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**Withering W (1785)**. An account of the foxglove and some of its medical uses: with practical remarks on dropsy and other diseases. London: J and J Robinson.

**Title pages**

from  
the author

A N  
A C C O U N T  
O F T H E  
F O X G L O V E,  
A N D

Some of its Medical Uses :

W I T H  
PRACTICAL REMARKS ON DROPSY,  
AND OTHER DISEASES.

B Y  
WILLIAM WITHERING, M. D.  
Physician to the General Hospital at Birmingham.

— nonumque prematur in annum.

HORACE.

BIRMINGHAM: PRINTED BY M. SWINNEY;  
FOR  
G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER-ROW, LONDON.  
M,DCC,LXXXV.

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MED. EDIN.

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P R E F A C E.

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**A**FTER being frequently urged to write upon this subject, and as often declining to do it, from apprehension of my own inability, I am at length compelled to take up the pen, however unqualified I may still feel myself for the task.

The use of the Foxglove is getting abroad, and it is better the world should derive some instruction, however imperfect, from my experience, than that the lives of men should be hazarded by its unguarded exhibition, or that a medicine of so much efficacy should be condemned and rejected as dangerous and unmanageable.

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vi P R E F A C E.

It is now about ten years since I first began to use this medicine. Experience and cautious attention gradually taught me how to use it. For the last two years I have not had occasion to alter the modes of management; but I am still far from thinking them perfect.

It would have been an easy task to have given select cases, whose successful treatment would have spoken strongly in favour of the medicine, and perhaps been flattering to my own reputation. But Truth and Science would condemn the procedure. I have therefore mentioned every case in which I have prescribed the Foxglove, proper or improper, successful or otherwise. Such a conduct will lay me open to the censure of those who are disposed to censure, but it will meet the approbation of others, who are the best qualified to be judges.

To the Surgeons and Apothecaries, with whom I am connected in practice, both in this town and at a distance, I beg leave to make

make this public acknowledgment, for the assistance they so readily afforded me, in perfecting some of the cases, and in communicating the events of others.

The ages of the patients are not always exact, nor would the labour of making them so have been repaid by any useful consequences. In a few instances accuracy in that respect was necessary, and there it has been attempted; but in general, an approximation towards the truth, was supposed to be sufficient.

The cases related from my own experience, are generally written in the shortest form I could contrive, in order to save time and labour. Some of them are given more in detail, when particular circumstances made such detail necessary; but the cases communicated by other practitioners, are given in their own words.

I must caution the reader, who is not a practitioner in physic, that no general deductions, decisive upon the failure or success  
 b of

of the medicine, can be drawn from the cases I now present to him. These cases must be considered as the most hopeless and deplorable that exist; for physicians are seldom consulted in chronic diseases, till the usual remedies have failed: and, indeed, for some years, whilst I was less expert in the management of the Digitalis, I seldom prescribed it, but when the failure of every other method compelled me to do it; so that upon the whole, the instances I am going to adduce, may truly be considered as cases lost to the common run of practice, and only snatched from destruction, by the efficacy of the Digitalis; and this in so remarkable a manner, that, if the properties of that plant had not been discovered, by far the greatest part of these patients must have died.

There are men who will hardly admit of any thing which an author advances in support of a favorite medicine, and I allow they may have some cause for their hesitation; nor do I expect they will wave their usual modes of  
 judg-

judging upon the present occasion. I could with therefore that such readers would pass over what I have said, and attend only to the communications from correspondents, because they cannot be supposed to possess any unjust predilection in favour of the medicine: but I cannot advise them to this step, for I am certain they would then close the book, with much higher notions of the efficacy of the plant than what they would have learnt from me. Not that I want faith in the discernment or in the veracity of my correspondents, for they are men of established reputation; but the cases they have sent me are, with some exceptions, too much selected. They are not upon this account less valuable in themselves, but they are not the proper premises from which to draw permanent conclusions.

I wish the reader to keep in view, that it is not my intention merely to introduce a new diuretic to his acquaintance, but one which, though not infallible, I believe to be much more certain than any other in present use.

b 2 After

After all, in spite of opinion, prejudice, or error, TIME will fix the real value upon this discovery, and determine whether I have imposed upon myself and others, or contributed to the benefit of science and mankind.

*Birmingham, 1st July,*  
1785.

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In a letter which I received from you in London, dated *September 29, 1778*, you write as follows:—  
“ I wish it was as easy to write upon the *Digitalis*—  
“ I despair of pleasing myself or instructing others,  
“ in a subject so difficult. It is much easier to  
“ write upon a disease than upon a remedy. The  
“ former is in the hands of nature, and a faithful  
“ observer, with an eye of tolerable judgment,  
“ cannot fail to delineate a likeness. The latter  
“ will ever be subject to the whims, the inaccuracies,  
“ and the blunders of mankind.”—

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