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# Jesse Bennet, Pioneer Physician and Surgeon

DOROTHY POLING

## I

### MEDICAL PRACTICES IN THE DAYS OF JESSE BENNET

In the early days of the United States the practice of medicine was very different from that of today. A doctor was often a man who mixed herbs and roots to make a tonic which he fancied could cure any or all diseases. The trained doctors were few and often very difficult to distinguish from the self-styled "yarb" doctors. The first interest in regulations and licensing of physicians was displayed by the doctors who wanted to raise fees and guarantee their collection. The medical societies in New York and Pennsylvania were the first to try to obtain licenses and set fees. By 1811, Ohio set up examining boards of three censors who were appointed by the legislature. They were to satisfy themselves as to the moral character and medical knowledge of the applicant. Passing this examination allowed the doctor to practice and to use legal processes to collect fees. Unlicensed physicians could practice but they were denied the use of the courts in collecting fees. By 1818, any graduate of a recognized medical institution was eligible to a license without examination.<sup>1</sup>

In colonial days anyone who wanted to become a doctor and could obtain the money felt he must study in Europe. There the medical schools were small, often having but one man on the faculty. Edinburgh was a favorite city for the colonists because there the students were required to "walk the hospitals."<sup>2</sup> This meant that much of the training period was spent in the hospitals watching and perhaps helping the great doctors of the time. Such famous early American doctors as John Morgan, William Shippen, Jr., and Benjamin Rush studied in Edinburgh.

William Shippen, who introduced to America the study of the human body by dissection, got his inspiration in Edinburgh.

<sup>1</sup> Madge E. Pickard, and R. Carlyle Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer, His Ills, Cures, and Doctors*, (New York, 1946), 253.  
<sup>2</sup> Everts Boutell Greene, *The Revolutionary Generation 1763-1790, A History of American Life*, IV, (New York, 1943), 33.

The very nature of colonial life made surgery a fascinating study. The colonists had not only broken away from the mother country politically, but they also had lost or discarded many of the traditions. The new country looked for new and miraculous cures, and the colonists were more eager to try new treatments than were the British. They had adopted the European systems but were also quick to change from one system to another when they felt that it would be advantageous.

After the American medical students felt they had learned all Edinburgh had to offer they might visit Paris and Padua, the French and Italian medical centers. Politics usually interested the students, and while they were abroad they would visit as many of the great men as they were able. Practically all of those who went to Paris talked with Voltaire, and while in England, Rush enjoyed the company of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

In the colonies, Shippen first started formal instruction in the form of lectures on anatomy in 1762. When John Morgan returned from a highly successful training period in Europe, he received permission to begin a college in Philadelphia. Then, instead of joining with Shippen, as they had planned while in school together, Morgan took all the arrangements into his own hands and claimed the credit as originator of the school.<sup>3</sup> This caused an enmity between the two men which resulted in a great loss of life during the Revolutionary War.<sup>4</sup>

The school thus started by Morgan and Shippen in Philadelphia in 1765 was the first non-Spanish medical school in America. Benjamin Rush, who was ten years younger than Morgan, joined the faculty in 1768 as an instructor in chemistry.<sup>5</sup> The two-year curriculum led to a degree of bachelor of medicine. If a doctor's degree were desired, the student must, after three years, "write and defend a thesis publicly in college."<sup>6</sup> The year Benjamin Rush joined the faculty, ten bachelor's degrees were granted and three years later four of these graduates received doctorates.

The basic courses offered in the medical school were anatomy, physiology and chemistry. The advanced students added

<sup>3</sup> James T. Flexner, *Doctors on Horseback*, (New York, 1944), 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Greene, *The Revolutionary Generation*, 92.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to this the study of therapeutics, botany, materia medica, and medical jurisprudence. It was not until 1805 that surgery and anatomy were separated into two courses, and it was 1813 before a lecturer on midwifery was added to the staff.<sup>7</sup> The Parisians were much more advanced in their study of obstetrics, having established classes and clinics as early as 1767. The first school of midwifery was established by Baudelocque in Paris in 1797, and was called the School of Maternite.<sup>8</sup>

Often a young man who aspired to medical service would apprentice himself to a doctor and there learn whatever he could. During his apprenticeship the student was expected to sweep the floors, keep the fires going, pound out the powders with mortar and pestle, and make pills. In his spare time, he was allowed to read the master's books. Sometimes a doctor would have several apprentices and he would give informal lectures on theories and cures.<sup>9</sup> When the master felt him qualified to do so, the apprentice went along on calls and served as a sort of "plumber's helper." He carried the tools, helped hold the patient, and did the dirty work which frequently confronted colonial doctors. He might also pull teeth, but if he collected a fee this must be given to the master.

Arguments between different schools and staffs resulted in the shortening of the formal training period to two terms instead of three. The bachelor's degree was done away with and the doctorate was cheapened until it was bestowed upon people who had barely fulfilled the former bachelor's requirements.<sup>10</sup> But medical training in the United States progressed so rapidly that while before the eighteenth century almost all the medical leaders had studied in Europe, by 1820 practically no American students studied abroad.

The study of anatomy through the use of dissection was severely handicapped by the lack of equipment and by prejudice. Shippen, who was the first instructor to use human cadavers, encountered many obstacles. In 1788, a riot was caused in New York when boys discovered a human arm which had been hung

<sup>7</sup> John A. Krout, and Dixon H. Fox, *The Completion of Independence, A History of American Life*, (New York, 1944), 298.

<sup>8</sup> Fielding H. Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine*, (Philadelphia, 1839), 399.

<sup>9</sup> Krout and Fox, *The Completion of Independence*, 293.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

out the window to dry.<sup>11</sup> Bodies were hard to obtain, and often the students would rob graves. This practice was not endorsed by the faculties and students were threatened with expulsion if they disinterred the dead. Merchants of bodies arose who charged fifty dollars a body. Schools also received from the state the bodies of executed criminals.

The study of medicine often resulted in the student merely learning the master's philosophy of disease and one theory of cure. In modern times it is hard to realize how little science and how much superstition early medical practices contained. The conception of the humors in the blood was still held by many, and most doctors had one system of cure which they used on all diseases. These systems generally bore the name of the doctor who made them famous. Thus there were followers of William Cullen, John Brown, Benjamin Rush, and Samuel Thomson. One early theorist, G. E. Stahl, the court physician to the King of Prussia, even went so far as to stress natural cures, with mild exercise and a diet containing plenty of vegetables. But he was too radical to have many followers.<sup>12</sup>

All the theorists believed in blood-letting, purging, and emetics to drive out the body disorders and then the use of tonics to rebuild the body. The difference of opinion lay in theories of the source and treatment of disease. The "fever" theory as advanced by William Cullen (1712-1790) of Edinburgh was that all disease was a result of a disturbed nervous system caused by irritation or excitement.<sup>13</sup> The logical treatment was therefore to bring about stability by calming or depressing the patient. This was done by blood-letting, sweating, or the use of diuretics and emetics. Most doctors of the day were followers of Cullen and that is why blood-letting was so popular. Benjamin Rush returned to practice in the United States, a staunch follower of Cullen's methods. Rush's influence on many of the medical students of Philadelphia was largely responsible for the popularity of Cullen's theory of the source and treatment of disease.

John Brown (1735-88), a pupil of Cullen, advanced a new theory, Brunoism. He believed that a state of health was

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>12</sup> Henry B. Shafer, *The American Medical Profession*, (New York, 1936), 98.

<sup>13</sup> Arturo Castiglioni, *A History of Medicine*, (New York, 1941), 589.

reached only when the body maintained a proper balance between stimulation and depression. Therefore the use of sedatives was urged when the body was overexcited and stimulants were employed when a person felt depressed.<sup>14</sup>

Friedrich Hoffman (1660-1742) was the pioneer user of tonics. He found that different patients reacted to drugs in a manner commensurate with the patient's physical condition. He introduced mineral waters and the use of such drugs as quinine, iron, and ether.

The followers of Cullen, Brown, and Hoffman were orthodox in their methods of treatment and were therefore called "regulars". Jesse Bennet was among these regulars, who represented about one-half of the doctors of the time. Those who did not ascribe to these treatments were the "irregulars." Followers of Mesmer, homeopathics, and botanics fell in this category.

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) was a French mystic and could be called the father of astrology and of modern-day hypnotism. He believed in the use of magnetic currents and performed many sensational cures. For a time he was under the protection of Marie Antoinette, but he was later forced to flee Paris. On his return, he was met enthusiastically by the court and all classes of people. His belief in the supernatural was very popular with all the people of his day. He was the first doctor to try to cure by using the power of suggestion.<sup>15</sup>

Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) advanced a theory directly opposite to that of Brunoism. Hahnemann felt that diseases could be cured by the use of drugs which produced a condition similar to the disease. Thus hot compresses were used for burns, opium used to cure somnolence, and so on. This was called "homeopathy", or the principle of like treating like, while Brunoism was called "allopathy". Homeopathy had many followers in the doctors of the nineteenth century and several schools of homeopathic medicine were established, some of which still survive.<sup>16</sup>

Samuel Thomson, (1769-1840) another irregular, patented in 1813 his theory of cures. He used herbs as emetics and steam

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 589.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

baths to remove the impurities, then when the human system was cleansed, gave a "syrop" containing brandy for a tonic.<sup>17</sup> The followers of Thomson organized societies and schools, many of which still exist today. They held their first national convention of Thomsonians in Columbus, Ohio, in 1833.

There were many other systems of medical practices but the foregoing were the most popular. To give an idea of the numerous pretenders and theorists, the following list appeared in 1836 in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*:<sup>18</sup> "regular, irregular, Broussaisians, Sangradorians, Morrisonians, botanics, regular botanic, Thomsonians, reformed Thomsonian, magnetical, electrical, homeopathic, rootist, herbist, florist, and quack." To this list the phrenologists, those who studied the bumps on the head, and the mesmerizers should be added for a comprehensive review of medical practices.

