocate the treatment of spinal caries by absolute rest in the horizontal position without the aid of caustic issues and setons. He led the revolt against the unscientific barbarities which were formerly practised under the guise and plea of counter-irritation. The leaders of surgery, particularly Earle, shocked at his temerity, opposed his views with vehemence. Nevertheless, Baynton was fortunate in numbering among his friends and supporters wiser and greater men—namely, Edward Jenner, to whom he dedicated his pamphlet on the "Treatment of Diseases of the Spine," and Anthony Fothergill, to whom he addressed his "New Method of Treating Old Ulcers of the Legs."

Baynton's advice on the treatment of diseases of the spine may be summed up in one or two quotations from his work on this subject. "My success," he says, "has been obtained by the application of simple principles, which are generally admitted in the treatment of some other diseases, and may have been acted upon in this, though neither myself nor the public have received the information." After referring to the use of "machinery for preventing pressure, as recommended by Sir James Earle," and "the use of drains occasioned by caustics, setons, &c., for the purpose of arresting the progress of disease in the bones, as advised by Mr. Pott," this not very eminent Bristol surgeon ventures to scrutinise their opinions and to ask "whether greater advantages

may not in future be expected from the use of means that are more simple, more reasonable, and much more agreeable." He argues that the repair of healthy bones when fractured is secured by fixation and rest, that ulcers of the legs are healed by resting, and proceeds to state that "a system of resting in the horizontal position regulated by scientific principles will accomplish the cures of diseases of the spine after the failure of drains and machinery, steadily continued a considerable number of years under the direction of skilful surgeons." Pott and Earle, he observes, made use of the horizontal position in curing diseased spines, even though they wrongly ascribed their success to setons, drains, and mechanical apparatus. It was Baynton's belief that drains are not generally, if they are ever, necessary for the curing of such diseases. "If so," he continues, "how much of that suffering which was experienced in the treatment by the making and dressing of setons, the application of caustics and the lying on open ulcers, of considerable extent, filled with pease, beans, or hard bodies, will be prevented by the adoption of this [i.e., Baynton's] plan of treatment.

"The following cases [he gives detailed accounts of thirteen] will clearly show that after very patient trials of partial resting, conjoined with the use of drains, and machinery, without any success, the most hopeless cases have been cured by uninterrupted [or as he elsewhere calls it 'undeviating, absolute'] rest alone." Baynton did not claim for himself priority of authorship for this plan of treatment. He says later, "With the exception of a French author, Mons. David, I have no recollection of any person who has suggested that rest would effect the cure of diseases of the spine." The description of the method of securing "undeviating, absolute rest" is as follows: "A crib or narrow bedstead must be procured, six feet in length, or rather of sufficient length to accommodate the patient; two feet one inch in height from the floor of the apartment to the floor of the crib, whereon the mattress is placed; two feet five inches wide, with posts three feet seven inches high (including castors) to be turned (by a turner) as a common crib. It must be provided with a rail floor, instead of sacking; and with side boards to raise up and down; which, when half raised, will resemble the raised flap of a table and must be supported with sliders, that can be drawn in or out when required; and which, when wholly raised, will furnish sides to the crib for security, or warmth at night." In this crib is to be placed a mattress which "should be as smooth as the seat of a sofa, perfectly flat, and nearly as hard as it can be rendered by the

skill of the manufacturer. The sides or flaps of the crib, when supported in their half-raised, or horizontal position, will answer the purpose of a table, and serve, when covered with blanket, to receive the patient once in a fortnight, or as often as may be necessary to turn the patient." In this crib the patient is to be horizontal for many months, enjoying fresh air and plenty of good nutritious food. The education of children is not to be neglected, whilst amusement and companions are to be encouraged. Indeed, Baynton himself apologises for devoting too much space to minutiae. The cases he describes were successfully treated by prolonged rest over periods varying from six to eighteen months.

The opposition aroused by Baynton's views was violent, as may be gauged by such criticisms as Estlin's: "I conceive, that in the greatest number of cases, the observance of undeviating rest in the horizontal posture will be found a valuable addition to the present mode of treating diseases of the spine, and for this Mr. Baynton is entitled to the thanks of the profession; but I consider his object, of the exploding the use of issues in this disorder, as an attempt at a dangerous innovation, and one that demands the most decided opposition of his professional brethren."

