

Case of hydrothorax : in which is related the origin of the disease, and progress of cure, from the most hopeless state to a return to health : with some observations on hydrargyri sub murias / by W. Whincopp.

Contributors

Whincopp, William.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

Woodbridge : J. Loder, 1822.

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CASE

OF

HYDROTHORAX,

IN WHICH IS RELATED

The Origin of the Disease,

And Progress of Cure,

FROM THE MOST HOPELESS STATE TO A RETURN TO HEALTH:

With some Observations

ON

HYDRARGYRI SUB MURIAS,

BY W. WHINCOPP, M.D.

Woodbridge:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. LODER; AND BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND
JOY, LONDON.

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1823.

THERE ARE TRUTHS WHICH, AS THEY ARE
ALWAYS NECESSARY, DO NOT GROW
STALE BY REPETITION.

Dr. Sam. Johnson.

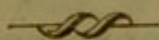
CASE

HYDROTIC

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The employment of digitalis in the
of dropsy is in no sense new, for
early as the year 1773, Dr. Keil, in
this and various works, has stated
the mode of its use in the
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CASE
OF
HYDROTHORAX.



THE employment of digitalis in the cure of dropsies is by no means new, for so early as the year 1775, the late Dr. Withering made trial of it in these diseases; but, previously to that time, even for a century, it has stood in the list of the *materia medica*. Dr. Withering informs us he was induced to make trial of it, in consequence of its being employed as a popular remedy in dropsy. His success was so striking, in many severe cases, that, in 1786, he published his valuable treatise on the singular properties of this plant.

Since that period the opinions of our most able men have confirmed Dr. Withering's observations, which have been given to the world in a great number of useful publications; it is not, therefore, my intention to write a history and essay on the properties

of this valuable plant, as what I could say, would add nothing to a subject which has already been so ably investigated by many of our most scientific practitioners.

I propose, therefore, simply to recite the progress and particulars of a case of dropsy, which, at most, can only add one other to the many apparently hopeless cases cured by digitalis. The subject of this memoir was from previous organic disease, consequent general broken constitution, and by the too liberal use of the *diffusible stimuli*, brought to such a state of indirect debility, superadded to this, a profuse hæmorrhage had yet further weakened the already declining powers of life, and he had arrived at an age so far advanced as could only afford the most unfavourable prognosis.

But to give a history of the case, and afford my medical reader an opportunity of forming his own conclusions, I shall proceed, without further preface, to recite as many of the particulars as my scanty notes will afford me; for it was not until some of the most favourable symptoms of amendment became apparent, and the interest many persons evinced in this neighbourhood,

that it occurred to me such a case ought to be made public.

Edward Harsant, aged sixty-three, a carpenter, an ingenious and clever mechanic, when young of a robust constitution, had been for many years a hard working, and, I may add, a hard drinking man. It often happened, by his intemperance, the digestive organs having been much impaired; the liver imperfectly performed its office, the bile frequently defective in quantity or quality, or both; his lower extremities œdematous. On these occasions the stomach and liver had been so far restored to the performance of those functions, by a short abstinence from his usual potations, and the aid of medicine, as to bring him to that state of convalescence that he could return to his usual occupation, but with diminished activity, as the œdematous legs, still exhibited a languor in the absorbent system: and for ten or twelve years I have remarked his legs have been double their natural size; he says, "it is longer since they began to swell;" but a certain energy of mind had kept him to his business, without any

long or serious confinement, until January, 1821; when the liver took on as much active inflammation as is usually seen in that organ, through which the circulation is so peculiar; which, under the judicious care and attention of Mr. G. Lynn, of Woodbridge, was subdued, but not till after exciting a complete *ptyalism*, which lasted three weeks; after a confinement of two months more, he began again to attend to his usual occupation; but his legs still remained equally œdematous, and he also felt an unusual shortness of breath, which gradually increased, but still he attended to his business, although with inconvenience, until the October, when a fall from a ladder again confined him; before he had recovered from the accident, in the middle of November, without any apparent exciting cause, a violent hæmorrhage began at the nose, and before he could procure any medical assistance, which certainly could not exceed an hour and half, he had lost several pounds of blood, for it literally ran with a stream; notwithstanding all the popular remedies had been applied, when I saw him, aided

by a syncope, the bleeding was soon restrained; it has not since returned to any amount, more than a few drops, as a dossil of lint dipped in a solution of allum has immediately stopped it; but from that time the *dyspnoea* rapidly increased, and on the 28th of November, 1821, he requested I would speak to him, as he could not lie down on his bed, nor walk up stairs, but with the greatest difficulty: feeling often as if he should be suffocated, starting from his sleep; there was also a slight numbness in the right arm; pulse intermitting every second or third vibration, from fifty to sixty in a minute; turbid and scanty urine: in this stage of the disease, conjecturing perhaps some of these symptoms might be partly caused by crude aliment, the intestinal canal wanting the necessary stimulus of a proper quantity and quality of bile, I gave him *hydrargyri sub murias grana sex extractum glycyrrhiza q. s. fiat pilula*. In this place, I have to observe, that I have been these last sixteen years in the habit of giving the hydrargy: sub murias, in an *insulated* form, and was never disappointed in its salutary effects of dis-

lodging from the intestinal canal any *scybula* or irritating *fomes*, which the calomel, when conjoined with any other cathartic, too frequently fails of effecting; all the other laxatives and cathartics act by stimulating more or less the extremities of the exhalant vessels; or the excretories of the mucus follicles; hence are produced watery evacuations only, and the *fomes* or *scybula* are left—whereas calomel *per se* increases the peristaltic action of the moving fibres.