Most doctors were followers of either Brown or Cullen. The systems of these two men were so well known that whenever a new doctor entered a community he was asked, "are you a bleeder or a stimulator?"<sup>19</sup>

The medicine used by the regulars were drugs, emetics, tonics, and three kinds of physicks: laxatives, purgatives, and drastic cathartics. The drugs most commonly used were mercury derivatives, opium and calomel. As an emetic, ipecac was by far the most popular with squill, tobacco, antimony and sulphate of zinc also being used. The tonics most often used were wines and other alcoholic beverages, sometimes mercury and other drugs. The laxatives most commonly used were fruit juices, melted grain, and fermented liquors; purges were also vegetable matter, usually rhubarb or aloes. For cathartics, potash and soda or castor oil, gamboge or hellebore foot were used. Jesse Bennet was a regular doctor and prescribed these medicines to his patients.

Blisters were popularly used to draw out poison. These were induced by plasters very similar to the present mustard plasters, only much more extreme. The adhesive was to be left on for twelve hours and then cayenne pepper and brandy were added to the raw sore. If this did not draw enough water and

<sup>17</sup> Shafer, *American Medical Profession*, 202.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

blood to satisfy the doctors, flies were added. When the inflammation became too bad it could be reduced by soft bread soaked in milk, fresh hog lard, or wilted cabbage leaves.<sup>20</sup>

Disinfectants came into use about the beginning of the nineteenth century. These were used in an external manner such as we would now use fumigation. Charcoal, chlorine, chlorinated lime and oxide of soda were used for humans.

In telling the story of pioneer doctors, it is necessary to review the lives of the important leaders who had a great influence on the practices and philosophy of other physicians. Benjamin Rush, as the great medical leader of Philadelphia, was instrumental in shaping the lives of many pioneer doctors. He taught so many students that practically all doctors for several decades were influenced by him. Those who did not personally attend his lectures or work in his office, read his many pamphlets and articles dealing with all subjects from religion to medicine. Jesse Bennet, as one of the many students who not only attended Rush's lectures, but also worked in the great doctor's office, felt Rush was the greatest doctor in America.

Benjamin Rush was not a pioneer in the sense that he moved into the wilderness; his pioneering was in his search for medical truths. Although Rush did not perform formal experiments, he was constantly looking for the answers in the curing of disease. His philosophy that all the drugs and theories necessary for the treatment of disease were at hand is evidenced by one of his introductory addresses to a class in Pennsylvania College. He stated that the European doctors had laid the foundation and built the walls for the "House" of medicine. Now all that remained was for the Americans to attach the roof.<sup>21</sup>

Until the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, Rush was a devoted follower of Cullen, and as such he believed in moderate blood-letting and the use of tonics, emetics, and sweating. It was this theory he advanced to his early students. Thus, through their training by Benjamin Rush, most of the doctors who studied in Philadelphia were also followers of Cullen. Several of these physicians, like Jesse Bennet, had moved to the frontier and taken along Cullen's theories. It was largely because of Rush's

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> Shafer, *American Medical Profession*, 29. Taken from Rush's *Introductory Lectures*, 19.

teaching that blood-letting was then so popular in America. But his earlier use of blood-letting was very limited compared with his "discoveries" of 1793.

The terrible epidemic of yellow fever showed Rush that his drugs and treatments were ineffectual. No matter what he did, his patients died by the scores. But Rush was not a man who could stand failure; he felt that he was destined to find a cure for this dread disease. Searching his records for any truths he had previously overlooked, the physician found Dr. John Mitchell's account of the yellow fever in Virginia fifty years before. Believing the disease due to overexcitement, Dr. Mitchell advised purges, even if the body seemed so weak that the pulse was practically inaudible. Dr. Rush remembered that the strongest purges given in the army had been ten grains of calomel and ten grains of jalap. He decided to add five more grains of jalap to the dose and draw blood accordingly. It was then that Rush became the bleeder and purger for which he was famous. He wrote pamphlets instructing people to bleed themselves if he were unable to attend them. In order that more people might be treated, he gave printed instructions to two Negroes so that they might aid the system of blood depletion. Since it was not Rush's philosophy to know defeat, he explained that those who died had not been treated soon enough. There is evidence enough that Rush believed this system was the best one, because he used it on his sister and insisted on being bled excessively himself when in his own final illness.

Benjamin Rush started his new method of treatment in September. In October, an early cold snap killed the mosquitoes, and the yellow fever cases started to dwindle. Soon the city was virtually free of the disease. Was this not proof that his system had been the right one? The doctor cannot be blamed too severely for his mistake. So many hundreds were visited by him in the course of the epidemic that he did not have time to keep adequate records. The dead were underground and easily forgotten, while the cured came back to thank him. Many who fled to the doctor in terror were not really sick. They must have been strong, indeed, to have withstood the treatment!

The life of Benjamin Rush was not entirely devoted to the struggle with disease. He was very interested in the cause of

freedom and exerted much influence in its behalf through the press. The doctor induced Thomas Paine to use Rush's carefully gathered notes as a basis for an essay. From these notes Paine wrote his celebrated essay *Common Sense*. Rush was elected to the Continental Congress in June of 1776, and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was never a popular politician, however, because of his unwillingness to compromise. During the Revolutionary War he served as physician-general of the "middle department" under Shippen.<sup>22</sup> In this capacity, he discovered Shippen's selfishness and inefficiency. Because Washington would not remove Shippen, Rush entered into the cabal against the Commander in Chief. A confidential letter to Patrick Henry in which he urged Washington's dismissal was delivered to the general. This brought much adverse publicity to the doctor and so weakened his prestige that the attack he had launched against Shippen proved ineffectual.<sup>23</sup>

Rush was responsible for many social reforms in Philadelphia. His methods of treating the insane were very modern. He suggested segregation of different types of insanity, occupational therapy, and the direct discussion with the mentally ill of their problems. One of his pamphlets, called "Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors Upon the Human Body," caused the Women's Christian Temperance Union to call him the instigator of American temperance reform. He was also instrumental in the founding of Dickinson College of Pennsylvania.

Such a man naturally exerted great influence upon his students and apprentices. His belief that he had found a universal method of treatment was wrong, but his zeal and his strength of convictions lived on in his students. Thus many frontier doctors obtained the courage they needed to carry on their work alone.

These pioneer physicians made many of the first great medical contributions in America. Three of these pioneer doctors lived in circumstances which paralleled those of Jesse Bennet. Although there is no evidence that Dr. Bennet had any direct relationship with these men, they serve to illustrate the type

<sup>22</sup> Flexner, *Doctors on Horseback*, 74.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

of frontier society in which Bennet lived. Bennet can be better appreciated by a comparison of his life and work with those of other pioneers, who all made their contributions later than his.

By 1783 the frontier in Kentucky had become increasingly difficult for the Virginia Assembly to govern from Richmond. To provide more immediate governmental control, three judges were appointed for the Mississippi Valley. One of these judges sent from Virginia was Samuel McDowell, whose son, Ephraim, was to gain fame as a pioneer surgeon.

In 1790, when Ephraim was but nineteen years of age, he traveled back across the mountains to Staunton, Virginia, where he apprenticed himself to Dr. Alexander Humphreys. Dr. Humphreys was one of the Edinburgh-trained physicians who was very much interested in the study of anatomy through the use of dissection. This was the same Dr. Humphreys of Staunton who four years later was present when Jesse Bennet performed his unusual operation. By then, Ephraim had gone to study in Edinburgh where he stayed for a year, although he did not have sufficient funds to remain there until he was granted a degree. While in Edinburgh, McDowell studied under John Bell, the father of surgery of the blood vessels. Bell firmly believed that ovarian tumors were hopeless to cure and impossible to remove, and taught his students so.

Although Ephraim McDowell returned to Kentucky without a degree, he was still very well trained for a frontier physician. Because of his father's position he was well known and soon he had built up an extensive practice. Surgery had always interested the doctor and he soon had a wide reputation for the successful removal of bladder-stones. James K. Polk came to him in 1812 from Tennessee to have such a stone removed. Later when Polk was a member of the House of Representatives, he wrote McDowell thanking the doctor for having made his [Polk's] successful career possible.<sup>24</sup>

When Mrs. Thomas Crawford was having difficulty in labor, Dr. McDowell was the logical physician to call. He rode the sixty miles through the wilderness to her home and started his examination. Two local doctors had told Mrs. Crawford she

was pregnant and she certainly had the symptoms. She was so large they were convinced she would have twins, but the pains had been intense for several weeks and all their skills had not brought about a delivery. It took McDowell but a short while to decide that Mrs. Crawford was not with child, but she was rather the victim of a large ovarian tumor.

Using all his persuasive powers, Ephraim McDowell explained to the patient the nature of her condition and the danger of an operation, and received permission to proceed. The operation could not be performed in the backwoods shack of the patient, so she agreed to accompany the doctor to his home in Danville. The ride on horseback was extremely painful to one in her condition, so the operation was postponed a few weeks until McDowell felt Mrs. Crawford was strong enough. The date for the operation was set for Christmas. In preparation the doctor examined all his plates of the abdomen and tried to recall every dissection he had made. James McDowell, the surgeon's nephew and partner, was urged to help, but he thought the undertaking impossible and refused to take part. When Christmas arrived, however, James changed his mind and decided to assist his uncle.

The operating room was the living room, the table was a plain wooden one to which Mrs. Crawford was strapped, and the only anaesthetic was a few opium pills. These were not strong enough to cause the patient to lose consciousness and she kept up her courage by singing hymns. The surgeon marked the course of the incision with a pen, handed his nephew the knife and bade him begin. If James were to share the possible danger, he must share the possible credit, too. Then the elder physician took over the serious part of the operation.

While he was in the midst of removing the fifteen pound tumor, church was dismissed. The street in front of the surgeon's home was suddenly filled with people who had been aroused by one of the local ministers. They shouted and threatened, and some even swung a rope over a tree in the yard in readiness to hang McDowell in case the operation were unsuccessful. They heard the singing in the house, and when it died down they felt sure the patient was dead. Had not the

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

sheriff intervened the mob would have broken in and taken things into their own hands.

But a miracle had been performed! When the singing stopped, Mrs. Crawford had passed into a half-conscious state from nervous exhaustion but she was still alive! Ephraim McDowell had proved to the world that the tissue of the abdomen did not immediately begin to decay when exposed to the air. He had opened a new field of surgery.

