

duce their calcareous deposits, which rapidly accumulate, and eventually rise to the very surface of the water. Then the wrack and débris of every kind which the sea carries to and fro, arrested in their wayward undulations by these submerged masses—retained upon these new-born islands—form on their surface a stratum of fertile soil. Here the rich growth of a tropical vegetation is duly developed, thanks to the seeds transported by the waves and the ocean-birds. Thus are formed in the Pacific Ocean the beautiful ring-like Islands of Coral.

Generally they are thickly wooded.

It almost always happens that the summits of the coral islands which emerge simultaneously around another submarine summit,



FIG. 209.—CORAL ISLAND OF OENO.

unite in an almost perfect circle, whose centre is occupied by a small clear lake. The waters of this lagoon contain a great number of shells, which produce pearls and nacre. Such are the islands of Oeno and Whitsunday, in the archipelago of Pomotou, visited by Captain Beechey. In due time this cincture enlarges laterally; the openings which gave access to its interior basin are closed; and when that basin has been filled up or run dry, the “fairy-ring of ocean” assumes very nearly the aspect of ordinary islands. The archipelagoes of the Maldives, the Chagoes, and the Laccadives, to the south of the great Indian peninsula, are of madreporic origin. Among the coral