

but, practically speaking, mankind could not exist, or at least never have existed, without the constant use of it. Thus, though employed in very small quantities at a time by any individual, and almost exclusively for the purpose either of preserving or of rendering his food more palatable, this substance may fairly be classed among the principal necessities of life: and, correspondently with this statement, we find that nature has supplied it in abundance, indeed in profusion often, in various parts of the globe: for, to say nothing of those apparently inexhaustible masses which occur among the solid strata of the earth, and which have been constantly quarried through successive ages from the earliest records of history, the ocean itself is a never-failing source of this valuable substance. In other instances salt springs afford the means of a ready supply: and, throughout a considerable part of the sandy districts of Africa and Asia, the soil itself abounds with it^e. The abundant supply of common salt

^e It does not belong to our present purpose to describe the common processes by which the salt is obtained either from the sea, or from any other liquid that may hold it in solution: but the following account of a particular process, for this purpose, so well illustrates the ingenuity of the human mind in taking advantage of natural hints, if the expression may be permitted, that no excuse can be necessary for its introduction. In Guiana there is a very common species of palm, the flowers of which are enveloped by a sheath capable of holding many pints of water;