But McDowell's wonderful discovery was not widely acclaimed as one might suppose it would have been. Doctors were slow to believe stories of miracles and Ephraim was well aware of this. So he proved that the operation had not been a freak by twice repeating it when the opportunities arose. In 1813, he performed a successful operation on a Negro woman and in 1816 he accomplished another. Then he undertook to write about the operations for publication. This was by far the most difficult task the backwoodsman had undertaken, and it was with great difficulty that his paper was finished. He sent one copy to John Bell in Edinburgh, another to Dr. Philip Syng Physick of Philadelphia. Physick was scornful and refused to have the paper published. A Dr. Thomas C. James, professor of midwifery at the University of Pennsylvania, did have it published, however, in 1817 in the *Eclectic Repertory*. Those surgeons who noted the article blamed it for insufficient data and refused to attempt similar operations until more information could be obtained.

Dr. McDowell was moved to great wrath by the city practitioners' reaction and he sternly reproved his critics in a letter to Dr. James. He said in part:

I thought my statement sufficiently explicit to warrant any surgeon's performing the operation when necessary, without hazarding the odium of making an experiment and I think my description of the mode of operating, and of the anatomy of the parts concerned, clear enough to enable any good anatomist, possessing the judgment requisite for a surgeon, to operate with safety. I hope no operator of any other description may ever attempt it. It is my most ardent wish that this operation may remain, to the mechanical surgeon, forever incomprehensible. Such have been the bane of science; intruding themselves into the ranks of the profession, with no other qualifications but boldness in undertaking, ignorance of their responsibility, and indifference to the lives of their patients; . . . 25

Daniel Drake, another pioneer doctor, won fame more from his literary and educational efforts than from the practice of medicine. He was born in New Jersey, but his parents took the hazardous journey down the Ohio to Kentucky when Daniel was still a young boy. On the same flat boat with the Drakes was a Dr. Goforth who was going to Cincinnati to practice. Goforth promised Isaac Drake that his young son, Daniel, could study medicine in his office when he became old enough. Neither the boy nor his father ever forgot that promise. All during his childhood Daniel was athirst for knowledge. He attended school whenever an itinerant school master came to the Drake's village of Mayslick, and Daniel could be spared from the farm chores. When Isaac Drake took his fifteen year old son to Cincinnati to study medicine under Dr. Goforth, the lad was woefully ignorant. But the doctor did not expect the boy to know much, so they got along well together.

The wonderful books in Goforth's office were available to the student, and he was allowed to accompany the doctor on his calls. But the apothecary shop! What a wonderful place for an inquisitive young man! Here Daniel ground drugs with the mortar and pestle, rolled pills, and played in his spare time. He felt very important when he ran down the street carrying the pills he had prepared.

Dr. Goforth was a follower of John Brown, and therefore he did not approve of Rush's theory of excessive bleeding and purging. But the doctor was tolerant and did not object when his student read one of Rush's books and became a convert. The apprentice progressed so rapidly that when he was nineteen, Dr. Goforth declared Daniel Drake to be a doctor. Thus without ever having attended school, never having witnessed a chemical experiment or a dissection of the human body, Drake was the first doctor to have been trained in the west.

The practice of training doctors through apprenticeships grew in the west. Approximately ten years after Daniel Drake received his training in Goforth's office, Enos Thomas was trained by Jesse Bennet. Thomas must have received training very similar to that of Drake's. Neither could have had much formal instruction nor the opportunity for formal experimentation.



For a year Daniel Drake and Goforth shared the medical practice of the growing city of Cincinnati. But Drake's thirst for knowledge had not been quenched, and in 1804 he borrowed money from his father to study under his idol, Benjamin Rush. The money ran out after one session in Philadelphia so he returned to Mayslick, Kentucky, to practice. From here he went to Cincinnati to take over Goforth's practice, when the latter moved down the Mississippi River.

Back in Cincinnati, Drake became enthralled by the rapid growth of the town. He decided to write the story of the city and worked many years on this project. The book was called a *Picture of Cincinnati*, and it certainly was a complete picture. He covered the topography, geology, botany, political institutions, and diseases of the surrounding community and made suggestions for a system of canals to link Cincinnati with the Middle West. He worked for years checking facts and adding information before his book was ready for the publisher. Once published it was immensely popular and brought the city and author national recognition.

With the completion of his book, Drake decided to return to Philadelphia where he was granted his medical degree. The many trips east and the inadequacy of medical training in the west, made Drake more conscious of the need for a medical school in Cincinnati. While he was in Philadelphia receiving his degree such a school, Transylvania College, was started; but it was in Lexington, Kentucky, and not in the city of Drake's choice. Upon Drake's return he was offered a professorship in the new school, which he accepted gleefully. But he would only stay in Lexington during the winter months; during the summer he intended to return to his beloved Cincinnati.

Drake proved to be an inspiring teacher and was a great success in the classroom. But his dictatorial methods with the other members of the staff continually brought dissension there. When he returned to Cincinnati in the spring his attitude had taken its toll, and he was no longer a member of Transylvania faculty. Not deterred, he founded a library, a debating club, a progressive school, and started a museum. The unknown naturalist whom he hired as curator was John

James Audubon, and by 1822 the museum was fourth largest in the United States.

But medical education was his first interest, and Drake worked until he finally succeeded in persuading the Ohio Legislature to pass an act chartering the Medical College of Ohio and appointing him to the faculty. His dream of a medical college in Cincinnati had come true. It would seem that the unhappy experience in Transylvania would have taught the doctor the futility of trying to rule a faculty, but that was obviously a lesson Drake was never to learn. He was too restless and high tempered to stay in one school long, and during his lifetime was called to thirteen different positions. He served in five separate medical schools, filling nine different professorships. He aided in the founding of the Medical Division of Cincinnati College in 1835, but the personal element again caused him to leave the faculty. Drake died from an acute attack of brain fever induced by a faculty meeting which had degenerated into a free-for-all battle. How true was his comment to a friend that "Medical schools have consumed me."<sup>28</sup>

William Beaumont was a typical frontier doctor. While practicing in a virtually primitive society, he was denied the help of libraries and the association with learned men of his profession. When the opportunity confronted him, Beaumont, like Bennet, had the courage and enterprise to take advantage of it. Unlike Bennet, Beaumont's name has gone down in medical history as one of the great pioneers.

Beaumont studied medicine under two practitioners, obtained a license, and when the War of 1812 broke out, enlisted as a surgeon. The army life was agreeable to the young doctor, and after the war he accepted a permanent position in the armed forces. He was sent to Fort Mackinac on an island between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. It was here that he was presented a most unusual opportunity to explore the human body.

One day Alexis St. Martin, a French Canadian, was accidentally shot at close range. Beaumont was immediately called and, although he thought the case was hopeless, he set to work

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.



to repair the damage. The man's chest, diaphragm, lung, and stomach were lacerated and a mass of blood, clothing and bone-splinters. But, surprisingly, the man recovered! For months he was unable to walk because of his weakened condition. Then the authorities decided he had been cared for long enough at public expense and were going to send him back to his home in Canada. Beaumont knew the trip would be too long and arduous for a man in such condition, so he took St. Martin into his own home where he fed, clothed, and nursed him. At the end of two years time the patient had recovered sufficiently to walk about, but the wound had healed in a queer manner. A fistula through the abdomen and into the stomach made the observation of all activity in that organ possible.

What an excellent opportunity for a doctor to explore! No one had been able to establish definitely the contents of the gastric juice. Many earlier experiments had been performed through the regurgitation of food. Benjamin Rush had used such an experiment to obtain information for his thesis for his doctor's degree, but his conclusions had been erroneous. Now all Beaumont had to do was to have the patient lie on his side while the doctor dropped into his stomach different foods suspended from strings. The food could be removed at any interval to be examined. Hundreds of experiments were performed and recorded. The main drawback was that Beaumont was in the wilderness far away from laboratories and books, but he felt he must find out all he could, so the experiments continued.

This experimentation was very uncomfortable for St. Martin and he became obstinate. A peculiar relationship grew between the two men. They hated each other but each was so dependent upon the other that for several years they suffered their mutual company. Beaumont could not experiment without his "Guinea pig" and St. Martin was not strong enough to earn a living by manual labor. After St. Martin had been exhibited by Beaumont in several eastern cities, his hatred overcame his material wishes and he returned to Canada. There he remained until after Beaumont's death. Although Beaumont had become a scientist by lucky chance, he was quick to recognize his opportunity and use it.

## II

## JESSE BENNET'S EARLY LIFE

Jesse Bennet was born in Frankford, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania on July 10, 1769 of middle class parents who traced their ancestors back to the Norman conquest.<sup>27</sup> His father was killed in a battle of the Revolutionary War when Jesse was just a young boy.<sup>28</sup>

Jesse's father's name is not known but perhaps he was also called Jesse Bennet and was the son of John Bennet of Wight County, Virginia. John Bennet, the father of eight children, willed part of his farm to each of his elder sons, William and John. The remainder was to go to his wife during her widowhood. In the event she remarried, her part was to be equally divided among the six younger children, one of whom was named Jesse. Six years after his father's death, William Bennet, partial recipient of John Bennet's farm, wrote the following letter to his brother John:

Portsmouth, Sept. 28, 1776

Dear Brother: these lines come hoping to find you in good health as I am at present & thank God for it. This day it is supposed we shall embark in order to sail to New York. Brother Jesse is well and in tolerable good health at present & he has enlisted for three years, he is to receive ten Dollars County Money & that unbeknowning to me he did enlist & if it please God I shall return again at the end of eighteen months & if I never should return I desire that everything I have should be equally divided amongst the three brothers & two sisters their names are James, Thomas, Edmund, Patty Dobbs, & Lucy Stephens. I have nothing more at present to acquaint you with but that you accept of my good will to you and the rest and permit to subscribe myself your loving brother,

William Bennet<sup>29</sup>

This Jesse Bennet, who was disinherited by his brother because of his patriotism, could have been Dr. Jesse Bennet's father.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Aquila L. Knight, "Life and Times of Jesse Bennet, M. D.", *Southern Historical Magazine*, (Richmond), II, No. 1, July, 1892, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Virginia Historical Magazine*, VI, 29, and recorded in *Isle of Wight County, Virginia*, June 4, 1778, Will Book, VIII, 40.

