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THE ACTION OF ALCOHOL.

Notwithstanding all that has been written upon the subject, our knowledge of the therapeutic action of alcohol cannot yet be said to stand upon an unquestioned basis. From the clinical point of view, the statement of its action upon the circulation and the nervous system as given by Dr. Rolleston (Allbutt's System of Medicine, Vol. III., p. 840) may be said to represent the general opinion of the profession. This writer says: "After the administration of alcohol the heart beats more forcibly, and with greater frequency, the period of diastole being shortened; the peripheral vessels are dilated, and thus the familiar flushing of the skin is produced. The pulse becomes full and frequent, the circulation more rapid, and the blood passes into the veins in a less venous condition, containing more oxygen than usual. As these effects pass off, the heart beats less powerfully and more slowly, so that the sum of the two phases is much the same as if no alcohol had been taken. Large quantities, however, diminish both the force and the frequency of the heart-beat from the first. On the central nervous system alcohol has first of all an indirect effect; by its action on the circulation it supplies the brain and the spinal cord with more blood, and so increases their activity. It acts, however, directly on the nerve cells as a functional poison. Hence though first stimulated by alcohol, the central nervous system becomes subsequently depressed." In opposition to this view which has been stoutly upheld among pharmacologists by Binz and his pupils, Schmiedeberg, Bunge, and many other pharmacologists hold that the action of alcohol on the nervous system is that of a depressant from the beginning, and that the symptoms of supposed stimulation are in reality due to the depressant action of the drug, weakening the functions of control and inhibition, and allowing the lower centres to act more powerfully than under normal circumstances they would. Cushny, in his work on pharmacology and therapeutics just published, says that there is evidence