Having thus allowed Baynton to tell in his own words the details of his "New Method of Treating Diseases of the Spine," I will leave it to his contemporary, Richard Smith, a famous surgeon at the Bristol Infirmary, to complete the story of the man and his life. Richard Smith's memoir of Baynton forms part of a vast manuscript collection of historical and biographical notes, comprising fourteen volumes, now in the possession of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, where Smith was for forty years an active member of the surgical staff up to the time of his death in 1847. This memoir begins with a notice of the death of Thomas Baynton's father, quoted from *Pine's Bristol Gazette*, March 9, 1775.

Died, Mr. Baynton, Surgeon in Gloster Lane, commonly called Doctor Baynton, who was of very great practice, and whose loss will long be felt, especially by the poor.

The subject of this memoir was born on 5th Oct., 1761, near the foot of Clifton Down. I am alike ignorant of the nature of his education and where he received it. I do not think that he knew much of the later classics, and he certainly had no Greek. I am inclined also to think that he was never fond of the Belles Lettres, and, in fact, he troubled himself but little about literary pursuits.

His indenture is dated 5th Sept., 1775, he paid to the apothecary, Mr. Elmes, a gratuity of 20 guineas, and the same sum annually to the

charity during seven years. The day of his coming to the House was that of Mr. Godfrey Lowe's election. Mr. Thomas Godwyn, Surgeon, late of Redcliff Hill . . . who was his fellow apprentice, told me that Mr. Baynton was such a tyrant that there was no enduring him, and that he used to beat Godwyn so that his friends removed him.

With the exception of Messrs. Pott and Bromfield, then two of the most eminent surgeons in London, I am at a loss to know what lectures he attended in the Metropolis. He began to practise at Bristol about 1782. On the 22nd of May, 1784, he married Miss Annie Swayne, of Hereford.

About Oct. in this year he received from the benevolent Dr. Fothergill<sup>1</sup> the honorary medal of the Humane Society for having restored a person "apparently dead by drowning."

In 1809 he went to reside at 20, Brunswick Square, and being now in easy circumstances he indulged himself in a pretty place at Hambrook, where he usually spent his Sundays and resided a good deal in the summer.

Almost at the very outset of his career he undertook the doctoring of four parishes in Kingswood, a business not in itself very profitable, but it led to better things. It brought him into contact with the Smith family of Stapleton, and also that of the Dowager Duchess of Beaufort. Mr., now Sir, John Smith, Bart., of Ashton Court, took a great liking to him and patronised him very much, and Mr. Baynton had on his part a persevering industry and good health, so that he very soon got into a very good line of business in the home districts of the County of Gloucester (sic) . . . he constantly appeared in dirty leather breeches and boots, with his clothes and hat in keeping, so that he seemed to have just quitted his horse after a hard ride into the country . . . a well-known trick.

His apprentice, Dew, said that his Master's House at this time was penury itself, and Baynton so close-fisted "that the pump-handle was troubled more at meal-times than the beer-cock."

[In 1783 he was an unsuccessful candidate for a Surgeon's vacancy at the Bristol Infirmary; he never again presented himself for election.] I believe upon the whole, although it hurt his feelings, it was much more advantageous to him to have remained out of the House. He avoided being implicated in the various cabals and altercations in which the officers of the Infirmary have invariably been engaged during the long period of forty years that I have known the Charity. However, he considered himself to have been overlooked, and certainly he retained to the last a hostile feeling towards the Faculty of the Infirmary, and seldom called in one of the Surgeons if he could avoid it. On more than one occasion he appeared in the ranks of opposition, and in particular when he headed a party in a great struggle to throw open the doors of the Operation Room to the practitioners of Bristol. He offered to the Trustees to raise amongst the Surgeons of the City a hundred guineas

<sup>1</sup> This refers to Dr. Anthony Fothergill, 1732-1813. Dr. John Fothergill had died in 1780.

annually provided in return that they might be present at the operations. The Society however negatived the proposition without a division.

[He took in 1816 a partner named Hill, who informed Richard Smith that in the most profitable year he ever had he booked £2,500, but there was nothing like that sum received.] Mr. Baynton refused no kind of midwifery case, and went to great numbers for a guinea. He continued to practise midwifery to the last, but he, a few years before his death, had the mischance at Clifton to lose four women of consequence within a short time and it had a very decided effect upon his practice in that line.