<sup>30</sup> A letter received from Edward F. Witsell, Major General, Office of the Adjutant General, Department of the Army, states:

"The records of this office show that William Bennet, surname also found as Bennet, served in the Revolutionary War as a private Captain Thomas Church's Company 5th Pennsylvania Regiment of Foot, commanded by Colonel Francis Johnston. He enlisted 20 March 1777, joined the organization 20 April 1777 and died 24 May 1777.

"No record has been found of any other men surnamed Bennet who are shown to have died in the service."

This correspondence arrived too late to incorporate in the body of the paper. It seems that this William Bennet would more likely be Jesse's father because he was a member of the Pennsylvania army, while Jesse Bennet, referred to above, was from Virginia.

The mercantile business which Jesse's father left accorded sufficient income for the family and enabled Mrs. Bennet to send Jesse to school until he was twenty-one years old. No record of her life after Jesse left home can be found, but she did not apply for a pension as a Revolutionary widow. This could mean one of several things: that she was not living when the pension law was passed in 1836, that she remarried prior to that date, or that she was wealthy enough so as to have no need for the money.

Mrs. Bennet's encounter with Tarleton's raiders proves that she was a woman of considerable nerve. Colonel Banastre Tarleton of the British Cavalry went through the little town of Frankford on his way to Charleston, South Carolina. While his troops were raiding the town, a group of soldiers entered the Bennet home and were starting to pillage in all the rooms. Mrs. Bennet was outraged, and when they would not obey her command to leave, she rushed out to find their commanding officer. In the street she found Colonel Tarleton and told him that if he had any decency he would make his men leave. The Colonel, surprised and pleased by the matron's nerve, ordered his men from her home.

Repenting a little for her anger, Mrs. Bennet then offered to serve the men their supper before they left. Tarleton refused for his men, but said that he and some of his other officers would be pleased to dine with her. This angered Jesse's mother again. Her offer to treat the men decently had been misconstrued by their officer to be an offer of personal friendship. She notified the cavalry leader that her husband was fighting with General Washington and that her heart was in the cause. She said that she would be glad to prepare a meal for the men, but she would not join them in the repast. When Tarleton saw he was not to have the lady's company at the meal he decided to eat with his men. Just as the men were leaving shots were heard in the direction of Philadelphia, and the soldiers hurried away to ascertain the trouble.<sup>21</sup>

As was the custom in colonial days in Philadelphia, young Jesse entered elementary school when he was but four years old. From elementary school he went to Latin Grammar

<sup>21</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennett," 2.

School, and had finished here by the time he was fourteen. He then entered one of the colleges of Philadelphia,<sup>22</sup> where he remained until he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts. His classical education then completed, Jesse turned his efforts to the study of medicine. He began as an apprentice in the office of Benjamin Rush,<sup>23</sup> but also attended a medical college in Philadelphia. In April 1791, this school granted him a degree of Doctor of Medicine, and his Alma Mater also bestowed upon him the degree of Master of Arts.<sup>24</sup>

In Philadelphia, Jesse Bennet studied under the most learned doctors of the day, among them Rush and Shippen. He was an earnest, diligent student, eager to absorb all the knowledge he could. One of his teachers called him a "thorough anatomist and most excellent surgeon."<sup>25</sup>

When his formal education was over, Jesse Bennet decided to go west and practice in Rockingham County, Virginia.<sup>26</sup> There he tacked his diploma on the wall of his log office and started his medical career. The first days were not very busy ones for Bennet and he had plenty of time for meditation. One night as he sat in his little office contemplating his fate, he decided that the practice of medicine would always hold first place in his life. He vowed to attend the sick, in good weather or bad, night or day, rich or poor alike.<sup>27</sup> To this oath he was always true.

As the young doctor's practice grew, so did his circle of friends. It was not long until he had scanned the available young ladies and settled his attention on one. She was Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter Hog, an attorney and at one time King's Solicitor for Rockingham County. But several other young men had also chosen Elizabeth, so Jesse had many

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.  
<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Autobiography*, edited by George W. Corner, Princeton, 1948, cites Benjamin Rush's List of Apprentices, in possession of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennett," 2. Frances Houston, medical librarian of the University of Pennsylvania, states that there is no Jesse Bennet in their list of graduates, but Dr. Knight got his information directly from Dr. Bennet. In 1791, the Colleges in Philadelphia were merging into the University of Pennsylvania, and it is quite possible that some of the records have been lost.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph L. Miller, "Cesarean Section in Virginia in the Pre-Aseptic Era," *Annals of Medical History*, (New York), X, n. 1, 1938, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Knight says Bennet went to Augusta County and Dr. Miller says it was Rockingham County. It would seem that Rockingham County is right because this county was formed from the part of Augusta County which includes Staunton, Virginia, in 1777. Samuel A. Kercheval, *A History of the Valley of Virginia*, (Woodstock, Virginia, 1856), 154.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennett," 2.

rivals. Elizabeth was not a frivolous girl; she had a good education for her sex, and was called "a lady of remarkably good sound sense."<sup>38</sup> By the spring of 1793 Jesse Bennet had won her heart and they were married April 8, of that year.<sup>39</sup>

In January of 1794 the young husband called Dr. Alexander Humphreys of Staunton. Mrs. Bennet was having great difficulty in giving birth to her child. The two doctors tried all the methods at their disposal for a normal birth, but had no success. After a consultation they decided that they must either perform a cesarean section or a craniotomy.<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Bennet felt certain that she could not live through the ordeal so she begged the doctors to save the child by attempting a cesarean section. This shocked and outraged Dr. Humphreys who refused to make any such attempt. When he saw that the young husband was in desperation going to try the operation, Humphreys condescended to stay and assist.

The operation table was made by placing two planks across barrels. On these Mrs. Bennet was placed; two Negro servants helped to hold her down. She was given a large dose of laudanum, a drug obtained from opium, which induced sleep but had no pain-killing qualities. Thus, on a moments notice, with only the simple preparation mentioned, Jesse Bennet attempted an operation, which was unprecedented in American medical history.

With one long sweep of the knife he laid open the patient's abdomen and removed the child and placenta. After controlling the hemorrhage, he declared "this shall be the last one" and before closing the incision he removed both her ovaries.<sup>41</sup> The wound was then closed with stout linen thread of the type used for making clothing.

The baby, whom Mrs. Bennet offered her life to save, was a strong, healthy girl whom they named Maria. This only daughter of Jesse Bennet grew to womanhood and was the mother of six normal children, descendants of whom still reside in Mason County, West Virginia.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> John W. Wayland, *Virginia Valley Records*, (Strasburg, Virginia, 1930), 34.

<sup>40</sup> The fetus is dissected and removed in pieces.

<sup>41</sup> John P. Hale, ed., *History of the Great Kanawha Valley*, (Charleston, West Virginia, 1891), II, 265.

But Mrs. Bennet, who had every reason to expect death, recovered! The great doctors of the day believed that upon exposing the internal organs to the air, decomposition would immediately set in. Startlingly enough, the incision did not become infected, but quickly healed. In seventeen days the mother was able to walk and by the first of March she was declared "cured."<sup>42</sup> The Bennets must have felt that her life had been miraculously spared.

But the operation was soon dismissed from their minds as another case of frontier emergency, and life in the Bennet home was much the same as it had been before. By September 1794, just eight months after the unusual birth, the doctor followed his father's example and enlisted in the army.

When men were called to help put down the Whiskey Insurrection, Jesse Bennet went to Winchester, Virginia, to enroll in Company B of Captain Robert Grattan's Troop of Cavalry from Staunton, Virginia. This troop was under the command of Major George Lewis. As surgeons mate Bennet received a dollar a day, or \$66 pay for his services from September 24 until November 30, 1794.<sup>43</sup>

Dr. Knight, in his story of Jesse Bennet's life,<sup>44</sup> states that the Bennets moved to Philadelphia shortly after their marriage in 1793, and that he joined the Pennsylvania Regulars from there. It would appear from the available records that he did not return to Philadelphia to live. Three reasons can be given to refute Dr. Knight's claim. First, the Bennets did not leave immediately following their wedding, because they were living in Virginia when the operation was performed, in January 1794. Second, the fact that Jesse Bennet enrolled from Winchester, Virginia, in a troop who came from Staunton shows that he was still living in that state in September of 1794. Perhaps he then moved to Philadelphia, but there is no proof that he did. It would be more probable that the young doctor would stay in Rockingham County. His marriage to the daughter of Peter Hog must have helped the physician's social standing and thus enlarged his practice.

<sup>42</sup> See figure 2, p. 128 of this article.

<sup>43</sup> Records of Jesse Bennet in the Office of the Adjutant General, War Department, Washington.

<sup>44</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennet," 3.

Peter Hog was a very important citizen of the county. He had been graduated from the University of Edinburgh in law and had later served as an officer in the French and Indian War. For his services King George III rewarded him with a tract of land on the Ohio River. The patentee states:

... for encouraging men to enlist in the services of our late Royal Grandfather for defence and security of the said Colony, we have given, granted, and confirmed and by these presents for us our heirs and successors, do grant and confirm unto George Muse, Adam Stephen, Andrew Lewis, Peter Hog, John West, John Polson, and Andrew Waggener, one certain tract or parcel of land containing 51,302 acres lying and being in the County of Botetourt and bounded as followeth to wit, Beginning at a large Sycamore and sugar tree marked G. SW standing on the point just at the mouth of the Great Kanawha.

Signed by John  
Earl of Dunmore . . . the fifteenth day  
of December 1772.<sup>45</sup>

The land thus given to these five men was the land upon which the Battle of Point Pleasant was fought three years later. One of the owners of the land, Andrew Lewis, was the commanding officer of the Virginia Militia at the encounter. A son of Peter Hog also fought against the Indians here. One local historian states<sup>46</sup> that this was the only instance where the colonists were required to defend the soil they owned by right of their earlier encounters with the Indians, before they had even settled it. It has never been proven, but several historians, including Theodore Roosevelt,<sup>47</sup> believe that Dunmore conspired with the Indians and purposely did not send the promised reinforcements to Lewis in this encounter. The governor was thought to feel that the western people would be easier to control if they were frightened from venturing so far into Indian territory. It is this feeling which causes many West Virginia historians to call the battle of Point Pleasant the first battle of the Revolutionary War.

