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## ON LARGE DOSES OF DIGITALIS.

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It is now nearly eighty years since the adoption of digitalis as a standard remedy by the medical profession, and yet we may be said to be in our infancy with regard to its doses, its uses, the quantity that may be borne with impunity, and the peculiar times, states, or changes in the system, that preclude its safe employment.

In some diseases, we say, experience has taught us that it is unsafe to give over two or three grains of the powdered leaves, or 30 or 40 drops of the tincture; and that even these doses frequently repeated, produce alarming depression of the heart's action. But Dr. Holland, however, remarks that physicians are too liable to be influenced by this sudden slowness and irregularity of the pulse, that he never recollects of a case of any injurious effects arising from small doses of digitalis, and farther, that to this fear of continuing its employment may be attributed their occasional want of success, with this valuable agent. He says too, that in dropsy with dilatation, and irregular beating of the heart, foxglove proved extremely useful in his hands, in removing the one, and correcting the other; but he was not afraid to push the remedy, for he found that relaxation and feebleness of circulation, called especially for perseverance in its use, and that weak persons bear much larger doses than the strong.

Cases of dropsy are liable to die suddenly, no matter what medicine they are taking at the time. If it be digitalis, the patient is thought to have died by digitalis, but if any other remedy, the death is attributed to the disease alone.

Dr. Withering, as long ago as 1777, confesses the truth of this assertion; he directed a decoction of the fresh leaves in a case of ascites, and the woman died suddenly three days afterwards. On inquiry, he found the digitalis had not been given at all, owing to the difficulty of getting it from under the snow; had the woman been taking the remedy, he said he would undoubtedly have attributed her death to its employment.

But deaths from digitalis are extremely rare; a man fills a quart pitcher with foxglove leaves, pours over them a pint, or a pint and a half, of boiling water, and takes a teacupful of the infusion on going to bed, repeating the dose from the same pitcher, the following morning. All the first dose, and part of the last, is absorbed, and yet he does not die,—with a little brandy and ammonia, he recovers, without convulsions or coma.

A woman with dropsy, boils two handfuls of the leaves in a quart of water, and drinks two tea-cupfuls of the "tea." She also, vomits and recovers, stimulants again being given.

A man with asthma, hearing that tincture of foxglove is good for his complaint, cures himself by taking an ounce of it, goes to bed, sleeps for three hours and a half, awakens, is vomited and purged,

lies down to sleep again, and after three hours more, his heart beating but 36, stimulants are again resorted to, and he recovers.

A drunken man, thinking it will cure him, takes half a wine-glassful of tincture of digitalis, and not being satisfied, swallows the remainder shortly afterwards; it does not cause him the slightest inconvenience.

From time immemorial, the charmed women in the rural districts of Ireland, have been in the habit of giving enormous doses for the cure of epilepsy. They boil the juice of four ounces of the green foxglove with a pint of beer, and give the mixture in doses of a gill (equal to 1½ ounces of our tincture), every third day; and they are very successful with it.

But it is not the ignorant alone who employ large doses of this herb, for there have been medical men, ever since Dr. Withering's time, that have prescribed heroic doses of digitalis. The late Sir William Crampton, not only examined into the correctness of the account of the fairy women's treatment, but exhibited it himself in like manner in four cases, as long ago as 1828; and said that he cured three of them by it, but lacking the bravery of his country women, he always became alarmed at the severe depression caused by the first dose, and never dared to give a second to the same person.

Dr. Sharkey, of Cork, in the *Lancet* of 1831, after much experience, also acknowledges the correctness of these women's treatment, and gives the foxglove juice in the same way.

Dr. Corrigan, in 1845, also testifies to the correctness of the experience of the two physicians above mentioned, but says, he never gave it but once in such a manner, when, although successful, he found it to be followed by violent vomiting, cold sweats, and a feeble and irregular pulse; and these again by intense gastritis, with great sinking of the vital powers, and double vision; which continued for several days, and proved quite sufficient to deter him from again venturing on its administration in such a dose. The plan he adopted afterwards was to prescribe 12 grains of the powdered leaves, (equivalent to quarter of an ounce of the tincture), in infusion every night for months, augmenting the dose very carefully as the system became accustomed to its use; and has had great success with it in epilepsy.

Dr. Billing, 25 years ago, gave half-ounce, and ounce doses of the tincture of digitalis for the same disease, and found it very efficacious in warding off its attacks.

Dr. Copeland remarks, that early in the present century, large doses of the infusion of foxglove were given very indiscriminately in dropsies, and that patients were often reduced very low with it, but he speaks of no fatal cases.

Mr. King, a physician in Suffolk, Eng., had been in the habit for many years of prescribing this re-