"A Descriptive Account of a New Method of treating old Ulcers of the Legs," published in 1707, and dedicated to Dr. A. Fothergill, F.R.S., laid the foundation stone of the great name which he acquired, the plan being adopted extensively both in the Army and Navy. The method consisted in the neat and regular application of adhesive strips to the limb and subsequently keeping the whole moistened with cold water. The principle, which is nothing more than affording a support to the parts, is as old as Wiseman. Mr. Baynton's master, Pott, of London, also strenuously recommended the laced stocking or the tight bandage, which are the same thing in effect, but the adhesive has the advantage of being cheaper and always at hand.

To this day (1830) I am not aware that any improvement has been made upon his suggestion, and the method having stood the test of 33 years' experience is a sufficient proof of its merits. Mr. Baynton, who either believed himself or wished to make others believe that his strips were omnipotent, used to assert that, in the generality of ulcers, he "could command them to get well . . . in most he could persuade them by degrees, and in some very obstinate ones he was obliged to use coaxing, but none dared to disobey ultimately." [Two persons whose cures appeared in Mr. Baynton's book were at that very time patients in the Infirmary for the identical ulcerated legs, says Richard Smith.]

In December, 1813, he published a pamphlet upon Diseases of the Spine in order to show that a mere horizontal position was sufficient for a cure unaided by caustic issues or setons. This doctrine was attacked with great severity in the medical periodicals, but chiefly by Mr. Earle, a surgeon in London. Neither was the dissent confined to the metropolis. In February, 1818, Mr. J. B. Estlin published a pamphlet in Bristol containing "Strictures upon Mr. Baynton's practice with the addition of cases to prove that gentleman to be in error." Mr. Estlin's paper was written in a mild and gentlemanly tone, and contained nothing that justified resentment on the part of Mr. Baynton. But the great success of his book on Ulcers had given to Mr. Baynton's mind a high opinion of the superiority of his own attainments, and he thought it little else than impertinence for anyone to dissent from his ipse dixit.

That he was well acquainted with the great principles of Surgery and Medicine there can be no doubt, but he was not backward in cherishing the idea that he had outstripped all his brethren in professional acquirements.

I never was in his company without hearing him relate some Wonderful Wonder in rescuing some patient from the jaws of death. If this ever meets the eye of any member of the Medical Book Society [of which B. and R. S. were members] I am sure that he will acknowledge the truth of this record and perhaps add that his whole conversation centered in himself and his profession.

He was exceedingly sanguine, catching eagerly at all new medicines or proposals, and, to use the language of a case he published, "flying to his patient with the remedy in his hand"; these *remedies*, as they were termed, had of course their day and then sank into oblivion.

Mr. Baynton had in the greatest possible perfection the art of "talking over patients." He usually began by alarming them: "He did not know what to say exactly—he feared there was great reason to apprehend the worst—it was almost too late to undertake the case—but it was one of those cases to which he had turned his particular attention—he had seen a great many—had several now under his care—and if anyone could cure it, he was happy to say—he *was the man*. He knew also the value of 'my good friend' and 'my dear Madam' even in the lowest classes, and turned all to advantage."

He avoided consultations, preferring to give up the patient rather than have another opinion. He considered that no one could know more than himself and that the proposal for further advice was rather affronting him.

In his early days I do not remember him, but I have often seen him operate in his late years, and I thought but very poorly of him. He made a great display and flutter, talked incessantly both to the patient and the assistant, but was tedious and indecisive in the stroke of the knife and not without tremulousness in the hand. In his person Mr. Baynton was rather handsome, being well grown, ruddy, and of a fair complexion. He had a very pleasing and gentlemanly address—he "boo'ed" somewhat too much, as Sir Archy McSycophant calls it, and endeavoured always to play the agreeable. His voice was remarkably musical and he had an oily smoothness and volubility of tongue which (with strangers especially) was particularly captivating. His great aim through life had been to accumulate a good round sum of money, and a fortunate purchase of a piece of ground at an ordinary price began to realise his wishes. Upon digging into this land coal was found, for the working of which he made a riskless and profitable bargain with a miner. His income from various sources was at the least £3,000 a year, and although he lived very comfortably yet he must have had a large surplus.