In 1797, Mrs. Bennet's family induced the young doctor to try his fortune in the far West. William Hawkins, who had married Mrs. Bennet's sister, Nancy Hog, was taking his wife

<sup>45</sup> *Mason County Deed Book*, KXI, 115.

<sup>46</sup> Hale, *Kanawha Valley*, II, 265.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, (New York, 1889), I, 395. "Lord Dunmore's war, waged by Americans for the good of America, was the opening act in the drama whereof the closing scene was played at Yorktown."

and young son to the new land and he wanted company. Peter Hog, Jr. had made the journey two years earlier and had settled on the upper tract of land given to his father. There were 3,000 acres in this tract, lying along the Ohio River ten miles north of the Kanawha.<sup>48</sup> The southern tract of land, 5,000 acres, lying six miles north of the Kanawha, was to be divided between the older children of Peter Hog: Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Hawkins, and Thomas Hog.

In the summer of 1797 the two families left Rockingham County, Virginia, on their way west. In the party there were the Bennets, their three year old daughter, Maria, and the Hawkins and their two years old son, Alfonzo. All the household goods was put into two four-horse wagons. Each family took about five slaves, who drove the wagons, and herded the livestock.<sup>49</sup> The date they left the Valley of Virginia can not be determined, but by August 1, Jesse Bennet was making entries in his Account Book<sup>50</sup> headed "Lewisburg."

Evidently the little group remained in Lewisburg at least six weeks, for the entries continue until September 14. Here the women and children rested from their long trip and Jesse Bennet enlarged his supply of merchandise. Under a heading of "Profit and Loss Dr. for Family," Bennet listed much material. There were many yards of broadcloth, flannel, twill, and "callico." No doubt some of this really went for the family's use, but it could not possibly have all been used in that manner. Most of this was undoubtedly for resale. It was not unusual for doctors to augment their slender earnings by other businesses. Many doctors were merchants while some, like Dr. Richmond, preached.

The American dollar system was not accepted in the frontier until well after the turn of the nineteenth century. Due to the absence of United States Specie, no real system of exchange existed. In his journal Jesse Bennet used the English pounds, shillings, and pence. In the ledger he started using the American system in 1810, but often charged thirty-seven and one-half cents, or eighty-seven and one-half cents. This

<sup>48</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennet," 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Journals of Jesse Bennet*, 2 vols., October 3, 1798-May 23, 1836, (Private Collection of L. L. Caldwell, Point Pleasant, West Virginia). The first volume contains daily records, in the journal form, while the second volume is a ledger, containing an itemized summary of individual accounts.

was to facilitate a more rapid change to the English system in case the patient wished to use those coins. Calico sold for 4 shillings a yard, flannel and linen cost but a little more than four shillings, but twill velvet was expensive at over eleven shillings a yard, while broadcloth cost one and a half pounds for the same amount.

The last entry from Lewisburg was dated September 1797. On this date Captain William Johnson paid his entire bill to Bennet, an amount of 20 pounds, 18 shillings, and three pence. The family then moved on to the land along the Ohio River they had acquired through Peter Hog. By October Jesse Bennet was again recording transactions in his account book, this time headed "Ohio."

### III

#### LIFE ALONG THE OHIO

When the Bennets reached the Hog tract along the Ohio River they found that Peter Hog, Jr. had a log home ready for them to occupy.<sup>51</sup> He had also built an office for Jesse Bennet. They could not have been in their new home long before Bennet recorded the first entry in his book under the heading "Ohio" on October 7, 1797. On this date, he sold to Nancy Hawkins a "shall" (shawl) and four kinds of cloth. This must have been merchandise which was brought from Lewisburg. The next entries contain such items as buttons, stockings, handkerchiefs, gloves, velvet, and dimity. But it wasn't long before the medical items became more and more frequent and soon practically all that was recorded was medicine, farm products, or whiskey.

The practice of medicine at the beginning of the nineteenth century was very primitive. It is hard to imagine medical practice without the use of anaesthesia or antiseptics. Upon examination of Bennet's records one is surprised to find so many medicines that are familiar to us today, after one hundred fifty years. The most commonly used cures were ipecac, paregoric and cathartics in either pill, solution, or pulverized form. Laudanum and antimony and elixir of vitriol were commonly used. Later Bennet used castor oil, senna, spirits

<sup>51</sup> Aquilla L. Knight, "Life and Times of Jesse Bennet, M. D." *Southern Historical Magazine*, (Richmond), II, no. 1, July, 1892, p.3.

of turpentine, spirits of nitre, and cream of tartar. All of these can still be found in any drug store. Although the doctor did some bleeding, he did not bleed many patients. He seemed to be more interested in blisters, and often used flies in the manner previously described. Once he charged fifty cents for "flies for plaster," and again he charged seventy-five cents for "blister plaster and flies."<sup>52</sup> It is hard to imagine being charged for the service of flies, but perhaps the patients received their money's worth in psychological benefits.

The land along the Ohio was sparsely settled in 1797 when the Bennets arrived. Although the town of Point Pleasant had been established in 1794, and ferries had been operating across both the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers since 1791,<sup>53</sup> there was little commerce with the East. All of Bennet's medical supplies except herbs, which he could obtain locally, had to be transported across the mountains by wagon or down the Ohio by flatboat.

Jesse Bennet is said to have been the only trained physician within a radius of fifty miles. He was often called to attend patients who lived many miles away. His accounts show that he treated patients in Gallipolis, Ohio, and also "up Kanawha." One entry has the address, Wheeling, Virginia, which is over 100 miles away. There were practically no office calls in those days. A person well enough to go to the doctor did not consider himself sick. When the doctor was needed, a member of the patient's family, or a slave, traveled to the Bennet home in search of the doctor. Then Dr. Bennet would start out on his horse to administer aid, with his medicine and instruments in the saddle bags. He might be called to prescribe a drug, pull a tooth, open an abscess, or deliver a child. There were few precedents for him to follow and little glory for the deeds he did. The only reward he obtained was his small pay and the gratitude of the people.

Patients often paid for their treatment by produce or labor. A man might haul wood or exchange farm supplies for his medical bills. William Hawkins was a shoemaker and made shoes for Bennet's slaves. Another debtor, Joel Cartrite paid his bill by mending a cart and making two large tubs and a

<sup>52</sup> Journals of Jesse Bennet, October 4, 1792-May 23, 1836, (Private Collection of L. L. Caldwell, Point Pleasant, West Virginia).  
<sup>53</sup> John P. Hale, *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers*, (Cincinnati, 1886), 275.

bucket for the doctor. Jonathan Riffe was a furniture maker and made for Bennet a plow beam, a gun stock, two bedsteads, and a cradle. The doctor must have been one of the few members of the community who had available money, because he often paid men for labor and charged it to the employer's account until reimbursed later.

If the doctor of 1800 seemed poorly paid it was because the wage and price level in the new nation was so low. A man was paid fifty cents a day for farm labor, or mowing. If he supplied a team of horses, he would receive as much as two dollars a day. Wheat sold for seventy-five cents a bushel, rye for fifty cents, and corn cost forty-four cents. Merino wool was expensive at seventy-five cents a pound. Shoes were made by the cobblers for the price of a day laborer, fifty cents. That is what Bennet paid for the shoes for his slaves: His own, however, cost him seventy-five cents. The price of half soling was sixteen cents a pair.

The drugs and supplies that Jesse Bennet sold had similar low prices. The average cost of medicine, vomits, purges, or extracting a tooth, was twenty-five cents. Drugs such as laudanum and paregoric were more expensive, as was bleeding. These treatments usually cost the patient a dollar. Bacon was sold by Bennet for about twelve cents, or a sixpence, a pound. Flour sold for three cents a pound, but bran cost ten cents a pound.

About 1810,<sup>54</sup> Jesse Bennet started to build a better home for his family. The new house was built of brick which was made on the premises. The slaves mixed the native red clay with shells and sand from the river bank and baked it. This made a very lasting quality of brick. Riverview, as the new home was called, was one of the show places of the neighborhood. The downstairs had a huge living room, dining room, and center hall, and staircase, which was paneled in cherry wood. On the back was a large kitchen built as a wing on one side of the porch. On the other side of the porch the doctor had a small bedroom, where he slept upon arriving home late at night. Upstairs was Mrs. Bennet's living room, which was also paneled in cherry and had cabinets of the same wood

<sup>54</sup> Journal of Jesse Bennet—credited Leonard Riffe with \$20 work on chimney.

all along one side of the room. One of these cabinets opened into a desk.

Behind the house stood the doctor's office. This was also built of brick.

Mrs. Bennet was noted for her fine home and her hospitality. Many social affairs were held at Riverview, and dinner guests often enjoyed the shining silver service, gleaming linens, and excellent southern food. The several household slaves prepared the elaborate meals and cared for the large house. Outside the yard slaves did the farm work, and cared for the fine horses and other livestock in the barns.

Only a few miles from Riverview was Sand Hill race track. Here the neighbors met to race their purebred horses. Dr. Bennet entered into the competition with a strong spirit of rivalry and prided himself on his many winners.<sup>55</sup>

The records show that there were many horses at Riverview. In 1826 the doctor kept the following account of the foals.

	1826	
Grey Mare Colted		16 March
Bad Bay		E Sunday
Fanny Mare		9th Apl
Old Bay		17th Do
Sorrell Mare		26th Apl <sup>56</sup>

On January 2, 1804, Mason County was formed from Kanawha County, Virginia. At the first meeting of the county court it was ordered that Jesse Bennet be recommended to his excellency, the governor, as a proper person to be commissioned major for the new county.<sup>57</sup> The same court further recommended that Jesse Bennet and Daniel Lears be the first county magistrates.

The news of the formation of the new county evidently did not reach the Virginia Adjutant General's office very soon. On March 30, 1804, Samuel Coleman, Deputy Adjutant General, wrote to the Governor of Virginia concerning a new division of companies in the militia. He listed "Jesse Bennet

<sup>55</sup> E. C. Winger, "Dr. Jesse Bennet," *The Point Pleasant Register*, December 4, 1941.  
<sup>56</sup> Journal of Jesse Bennet.  
<sup>57</sup> Mason County Record Book 1, 5.

of Kanawha" as a new commander of a troop of cavalry.<sup>58</sup> This was the only listing for either Kanawha or Mason County, so Bennet might have been commander of a combined troop from the two counties.

