
CHAP. XXII.**OF EMOLLIENTS.**

THE class of Emollients, according to the definition given by Cullen, includes those medicines which diminish the force of cohesion in the particles of the solid matter of the human body, and thereby render them more lax and flexible. Their operation is evidently mechanical; they are insinuated into the matter of the solid fibre, and either diminish its density, or lessen the friction between its particles. Hence they are useful where the fibres are rigid, or where they are preternaturally extended, and therefore afford relief when topically applied to inflamed parts, to tumors distending the skin, or where the skin is dry and rigid. There may be included under the same class, those substances which, applied to the surface, by their bland quality, afford relief from irritation.

Heat, conjoined with moisture, is the principal emollient. Warm water is of itself useful; but when applied by the medium of some vegetable substances, as in the different fomentations and cataplasms, it is more advantageous, as the heat is longer retained; bread in crumbs, or the flour or meal of the common grains, forms the basis of the common cataplasm; the flowers of the chamomile, or the mallow, are often used as the vehicle for fomentations. The emollient power is little increased by such additions, though some have supposed that the mucilaginous vegetables have some efficacy of this kind.

The other emollients are the oils, or unctuous substances: they are merely introduced by friction; and in distension of the animal fibre, as in dropsical swelling, afford some relief. *Axungia Porcina*, Hog's Lard, is the principal substance of this kind not hitherto noticed. It is the fat of the hog, freed from the cellular fibre with which it is intermingled. This is done by melting it with the addition of a little water to prevent the heat from rising too high. When cold, it becomes concrete; has all the properties of animal fat; and from its softness is adapted to the purposes of an external emollient application. It forms the basis of ointments, which are applied as a dressing to inflamed parts. Such compositions too are formed from the expressed oils, melted with a due proportion of spermaceti or wax: they prove useful in a great measure by excluding the air, while, from their smoothness and softness, they excite no irritation. The thick and bland liquid formed by the combination of lime-water with expressed oils, (*Linimentum Aquæ Calcis*), is another emollient composition, usually employed as a soothing application to burns, and proving useful by a similar operation. There are some other unctuous substances which have been introduced for similar purposes; such as Palm Oil, an expressed oil nearly concrete, obtained from the kernel of the fruit of the *Cocos BUTYRACEA*, a native of Brazil. It is obtained by decoction of the kernels bruised in water, the oily matter separating: it is of a lively yellow colour and rather agreeable odour, and is sometimes applied as an emollient by friction. The Oil of the Laurel Berry, (*LAURUS NOBILIS*), is of similar qualities, and is obtained in the same manner, the berries bruised being boiled in water. It is concrete, of a yellowish-green colour, and has an odour slightly fragrant.