Miscellaneous.

Beer-Drinkers' Heart.

Georg Keferstein (*Zeit. für Diät. und Phys. Therap.*) discusses the effect upon the heart of drinking large quantities of fluids, and especially deals with the question of how far the so-called "beer-drinkers' heart" is caused by the alcohol in the beer and how far it is a mere mechanical effect of the quantity of fluid taken in. His view that the toxic effect of the alcohol is the main cause, to which other causes are only secondary, has been combated by Hueppe, who cites the occurrence of an exactly similar heart condition in excessive tea drinkers in Russia in support of the theory that the amount of fluid rather than the nature of the fluid is the harmful factor. Tea, however, may itself exert a toxic influence, and in favor of Keferstein's view is an observation of Aufrecht, who found that spirit drinkers also suffered from similar heart lesions. Certain authors have held that a plethora vera or increase in the total amount of blood in the body without change in its composition may result in part from drinking large quantities of fluid, and that such a plethora must throw more work upon the heart. Keferstein does not admit that the existence of plethora vera has been demonstrated, for we have no direct method of estimating the total quantity of blood in the body. Of the writers who describe the condition most appear to consider it the result of over-feeding, in addition to over-drinking. When occurring in combination with over-feeding, if we suppose that the need of the body for nutrition is increased and that all metalobic processes are more active than normal, the work of the heart will undoubtedly be increased, but not now by any mere mechanical process. Apart from such a supposition, it seems impossible that plethora vera can mechanically increase the work of the heart. The need of the tissues for nutrition being unaltered, the flow of blood through the capillaries will not be increased, and the only effect of the condition will be an accumulation of blood in the most distensible part of the vascular system, that is, in the veins. The condition of plethora serosa or of increase in the fluid constituents of the blood is radically different. Since the number of cells in any given mass of blood is diminished, a greater mass of blood than before must pass through the capillaries in a given time in order to sustain the nutrition of the tissues, and if other conditions are supposed constant, the heart must work harder to bring this about. On the other hand, the viscosity and cohesion of the blood being diminished, the friction with the vessel wall will be diminished and the work of the heart to this extent lessened. Both these factors act together, and we have no method of estimating the total result on the work done by the heart.