The growing prominence which Bennet was gaining is revealed by the county record books. Almost every page contains at least one mention of his name. He served as foreman of the grand jury, March 5, 1805,<sup>59</sup> was one of the first overseers of the poor, and in 1807<sup>60</sup> was made a member of the county court.

In 1805 the doctor was chosen to represent the newly organized county in the Virginia Assembly. In this capacity he served for two years. In January 1809, while he was a member of this body, an act was passed to form Cabell County and Jesse Bennet was appointed on the commission to investigate the location of the county seat. The commission reported in favor of the point where the Guyandotte River flows into the Ohio, the present site of Guyandotte, West Virginia.<sup>61</sup> Later many attempts were made to change the county seat to Huntington. In 1811, a suit was brought against John Morris by the Commonwealth in which he was charged with bribing the residents of Cabell County, by lowered tax levies, into signing a petition for moving the county seat to Huntington. It was not until almost a century had passed that the Cabell County seat of justice was moved to the rapidly growing city of Huntington.<sup>62</sup>

Early in the nineteenth century, Aaron Burr became interested in colonization along the Mississippi River. At the end of his term as Vice-President, his political enemies had ruined his former law practice and plunged him hopelessly in debt.<sup>63</sup> Seeking financial rehabilitation, Burr made numerous trips down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on which he was entertained by many state officials and made numerous friends.

On one such trip down the Ohio, Burr stopped at Blennerhassett Island as the guest of the owner, Harman Blennerhas-

<sup>58</sup> H. W. Flournoy, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts*, (Richmond, 1880), IX, 405.

<sup>59</sup> *Mason County Record Book*, I, 27.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 25.

<sup>61</sup> *West Virginia Historical Magazine*, January 1905, p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>63</sup> Albert J. Beveridge, *The Life of John Marshall*, (Boston and New York, 1896), III, 276.



JESSE BENNET

1769-1842

This portrait was made while Dr. Bennet was in Richmond, Virginia, during the Aaron Burr trial. A copy of this picture is in the Mansion House, Point Pleasant, West Virginia.



sett. The island, located near Parkersburg, lies fifty miles upstream from Point Pleasant. Here Blennerhassett, a wealthy Irish lawyer, had settled and built a beautiful home. Burr and Blennerhassett became friends and as a result of their friendship, Blennerhassett suffered imprisonment and loss of all his worldly goods.

The Spanish control of the mouth of the Mississippi River had caused much trouble between Spain and the United States. Many Americans felt that war between the countries was inevitable. President Jefferson had sent two messages to Congress which all but avowed that a state of war existed between the two countries.<sup>64</sup> In his attempt to colonize the Bastrop Lands, on the banks of the Red River, Burr was trying to develop a frontier near the enemy. Many people felt that he wished to build up a company of men whom he could lead against the Spanish settlers. This would not have been so bad, had it not been coupled with the belief that Burr, once he were successful against the Spanish, would withdraw from the United States and set up an independent empire.

President Jefferson, after receiving conclusive evidence of Burr's attempts, decided something must be done. On November 27, 1806, Jefferson issued a proclamation in which he "enjoined and required" that all persons search out and seize all vessels, arms and supplies, of all persons engaged or concerned in such an enterprise against the dominions of Spain.<sup>65</sup> Although Aaron Burr was not mentioned there could be but little doubt as to whom the President meant. His proclamation was so worded that it gave anyone a right, or he might consider it a duty, to destroy Burr's property. Blennerhassett, as a friend of Burr, was certain to be attacked also.

Shortly before the proclamation was issued, Mrs. Blennerhassett had heard rumors of the step and felt uneasy. Harman Blennerhassett had gone on a trip down the Ohio River and except for the servants, she was alone on the island. So she sent the family handy-man, Peter Taylor, to Lexington to tell her husband to return home soon. She sent word that a

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>65</sup> William A. Safford, *The Life of Harman Blennerhassett*, (Chillicothe, Ohio, 1890), 98.

volunteer battalion of three companies had been organized and they were expected to land on the island, burn the home, and capture or burn all the supplies there.

Blennerhassett immediately set out for home and on his way stopped to talk with Jesse Bennet. As major of the militia in Mason County, Bennet had charge of the arms and munitions. But Blennerhassett did not ask for supplies to support any military campaign. He said that he wanted to obtain information from Bennet and military help only in the case of an "illegal and unwarrantable attack" <sup>65</sup> on Blennerhassett Island. Blennerhassett told Dr. Bennet about the purchase of the Bastrop lands by Colonel Lynch, Burr's friend. He said that Lynch had offered Blennerhassett and his associates any participation they wished in the purchase. The doctor's guest insisted that Burr and he had no intention of "undertaking enterprises illegal or adverse to the United States," nor did either of them have "any concern with the means of effecting a division of the Union." <sup>66</sup> Blennerhassett then prevailed upon the doctor to speak at a muster to be held in a few days and try to encourage men to join him on the island. The Irishman further reported that Jesse Bennet said he would like to emigrate to the new lands himself if he could dispose of his place without too great a sacrifice.

Perhaps this story of the visit between the two men is true, but it cannot be proved. It was recorded in the Blennerhassett Papers, and was not endorsed or denied by Bennet. If Bennet were interested in the plan he must have changed his mind a few days later when Jefferson's proclamation was issued. There is no record of a muster in Mason County and according to available records, there were no Mason County men on Blennerhassett Island when it was attacked by the Wood County Militia.

When Aaron Burr was tried for treason in Richmond, Virginia, Jesse Bennet was called as a witness. On August 17, 1807 he was "called and recognized," <sup>68</sup> but evidently he did

<sup>65</sup> Safford, *Blennerhassett*, 232.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> David Robertson, *Trial of Colonel Aaron Burr for Treason*, (Philadelphia, 1808), I, 429.

not testify. <sup>69</sup> Blennerhassett was arrested with Burr and also held in jail in Richmond. With his lawyers, Blennerhassett prepared a brief to be used in the event that he be indicted for treason and required to stand trial. This brief contains Blennerhassett's account of his visit with Jesse Bennet. But since the doctor did not have an opportunity to testify at the trial of Aaron Burr, Blennerhassett's story of the visit is the only one recorded.

A few days later Jesse Bennet was mentioned in the testimony given by Peter Taylor, the Blennerhassett's handy-man. In part Taylor's testimony was:

About two weeks after I got home, he (Blennerhassett) sent me to Dr. Bennet's, of Mason County with a letter. He wanted to know if Dr. Bennet wouldn't sell him the arms belonging to the United States, which were in his charge? If he could sell them and keep himself out of danger, he'd give him a draft upon his friend in Kentucky for payment; if he could not sell them without bringing himself into a hobble, he must send him word where they were kept, and he would come and steal them away in the night, I delivered the letter. He gave me directions to get it back and burn it, for it contained high treason. I was not to give the letter to doctor Bennet, until the doctor promised to give it back, for me to burn it; for that it contained high treason. I did burn it: the doctor was present.

The doctor read the letter, and said he was unacquainted with the plot, and couldn't join in it. <sup>70</sup>

From this testimony it would appear that Bennet was favorable to Burr's plan. Dr. Knight states that the opposite was true. Instead of selling the arms of the county militia, or allowing them to be stolen, he made sure they were safe. Before the time the expedition was expected to journey down the river, the doctor had his slaves bury the guns and munitions so that there would be no danger of having them stolen.

Since the doctor was not called to testify, no one questioned the truth of Peter Taylor's story. Mr. and Mrs. Blennerhassett,

<sup>69</sup> St. George L. Slossat, Chief of the Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, states, "there is no testimony of Dr. Bennet at the Burr trial." Helen Newman, of the United States Supreme Court Library, states, "I cannot find in any of the compilations testimony of Dr. Bennet. It would appear that while he was called and recognized, he did not speak."

<sup>70</sup> Robertson, *Trial of Aaron Burr*, I, 495.

<sup>71</sup> T. Carpenter, *Reports of the Aaron Burr Trial*, II, (Washington City, 1807-1808), 147. The words underlined are written this way in both of these sources.

in their letters to each other, spoke as if they were very upset by his "perjured evidence,"<sup>71</sup> at the trial. Had Jesse Bennet known Aaron Burr and talked with him instead of Blennerhassett, the doctor probably would have been called to the stand. Blennerhassett did not stand trial, and at Burr's acquittal, was freed. If there was insufficient evidence to convict Jefferson's arch-enemy at trial, certainly Blennerhassett could not be found guilty.

After the trial at Richmond, the doctor came back home to continue his medical practice. Like his preceptor, Benjamin Rush, Bennet could not deny the attraction of politics and war. When James Monroe, Governor of Virginia, instructed Mason County to equip 110 men in 1812, Jesse Bennet enlisted. This company, called the Mason County Riflemen, was commanded by Captain Anthony Vansickle and assigned to the Second Virginia Regiment. Under General Leftridge, the men were sent directly to the Maumee Rapids where they joined General William Henry Harrison. The regiment was sent out on a forced march of three days to reinforce General Winchester, who was then sorely pressed at the River Raisin, but they did not arrive until after the disastrous defeat on January 12, 1813. They then returned to The Maumee Rapids, where they assisted in the erection of Fort Meigs.<sup>72</sup>

In the course of the construction of the fort, a soldier was severely wounded in the leg by the accidental discharge of a rifle. Bennet, as the company's surgeon, was called to consult with the other physicians. When he arrived the others were in lengthy discussion while the patient lay hemorrhaging fearfully. Bennet had learned how to make momentous decisions hastily so he wasted no time. Ordering four men to hold the patient, he found the severed artery, drew it up and tied it, thus saving the patient from a fatal hemorrhage. Turning to the other doctors, he said: "Gentlemen, in this case there was no time for consultation; that man would have bled to death in a few minutes."<sup>73</sup> When Jesse Bennet felt that an operation was imperative, he had the courage and the skill to act promptly and decisively.

