

# SALT

## ITS ROMANTIC HISTORY AND THE STORY OF HOW IT IS MINED AND HOW IT IS REFINED

By Mason Gould

Modern Technology has brought us such an abundance of things that we take them for granted. We forget that not so many years ago they were either non-existent or so scarce that blood was shed in struggles for their control.

Salt is such a product. Without it in your body, you would quickly die. Have you ever realized, as you casually sprinkle your food with salt, that its scarcity was one of the major causes of the bloody French Revolution?

Yes, salt (sodium chloride or NaCl), has had a colorful history. References to it date all the way back to 2700 B.C., indicating the vital role played by this now common compound. Marco Polo spoke of it. So did the Bible. So did Plato and Homer and Shakespeare in their famous works.

### USED AS MONEY

In old China, salt was second only to gold in value. Salt cakes, bearing the stamp of the Great Khan, were used as money in Tibet during the 13th Century. Slaves were once sold in exchange for salt on the Gold Coast of Africa. And in the days of the Roman legionnaires, soldiers received part of their pay in salt or were given a "salarium" (allowance to buy their ration of salt). Hence our present word "salary" and the expression, "He's not worth his salt". Salt is still used as money in some parts of Africa and the South Sea Islands.

No article of food has been so ruthlessly exploited by rulers to keep down their people as salt. The most famous example is the salt tax in France in the 18th Century. A small, favored group was given the right to refine and sell salt at prices too high for the poor to pay. So when the poor tried to produce salt by evaporating sea water, they were imprisoned, and tortured, or in the event of a second offense, sent to their deaths by hanging. This abuse helped to stir up the French Revolution.

In 1930, Mahatma Ghandi and his followers led a revolt against the salt tax in India.

### IMPORTANT ROLE IN WARS

Salt has played an important part in wars, too. One of the reasons why Napoleon was forced to retreat from Moscow was because he ran out of salt for his troops. This deficiency caused low resistance to infection. Many of his soldiers' wounds, though not serious at first, proved fatal.

The early American pioneers, during their surge westward, fought the Indians over valuable salt licks.

And during the Civil War, the North successfully waged a campaign to cut off the South's salt supply at the Saltville, Virginia works.

### VITAL TO DIET

Why is salt so important? Because if it were left out of your diet, you would soon die. And that goes for animals as well as humans. Salt is present in your blood and tissues. It governs the exchange of water in your tissues and maintains the proper osmotic pressure. Your body is continually throwing off salt through your kidneys and glands, so it must be replaced. Every adult needs two-thirds of an ounce of salt every day.

### 14,000 USES

At the last count, there were more than 14,000 ways in which salt can be used. In the United States, world's leading producer of salt, salt used in the manufacture of chemicals is the chief use. Dry salt for livestock ranks second, and salt for household use is in third place.

Salt is used in the food industry in meat and fish curing, in canning, and in producing many products. It is used in the home for seasoning food, freezing ice cream, removing soot, cleaning teeth, and melting ice and snow from the walk and driveway. It is used on the farm for feeding livestock, salt hay, controlling weeds, and as an