In many cases of diarrhœa, with distressing tenesmus, the calomel *per se* has succeeded with my patients after all other means have failed. I am aware Mr. Abernethy recommends calomel in a similar way in many cases even where the irritating cause did not seem to be in the intestinal canal; but long before I saw his luminous essay, I had constantly been accustomed to give it in this way. The effects forcibly struck me seventeen years since, when my two little girls, the one two years of age, the other a year old, were ill with *typhus gravior*, with scarcely a hope of recovery; when the late much-lamented Dr. Wm. Hamilton, of Ipswich, visited them, and enquiring

into the state of their bowels, I told him they had been relieved by a common cathartic, notwithstanding he recommended they should have directly six grains of calomel in honey, and no other cathartic; when, so soon as what had been irritating was removed by the calomel, they both began to amend; this, of course, made a strong impression on my mind, and since that time I have employed calomel in that way: but its violent effects, in some few instances, have prevented many persons giving it, except in small doses added to a cathartic: this effect, at first, I apprehended might arise from an adulterated or improperly prepared medicine; and, more particularly, if after being made into pills with any of the acid conserves, they are kept for any length of time; as it is the property of sugar, combined with an acid, to dilequesce: the mass or pills combine with a yet larger portion of oxygen, and thus the calomel may be rendered more active: but experiencing this effect in scarcely any case with children, I was convinced it must arise from a carbonaceous acid, in the *prima via*, further

The first part of the book is devoted to a general
 introduction of the subject. The author discusses the
 importance of the study and the scope of the work.
 He then proceeds to a detailed examination of the
 various aspects of the problem. The second part of the
 book is devoted to a critical analysis of the
 existing literature on the subject. The author
 discusses the contributions of various authors and
 the progress of the research. The third part of the
 book is devoted to a presentation of the author's
 own research. He discusses the methods used and
 the results obtained. The fourth part of the book
 is devoted to a discussion of the implications of the
 research and the conclusions drawn. The author
 discusses the significance of the findings and the
 directions for further research.

The author concludes the book with a summary of the
 main findings and a final statement of the
 conclusions. He expresses his hope that the book
 will be of interest and value to the reader.

The book is written in a clear and concise style.
 The author's arguments are well presented and
 supported by a wealth of references. The book
 is a valuable contribution to the literature on the
 subject and is highly recommended to all
 interested in the field.

lorn hope, I was induced to try the *digitalis*; but with a pulse between 50 and 60. I dreaded what might be the consequence of bringing them still lower; but this apparent slow circulation was more the effect of intermission, than any thing else, as was subsequently proved:—but other symptoms militated against the use of *digitalis*; for Dr. Withering remarks, “that, although in other cases of dropsy, a relaxed, weakened, and depressed state of the system was most favourable for producing the full effects of *digitalis*; and that in persons of a tense fibre, florid complexion, and much natural strength, labouring under dropsy, it seldom succeeded; whereas when the pulse was feeble or intermitting, the anasarcaous limbs soft and yielding, the countenance full and the skin cold, the diuretic powers of this plant were conspicuous; subsequent observation has confirmed this fact as far as concerns ascites and anasarca: but with respect to *hydrothorax* *digitalis* succeeds in the *opposite state* of the system.” In some particulars, it is true, here was this opposite state of the system; there existed an intermitting, but not very feeble

pulse; however, I began with ten drops of the tincture twice every day; on the third day it had a most powerful diuretic effect; for although he had taken no more liquid than usual, he made several gallons of urine during the night; in fact he said, he should have slept soundly the whole night but was so frequently obliged to get out of bed to empty the bladder; as it was, he had more sleep than he had had for several nights previously: his pulse was more regular. The digitalis was continued two days longer; he could now lie down in bed, and had good nights.