<sup>71</sup> William H. Saford, ed., *The Blennerhassett Papers embodying the Private Journal of Harman Blennerhassett* (Cincinnati, 1864), 276.  
<sup>72</sup> *Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia, with Histories of Mason and Putnam Counties* (Chicago, 1883), 7.  
<sup>73</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennet," 12.

After the war ended, Bennet returned to a more pleasant life at Riverview. The next fifteen years must have been full and happy ones for the Bennets. Maria went to school at "the Point," starting there May 27, 1804,<sup>74</sup> at the age of ten years and four months. It was not so unusual for a girl in those days to start school at the age of ten years. Often the girls were taught to read and write at home and did not attend school until they were about the third or fourth grade level, especially when the school was located some distance away.

There are many stories told about the doctor to illustrate his jocund sense of humor. One that he enjoyed telling about himself concerned a visit from the Rev. David Smithers. Although Jesse Bennet did not belong to any church, he was respected by the local clergy, and on their ministerial rounds, many of them would make Riverview a regular stop. On such a visit in June 1815, the Rev. Smithers found that the Creek, Old Town, which he must cross to get to town, was flooded so that it was impossible to cross. The Rev. Smithers was persuaded to stay over night and try to cross the next morning. When morning came the creek was still too high to cross on foot. The doctor got on his horse, and taking the minister behind him, swam the animal across with great difficulty. Kyer, one of Colonel Charles Lewis' slaves, was watching the men from the other bank. When they were safely across, Bennet started to tease the Negro about being so frightened. Turning to the slave, he asked which man Kyer thought the devil would grab if he could have only one. Kyer's answer sent the doctor into peals of laughter; "he'd have took Mr. Smithers, cause he ain't so sure of Mr. Smithers, but he's done sure of you, now, sir."<sup>75</sup>

Soon after Jesse Bennet's return from the War of 1812, Enos Thomas apprenticed himself to the doctor. Young Thomas and Maria Bennet fell in love and were married about 1814.<sup>76</sup> The couple lived at Riverview, where their six children were born. On April 20, 1815, Jonathan Riffe made a cradle for the doctor,<sup>77</sup> which was undoubtedly to be used by one of Maria's

<sup>74</sup> *Journal of Jesse Bennet*, front cover.

<sup>75</sup> Hale, *Kanawha Valley*, II, 285.

<sup>76</sup> They were evidently not married in Mason County because the marriage is not recorded there.

<sup>77</sup> *Journal of Jesse Bennet*.

and Enos' children. On December 24, 1815 Jesse Bennet advanced John Musgrave five dollars and made the entry:

To cash in presence of E. Thomas \_\_\_\_\_ \$5.00 <sup>78</sup>

This is a clear indication that Enos Thomas was then living with his father-in-law.

Enos Thomas, like Daniel Drake, was one of the early doctors who received their training in the West. Presumably all the medical education Thomas had was what he learned as Jesse Bennet's apprentice. Bennet's accounts show that after 1820 he cared for fewer patients. No doubt, Dr. Thomas had taken over much of the doctor's practice by then. After 1824, there are no new entries in Bennet's Journal, but it was as late as 1836 before some of the accounts were settled.

In 1827, the Thomas family was broken by the untimely death of the young father on March 22. On May 14 of the same year, an infant daughter of Maria and Enos also died. The little girl, Maria Letitia Thomas, was but ten months and one day old at the time of her death. The cause of neither death is discernable. Perhaps one of the many epidemics of ague, milk fever, or influenza so prevalent on the frontier killed them both.

In 1830, fourteen days before her sixty-first birthday, Mrs. Elizabeth Hog Bennet died. She had lived thirty-six years since the operation from which she had felt certain she would never recover.

After the deaths of Enos Thomas and Mrs. Bennet, life at Riverview was not the same. Maria and her father were not happy together. On February 17, 1833, at the age of sixty-four, Jesse Bennet remarried. His second wife was Harriet Fowler,<sup>79</sup> a young woman whose father was said to have been the brick mason who built Riverview.<sup>80</sup> Maria and her father quarreled and she married Robert Mitchell and moved away from Riverview. The gossip of the enmity thus begun between father and daughter was well founded. Maria probably never returned to her childhood home, and her father's will and lawsuits between Mitchell and the doctor show that a very unfriendly feeling existed between the two.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Mason County Record Book, I, 28.

<sup>80</sup> Winger, "Life of Jesse Bennet."

The first positive evidence of this bitterness came when Robert Mitchell and Dr. Bennet had matured suits in the Mason County Circuit Court, April 18, 1837. Robert Mitchell, in his suit in detinue against Jesse Bennet, was granted a judgment for a Negress, Elvira, and \$140 for her services; or \$600 if the slave could not be had.<sup>81</sup> The slave record shows that Elvira, daughter of Poe, was born at Riverview on March 2, 1815. Elvira was still living at the Bennet home in 1831, because the birth of her daughter, Mary, is recorded there also.

Evidently Elvira was Maria's personal servant and as such left Riverview with Mrs. Mitchell when she moved away. From this and the following suit, it would appear that Jesse Bennet agreed to sell Mitchell the slave for \$600. When Mitchell did not pay for her, the doctor regained possession. Thus when the court awarded Mitchell the slave, Jesse Bennet was given a judgment for the sale price of \$600, which he had not received. Thus judgment plus 6% interest was awarded the doctor on the following day, March 19, 1837. Three payments were to be credited to the amount, however, which totaled \$183.98  $\frac{1}{4}$ .<sup>82</sup>

In April 1835 Jesse Bennet wrote his will, and three of his neighbors, William Fowler, Jonathan Riffe, and William Sterrett, witnessed it. Here his animosity toward his daughter was made clear. He left all his money but \$1,050, to his second wife. To her also was to go all the stock, riding carriages, household furnishings and eight of the slaves, of her choosing. One thousand dollars of the money reserved was for the doctor's grandson, Griffin Bennet Thomas, "for the purpose of giving him the means of obtaining a classical education, and (I) cherish the hope he will with it qualify himself to assume some professional avocation."<sup>83</sup> Susan Rebecca Thomas, Maria's daughter, was to have four slaves, two of each sex, and all the lots in Point Pleasant that the doctor owned. The home farm was to be Mrs. Bennet's as long as she lived and then it was to go to Griffin Bennet Thomas. He was also to receive the four other farms owned by Dr. Bennet, a total of over 820 acres. Maria was to have \$50 cash, presumably so that she would not be cut off and have an excuse to protest the will. Jesse Bennet

<sup>81</sup> Mason County Law and Order Book, I, 191.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>83</sup> Jesse Bennet's will recorded in Mason County Will Book, I, 31.

justified this by saying that she was well cared for and "has already received liberal and ample advances, both in slaves and money."<sup>44</sup> All the personal effects of both her mother and father were lost to Maria and became the property of Harriet Fowler Bennet. She disposed of them at the doctor's death through her own family. It is not surprising that Dr. Bennet's papers have been widely scattered.

At his death in 1842, the doctor was buried beside the family burial plot in which his first wife, son-in-law and granddaughter were buried. An impressive sandstone monument marks his grave.

Jesse Bennet was wealthy by the standards of the Mason County residents. But he is remembered not for his wealth but for his remarkable personality. The doctor was a man of intense feelings at all times. His great love for Maria is evidenced by the notes in the front of his books. In her childish scrawl B E N N E T is found in many places. In later years after their disagreement his disappointment and resentment toward her must have been just as intense.

As a master of his slaves the doctor was noted for his kindness. Medical care and clothing, as well as shelter, were all afforded the slaves free. John Musgrave and William Hawkins were often credited with "shoes for Barber" or some other slave. Bennet never sold a slave because he thought the practice barbaric. If one ran away he did not try to catch him. One of his slaves, Barber, ran away to Ohio and stayed for several weeks. When he returned and the doctor saw him, Bennet grabbed his shotgun and chased Barber around the field. After a few minutes the doctor's anger cooled and he asked the slave why he had run away from a home where he had received the best of care. Barber told his master that he had longed for freedom, but that he found he could not live while free as well as he had lived as a slave. The doctor told the slave that he would have his freedom some day. When Dr. Bennet died, a certificate of emancipation for Barber was found among Bennet's papers.<sup>45</sup> In the doctor's will he provided for the care of another slave, Benjamin, at Riverview as long as he should live.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Knight, "Jesse Bennet," 10.

The mastery of words and the intricacies of poetry intrigued the backwoods doctor. He must have written many rhymes because several have been found among his papers. One verse from his account book, perhaps written to Mrs. Bennet, strikes a rather sweet, sad note.

Pardon these lines, you lovely fair,  
O you I love, I must declare;  
Let them suffice, when tongues suppress;  
Least you should wound my tender breast;  
You, only you, impare my wanton rest.  
Contented I am when thinking on you.

#### IV

#### THE PLACE OF JESSE BENNET IN AMERICAN MEDICAL HISTORY

Jesse Bennet was a typical pioneer doctor. He had the benefit of the best training his country had to offer, but he chose to leave the civilized thoroughfares of the medical centers and go to the backwoods where doctors were sorely needed. Here he had only a small kit of instruments, a few drugs, and his own ingenuity and skill upon which to depend.

William Beaumont, Ephraim McDowell, Daniel Drake, John Richmond, and Jesse Bennet all made their contributions from a frontier society. Beaumont had an unheard of opportunity for experimentation. He could not consult his teachers, so he did as all pioneers must do, he used his own judgment. He kept careful records of his experiments and was very anxious to display his victim and make public his results.

McDowell was confronted with a situation which more nearly paralleled that of Jesse Bennet. He knew that without an operation his patient could have no hope of recovery. So he ran the risk of personal danger and possible lynching in order to give Mrs. Crawford a chance to live. McDowell's patient was unknown to him before the operation and his feeling toward her was the same as his feeling toward anyone in distress. Jesse Bennet had the lives of his wife and daughter at stake. How much more emotional pressure must have been felt by the one who acted as husband and father as well as physician, benefactor of mankind? McDowell's attitude to-

ward the operation and his part in it were very advanced for his day. He considered surgery a science and, as such, he wanted to place the recent knowledge gained through his successful operation at the disposal of others. The manner in which his contribution was received by the other members of the profession is indicative of their progress in scientific study.