His monies at his decease amounted to about £33,000, and he had land also and considerable family expectances. He made his own will, the grand object of which was to build up hereafter in a lapse of years a Great Man, and it was so full of contrarities, safeguards and postponements that his executors, not being able to comprehend his intentions, refused to act. So much of the bulk being tied up for an hereafter did not at all suit the views of his family, and a process was commenced to set aside these clauses. In this

difficulties have arisen, so that in all probability the gentlemen of the long robe will reap the benefits of Mr. Baynton's great and unremitting exertions to accumulate a large property.

Of his death Richard Smith writes :—

On the evening of the 29 of August, 1830, I happened to be at the Play—the lobby-keeper came to say that a gentleman's carriage was at the door for me, I learned that it was Mr. Baynton's. I found that he had *retentio urinæ* for 48 hours and was in great pain. I wished him to allow me to pass a catheter, this he peremptorily refused, alleging that he had been so once before and had then been relieved by Nature. We had therefore recourse to the bath and so forth. At 12 the next day I thought him dying, but about 7 in the evening he spontaneously emptied his bladder and seemed quite well again. "You see, my friend," said he, "I told you I should relieve myself." Everything seemed to promise well. But early in the morning he complained of his head, he soon became delirious, then insensible, and so departed this life. When he became worse almost every medical man in Clifton was sent for, the room was quite full of us, but all hope of the case was at an end upon the first glance at the patient.

A newspaper announcement of his death reads thus :—

Died. Thursday last at Clifton, Thomas Baynton, Esq<sup>r</sup>, a surgeon not less celebrated for eminence and skill in his profession than he was distinguished for the feeling of humanity of his disposition and general amenity of his manners. His essay on the treatment of Ulcers will perpetuate his memory as one of the greatest alleviators of as painful a disease as any to which the human frame is incident.

He died as he had been born, in a house "at the foot of Clifton Down," next door to Duncan House, which still remains.

He achieved an unwonted reputation and success in his lifetime, and his method of strapping ulcers is in vogue to the present day, enshrined as already stated in Bergmann's great work on surgery as "Baynton's method." But his greater claim to the respect of posterity rests upon his strenuous though bitterly opposed plea for rest in treatment of spinal caries and the abandonment of the barbarous issues and setons which in his day were held to be the essentials of the cure. To the credit of the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, one solitary voice hailed the heretical opinion as being at once sound surgery and common-sense.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY.

- BAYNTON, T. "Descriptive Account of a New Method of treating Old Ulcers of the Legs," Bristol, 1797.
- Idem.* "An Account of a Successful Method of treating Diseases of the Spine," Lond., 1813. *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, 1814, x, p. 389, "Review of Baynton on Diseases of the Spine." *Ibid.*, 1815, xi, p. 35, "Reply to the Review of Mr. Baynton's Essay on the Cure of Crooked Spine," by Henry Earle.
- ESTLIN, J. B. "Observations on Diseased Spine, illustrated by a Case, and containing Strictures upon Mr. Baynton's Treatise on that Disorder," Bristol, 1818.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF BAYNTON.

- "Dict. Nat. Biography."
- "Biog. Dict. of Living Authors," 1816, pp. 17, 412.
- "Richard Smith MS." (Bristol Royal Infirmary).

## DISCUSSION.

The PRESIDENT said that Baynton's work was an example of the stimulating effect exercised by Percival Pott upon his pupils, many of whom had dedicated their books to him. Pott was the first surgeon to be elected at St. Bartholomew's Hospital who was not at the time of his election a member of the Barber Surgeons' Company. Smith's description of Baynton's manner in dealing with patients reminded one of the surgeon in "Tom Jones" on the occasion when Jones sustained a broken head during a brawl in a tavern. Baynton, of course, lived a little too late to serve as Fielding's model. He (Dr. Moore) considered that the Section did good service in drawing attention to such men as Baynton, who would otherwise be forgotten.

Dr. PARKES WEBER remarked that Smith's sneer at Baynton's claim to have cured ulcers which subsequently relapsed was ungenerous, considering that chronic ulcers frequently relapsed whatever might be the treatment employed.

Dr. PEACHEY mentioned that Keetley, in his "Surgery," recommended Baynton's method of healing ulcers. Strapping was used to approximate the edges of the ulcers; it was not employed in order to procure rest, but to enable the patient to get about.