

## ACIDIFEROUS ALKALINE MINERALS.

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UNDER this head are included such minerals as consist chiefly of an alkali united with an acid; but several of them are very impure in their native state.

### NITRATE OF POTASH.

Nitre, Naturlischer Salpeter, W. Potasse Nitratée, H. Prismatic Nitre Salt, M.

Contains potash 46.46, nitric acid 53.54.

Sp. Gr. 1.9—2.0.

Primary form a rhombic prism of about  $60^\circ$  and  $120^\circ$ . Occurs in crusts, and in capillary crystals, of which the forms are not discernible; it is whitish or yellow; is translucent or transparent; brittle; saline, and cooling to the taste: it deflagrates when placed on a hot coal, and detonates with combustible substances.

It occurs on or near the surface of the earth, on old walls, &c. In Hungary, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and in many of the plains of Spain, it is found in considerable quantities. It is also common in India, especially on a large plain near Agra in Bengal. The mountainous regions of Kentucky, which are calcareous and full of caverns, afford it to the inhabitants of North America. In South America, the plains bordering the sea near Lima are covered with it. It is not however produced naturally to an extent sufficient for its multiplied uses; and is therefore principally procured artificially from the decomposition of animal and vegetable substances.

Nitre is employed in medicine, the arts, and in metallurgy for assisting the processes of oxidating and smelting; but its principal, if not its chief use, is in the manufacture of gunpowder, for which that imported from Egypt is most esteemed, as it contains the least calcareous matter. Gunpowder consists of seventy-six parts of nitre, nine of sulphur, and fifteen of light charcoal.