Daniel Drake's contribution was primarily by means of records and accounts of treatment of diseases. He, also, was anxious to further the work of the profession by passing on to others what information he could gain.

Dr. John Lambert Richmond has been credited by many as the first doctor in America to perform successfully a cesarean section. By examining Richmond's account, the operation is found to have been performed thirty-three years after Jesse Bennet's, and was only half successful. The mother lived, but the child did not. Dr. Richmond was poor, and got his medical training by working as a janitor in the Ohio Medical College at Cincinnati. There he would often stand in the door and listen to Drake's lectures.<sup>36</sup> Finding that he could not make a living practicing medicine, after graduation he moved to Newtown, Ohio, where he supplemented his doctor's fees by preaching. He was called from the pulpit one Sunday evening to attend a woman in labor. Acting with true pioneer manner, he took the only course he saw open to him—caesarean section. He must have been as surprised as the neighbors when the woman lived. Three years after his operation, Dr. Richmond's report entitled "History of a Successful Case of Caesarian Operation," appeared in the *Western Journal*.<sup>37</sup>

All these pioneers, except Jesse Bennet, recorded their discoveries and have received their reward from a posterity highly sensitive to written evidence. It is easy to understand Bennet's reluctance to give a detailed public account of his achievement. At the time of its occurrence, many women refused to be attended by male doctors and insisted on calling mid-wives. In many backwoods sections today this is still the custom, although it can be attributed to the lack of doctors as well as to a feeling of modesty.

<sup>36</sup> James T. Flexner, *Doctors on Horseback*, (New York, 1944), 206.  
<sup>37</sup> Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Bailey, *The Midwest Pioneer, His Ills, Cures, and Doctors*, (New York, 1948), 116.  
<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

How distasteful it must have been to Jesse Bennet even to consider discussing the delicate operation. Having studied in Philadelphia, Bennet must have known the attitude of the doctors there toward the pioneers. In his own words, as reported by Mrs. Bennet's sister, Jesse Bennet gave his two reasons for remaining quiet: "no doctor with any feeling of delicacy would report an operation he had done on his own wife,"<sup>38</sup> and later, "no strange doctors would believe that operation could be done in the Virginia backwoods and the mother live, and he'd be damned if he would give them a chance to call him a liar."<sup>39</sup>

About 1931 Jesse Bennet's great granddaughter gave Dr. Miller a copy of Baudelocque's *Two Memoirs of the Cesarean Operation* which had been in the doctor's private library. In this book Jesse Bennet placed marginal notes about his operation. Following Baudelocque's record of twenty-four case reports of "The operation performed with success," Dr. Bennet wrote; "25th 14 Jany 1794 J.B. on E. B.Up 9 Feby Walked 15 Feby Cured on 1 March." (See Fig. 2). Later in the chapter he underscored a significant passage:

This operation is not essentially mortal . . . if it had not introduced a catheter into the deepseated collection of matter which threatened the most dreadful consequences, Mr. Bacqua, like many others would have failed in attaining the end, which he proposed to himself, and would have furnished an additional arm for the adversaries of caesarean operation, in making them acquainted with another victim . . . we can scarcely promise ourselves to save one woman in ten.<sup>40</sup>

Jesse Bennet was not a true scientist in the sense that he wished to bring light to the study of medicine through the revelation of his discoveries. He was not primarily interested in teaching, as was Drake. He was one of the many doers who was content to let the credit go to others.

The question underlying an evaluation of any such unprecedented accomplishment is: which is more important, the successful performance, or the ultimate effect of that performance on mankind? If the performance is of major im-

<sup>38</sup> Joseph L. Miller, "Caesarean Section in Virginia in the Pre-Aseptic Era," *Annals of Medical History*, (New York) X, v. 1, 1938, p.24.  
<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.  
<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

21st and 22d. LAMBRON, Surgeon at Orleans, has performed the same operation twice upon one woman<sup>(\*)</sup>, who has since laboured very fortunately. She was operated upon the first time, on the 9th of August 1775, and the second time on the 30th of December 1779.

23d. DUMAY, Surgeon at Fontenai-le-Peuple, performed the same operation on account of a rupture of the uterus, although the fetus had not penetrated into the belly, on the 4th of Germinal in the 4th Year, (23d March 1796) and on the 30th day the wound was not larger than a shilling<sup>(\*)</sup>.

24th. Finally Mr. BACQUA has performed the cesarean operation more recently, namely on the 25th of Floreal in the 5th year, (14th May 1797) and has met with all the success, that could be desired from it<sup>(\*)</sup>.

(\*) The womb of this woman was lacerated in two successive labours and the infant, each time, passed completely into the cavity of the abdomen.

(\*) This observation, highly interesting to the progress of the art, will be published at full length in the *Recueil*, when the further account of it, which has been requested, shall be received.

(\*) See *Recueil Périodique* pag. 484, tom. IV.

Fig. 2. JESSE BENNETT'S NOTES ON THE OPERATION

portance, Jesse Bennet should be ranked among our most eminent medical pioneers. When one considers the traceable effect of his deed on mankind, another conclusion must be reached. If the patient had been any other than his wife, perhaps he would have told the story, but, again, if he had had a less intimate subject perhaps his zeal and skill would not have carried him to such a great accomplishment.

Even if the story were not told directly, no doubt many contemporaries had heard rumors of Bennet's undertaking. Ephraim McDowell has received credit for the first abdominal operation, and by destroying the fake taboos, blazing the way for other surgeons to invade the uterus.<sup>21</sup> In reality, Jesse Bennet had successfully done this twenty years before. McDowell has been widely acclaimed for the first ovariectomy.<sup>22</sup> In reality, Jesse Bennet had preceded this by twenty years in his oophorectomy.<sup>23</sup> This had never been attempted before.

McDowell studied in Staunton, Virginia, under the same doctor who was present at the Bennet operation. But McDowell had finished his apprenticeship there and gone on to Edinburgh to study when the operation occurred. If he stopped to talk with his old master on his return home, or communicated with him in any other way, he could have heard of the operation. But however remarkable the coincidence, there is no evidence that Dr. Humphreys told anyone of the operation. Alexander Humphreys was considered to be a radical in his practice of medicine and soon after 1794 he traveled west and settled along the Mississippi River. Perhaps he had been sworn to secrecy by Bennett, or he too could have felt that the story would not be believed.

Slowly Jesse Bennet's deed has been affording him recognition. In 1891 Dr. A. L. Knight, who had been a neighbor of Dr. Bennet, wrote a chapter on medical history in Hale's *History of the Great Kanawha Valley*. In this account he relates the story of the operation as told to him by two witnesses, a negro slave and Mrs. Hawkins. The next year Knight wrote an article for the *Southern Historical Magazine* entitled, "Life and Times of Jesse Bennet, M. D., 1769-1842."

<sup>21</sup> Flexner, *Doctors on Horseback*, 130.  
<sup>22</sup> Removal of an ovarian tumor.  
<sup>23</sup> Removal of healthy ovaries.



In 1929, Dr. Joseph L. Miller wrote biographical sketches of both Dr. Knight and Dr. Bennet which appeared in the *Virginia Medical Monthly*.<sup>94</sup> Later Dr. Miller wrote a report for the *Annals of Medical History*, "Caesarean Section in Virginia in the Pre-Aseptic Era," in which he gives the proof that Bennet performed the operation first.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Knight and Dr. Miller, Jesse Bennet has been given recognition by several other medical historians. In 1931, Packard in his *History of Medicine in the United States*, and Blanton in his book, *Medicine in Virginia in the Eighteenth Century*, credit Jesse Bennet with the first successful caesarean section. Fielding H. Garrison, who was for several years assistant archivist in the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States, spent his life doing research on medical history. In 1929, he published an extensive volume, *History of Medicine*, in which he credits Richmond as having been the first to perform such an operation. But, in a series of lectures given in 1933 on "Contributions of the West to American Medicine", Dr. Garrison states that Jesse Bennet performed the operation first.

Three later authors of medical history do not mention Bennet. Flexner, in 1937, tells of Richmond's operation and adds "many writers have accorded him priority although earlier authenticated cases have recently come to light." Castiglioni, in his extensive medical history, and the more informal story by Pickard and Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer*, both credit Richmond.

In a study of this nature the problem again arises: What is history? Is it all that has happened, or is it merely that which has been recorded? If history is only what has been recorded, the thrill and inspiration of discovery is lost. But no, much of our history is yet to be found! It is hidden away in many unrecorded manuscripts and letters. The thrill of discovery awaits the searcher.

Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time?

Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia*

<sup>94</sup> Miller, Joseph L., "Dr. Jesse Bennett (1763-1842) Pioneer Surgeon, Dr. Aquilla Leighton Knight (1823-1897) Humadist, Old Virginia Doctors: Who saw life steadily and saw it whole." *Virginia Medical Monthly*, (Richmond), LV, January 1929, p. 711-714.

## Charles James Faulkner In the Civil War

DONALD B. McVEIGH

### INTRODUCTION

Historians have devoted considerable attention to the crisis which engulfed the men of the Upper South in their year of decision, 1861.<sup>1</sup> Scholars seek to discover why one man took a firm stand on the side of the Union, while his neighbor (or even his brother) attached himself with equal tenacity to the Confederacy.

It is almost impossible to generalize successfully on the reasons for these decisions. The range of motives, sentiments, and pressures operating on the individual is far too wide.

Perhaps surprising to note, this critical choice was, by and large, an individual affair. Each man wrestled with his conscience alone, influenced mainly by his own character and his personal relationship to the problem at hand.

Nowhere in the United States did this soul-searching and examination of conscience cause greater anguish than in the Upper South; and none among the border-staters suffered greater mental torture than the citizens of Virginia.

To further narrow the geographical background of this paper—the citizens of western Virginia had an historical position which at once attracted them to, and repelled them from, the government at Richmond.

Going one step further, one arrives at the doubly unenviable situation of the residents of the border within Virginia; specifically, the citizens of Berkeley County.

The brother-against-brother aspect of the war may be seen here in concentrated form. For example, the man who went to

<sup>1</sup>A paper presented at the Annual Meeting in Charleston, October 21, 1950. For a recent and simplified statement of the highlights of this problem, see Samuel Eliot Morrison, and Henry Steele Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, I, pp. 650-652.