Fearful of pushing this powerful medicine too far, and bringing on that alarming train of symptoms, consequent to its too liberal use, anxiety at the heart, fainting, giddiness, &c. and hoping my end was, at least, partly gained, I discontinued the digitalis: my patient continued going on tolerably well for another fortnight; still there was water in the chest; the pulse intermitting; he was unable to lie down in bed; numbness in the right arm; starting occasionally from sleep; indeed he became gradually worse: calling upon him on

Christmas day I found the arm, which before was only a little benumbed, now become paralytic; the tongue and organs of speech were so much affected, that with much difficulty I understood him; I apprehended the same watery effusion had now also taken place on the brain: he was extremely enfeebled, and did not for several nights obtain any sleep; neither did he attempt going to bed, as he felt as if he should be instantly suffocated in any other than an upright posture; he, therefore, sat up in his chair, and got little or no sleep; his pulse intermitting every second or third pulsation; and entertaining no hopes of his recovery, on the night of the 30th, I was requested to visit him, and in the full expectation it would be the last time I should see him alive; but during the absence of his messenger he had taken some spt: æther: vitriol: compos: which I had left him; and by which means he had been a little relieved: but the alvine excretion requiring prior attention, as the *alvus adstricta et lutosâ*, indicated a very imperfectly secreted bile; I had again, therefore, recourse to the calomel, which relieved the paralysis

of the tongue; the arm now was only numb not palsied; and the next day I repeated the digitalis, increasing it one drop at each dose twice a day, to twenty drops, with the same diuretic effects; and continued it till the 21st of February, when all the symptoms of hydrothorax completely subsided; his pulse regular, between sixty and seventy in a minute; he could lay his head as low in bed as ever; he slept soundly all night, and could get up stairs without stopping; could walk a mile without any inconvenience, excepting weakness; and, what is yet more extraordinary, his legs, which for many years had been anasarcaous and very much enlarged, were certainly much less than he could remember them at any time during a very long period; in fact, they were as nearly reduced to their natural size as could be expected from the skin being so long kept in that tense and enlarged state. A striking effect also of the digitalis in this case, was not lessening the frequency of the pulse, whilst the full diuretic effects were in complete action; I can only account for this by its restoring an intermitting to a regular pulsation, which

it completely did so soon as the water was removed from the chest. The length of time my patient was obliged to continue the digitalis had very much impaired his appetite, and of course the whole system was in a debilitated state; I therefore gave him half a grain of sulphate of iron twice a-day, in a wine glass full of very weak English gin and water. The dose of sulphate of iron may appear small to those in the habit of giving it in full quantity; but I have always found more beneficial effects in cases of simple debility, from small doses much diluted: in my opinion the good effects of our mineral chalybeate springs arise in a great measure from the small and diluted doses; the strongest chalybeate spring (Hartfell) containing but little more than four grains in the pint. Cheltenham, which is held in such high estimation, contains little more than half a grain in the pint; many much less. The benefit to my patient was soon very apparent in a rapid restoration to appetite and strength, so that in a few weeks he was able to walk two or three miles with ease; indeed he might have been considered

well, had he not imprudently gone abroad one very cold windy day in March, which brought on catarrh.

April 20th, my patient was able to work at his business, his legs, from the exertion, swelled a little: again I had recourse to digitalis; in two days the diuretic effect followed as before, breathing freely, excepting the effects of a slight catarrh; appetite good; he continued to work at his business; experienced no other inconvenience except return of œdema in the lower extremities; this I was not at all surprised at, as his lower extremities had been so many years *anasarcous*; his legs also disposed to ulcerate; neither was this by any means new, as they had been for a long time subject to ulceration, although the ulceration had never been very extensive.

As no kind of dropsy is so liable to return as hydrothorax, so in the present case symptoms of relapse began to appear in the early part of May; the urine scanty and turbid, and lassitude upon the least exertion, although it could be scarcely said to be dyspnœa; he could walk up stairs and lie in bed with little or no

inconvenience; his sleep was also uninterrupted: the lassitude, I considered, was now more the effects of general debility than any positive symptom of water in the chest. I however again directed my patient to repeat the digitalis, when his urine began to be plentiful and clear; but during my absence of a few days he had increased the dose to forty drops, which had produced anxiety about the region of the heart, debility and loss of appetite. I ordered him to discontinue that medicine, and gave the sulphate of iron, now increased to a grain and half. In a few days his bodily strength was so far amended, that he was able to work a little at his business, the general anasarca appearance was subsiding. I perceived in this relapse and repetition of the digitalis, how cautious we ought to be of an over dose, and also the necessity of watching the patient whilst taking this active medicine; and that a large dose is wholly unnecessary, as I have found from subsequent experience: for desirous of guarding against a return of the complaint, I have warned him, so soon as the urine became muddy and scanty, to take

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upon him some little time since, I found
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 What is much to his credit he has entirely
 left off drinking strong liquors. The liver
 after having been so long deranged, and
 severely diseased, performs its necessary
 functions but imperfectly, and for no long
 time without assistance: so soon as this
 is the case, of which his feelings and the
 urine excretion quickly apprize him, he
 has recourse to six grains of calomel per
 which never fails to relieve him. He is
 now entirely free from any of the least
 symptoms of hydropsis; can eat, drink,
 and sleep perfectly well, and follows his
 usual occupation.

VIRIS

The following case is a very singular
 one, and is not to be met with in any
 of the common treatises on the subject.
 It is a case of a very long standing
 and is attended with many singular
 symptoms, which I have not seen
 elsewhere. It is a case of a very
 long standing, and is attended with
 many singular symptoms, which I have
 not seen elsewhere.

