Butyn in Local Anaesthesia

Butyn does not appear to have been given an extensive trial in ophthalmic surgery in this country, save by Dr. W. M. Beaumont of Bath, who has found it altogether satisfactory. Perhaps the high price may account for this want of trial, or, perhaps, ophthalmic surgeons are more conservative than some of their colleagues in other specialities, and having found cocain a safe local anaesthetic over a good many years, are loath to give up using it so long as it can be obtained. Those who have used butyn seem to agree that it causes excessive smarting after it has been instilled, and some mention has been made of hyperaemia. The only unpleasant ophthalmic experience we have so far found recorded in this country is in a case by Dr. James Kerr (Brit. Med. Jl., 1923, Vol. II, p. 947), where a small quantity of the solid drug was placed on a stye, and, although it was washed off after a few seconds, it produced white sloughing of the conjunctival surface and violent chemosis. But reports are beginning to be published in the medical press with regard to the disadvantages of butyn, especially in surgery of the air passages. Dr. G. William Hill, in a paper in the Brit. Med. Jl. some three months ago, reported that some of his cases failed to respond to butyn, and that in many cases there was hyperaemia and excessive secretion of mucus; whilst Sir St. Clair Thomson (Brit. Med Jl., Feb. 9th, 1924, p. 235) sounds a note of warning. He reports four cases; complete anaesthesia was obtained in only one case, and in that case, the operator had the unpleasant experience of seeing his patient at the completion of the intra-laryngeal operation half rise from the chair and be seized with an epileptic convulsion when he was laid out flat on the consulting room floor. In a second case the butyn was found to be effective, though it took longer to act than cocain, and in each of these two cases, the secretion of mucus was profuse. In two cases, butyn was found ineffective in producing a proper anaesthesia.

Dr. Beaumont (Brit. Med Jl., 1923, Vol. II, p. 1121) quotes from a report of Professor Roger Adams of the University of Illinois, one of the discoverers of butyn, on the subject of five deaths which have occurred when this drug was used. In one case, no details could be supplied, in one case, an intraspinal injection had been given and in the other three cases there had been a combination of butyn with other drugs.

These cases make rather alarming reading and we cannot help feeling that butyn must have, as Mr. Shandy said of the science of fortification, its weak points.