

people survive two or three days under such circumstances I cannot imagine: at the same time, I must confess that my guide did not suffer at all, and was astonished that one day's deprivation should be so troublesome to me.

I have several times alluded to the surface of the ground being incrustated with salt. This phenomenon is quite different from that of the salinas, and more extraordinary. In many parts of South America, wherever the climate is moderately dry, these incrustations occur; but I have nowhere seen them so abundant as near Bahia Blanca. The salt here, and in other parts of Patagonia, consists chiefly of sulphate of soda with some common salt. As long as the ground remains moist in these salitrales (as the Spaniards improperly call them, mistaking this substance for saltpetre), nothing is to be seen but an extensive plain composed of a black, muddy soil, supporting scattered tufts of succulent plants. On returning through one of these tracts, after a week's hot weather, one is surprised to see square miles of the plain white, as if from a slight fall of snow, here and there heaped up by the wind into little drifts. This latter appearance is chiefly caused by the salts being drawn up, during the slow evaporation of the moisture, round blades of dead grass, stumps of wood, and pieces of broken earth, instead of being crystallized at the bottoms of the puddles of water. The salitrales occur either on level tracts elevated only a few feet above the level of the sea, or on alluvial land bordering rivers. M. Parchappe<sup>1</sup> found that the saline incrustation on the plain, at the distance of some miles from the sea, consisted chiefly of sulphate of soda, with only seven per cent of common salt; while nearer to the coast, the common salt increased to 37 parts in a hundred. This circumstance would tempt one to believe that the sulphate of soda is generated in the soil from the muriate left on the surface during the slow and recent elevation of this dry country. The whole

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<sup>1</sup> Voyage dans l'Amérique Mérid. par M. A. d'Orbigny. Part. Hist. tom. i. p. 664.