

habitation for a race of animalcules, from their soft texture most obnoxious to external injuries; but which is calculated to resist the utmost action of the sea, and in many instances to protect the original surface of the earth itself from its assaults. Thus almost all the tropical islands; which Cook saw in the South Pacific Ocean, are guarded from the sea, to a greater or less extent, by a reef of coral rocks, extending out from the shore to the distance of six hundred feet and farther; and on this reef the force of the sea is spent before it reaches the land: and thus nature has effectually secured these islands from the encroachments of the sea, though many of them are mere points when compared with that vast ocean ^h.

As the specific gravity of coral is greater than that of sea-water, the structure of a coral reef necessarily commences either from the natural bed of the ocean, or from the surface of some submarine rock; and, as may be collected from the nature of the soundings among coral reefs, the whole structure is very frequently disposed in the form of a crescent; sometimes even approaching to a circle. This crescent is, on the convex side, built up throughout in very nearly a perpendicular direction; so as to form a wall, which is exposed to that quarter from whence a stormy sea most frequently prevails. The in-

^h Cook's Voyage, 1777, 4to. vol. i. p. 212.