

mal and vegetable matter, with the exception of those which belong to the ocean itself, would soon perish; for under such circumstances the earth would be deprived of those seasonable showers, without which its vegetable productions could not be sustained; and every spring would soon fail, and every river be dried up: for rivers are in most instances formed by the progressive accumulation of various torrents; and these are produced by that portion of rain which, having fallen upon the ridges and inclined surfaces of hills and mountains, descends more rapidly than the soil can absorb it: and springs result, in a manner that will be hereafter mentioned, from the accumulation of that portion of the rain which sinks beneath the surface on which it has fallen. But it is evident that if the vegetable world were to perish, the animal world could not long survive.

Nor are the laws by which the moisture, contained in the atmosphere, is precipitated from it in dews or rain, among the least admirable instances of the provision made by nature for a constant supply of the wants of man.

The mechanism, if the term be allowable, by which the formation of clouds and the occasional descent of rain are regulated, resides in the variableness of the state of the heat and electricity of the atmosphere: in consequence of which a given mass of air is incapable of re-