

That excellent navigator, the late Captain Flinders, gives the following interesting account of the formation of Coral Islands, particularly of Half-way Island on the north coast of Terra Australis \*.

“ This little island, or rather the surrounding reef, which is three or four miles long, affords shelter from the south-east winds ; and being at a moderate day’s run from Murray’s Isles, it forms a convenient anchorage for the night to a ship passing through Torres’ Strait : I named it *Half-way Island*. It is scarcely more than a mile in circumference, but appears to be increasing both in elevation and extent. At no very distant period of time, it was one of those banks produced by the washing up of sand and broken coral, of which most reefs afford instances, and those of Torres’ Strait a great many. These banks are in different stages of progress : some, like this, are become islands, but not yet habitable ; some are above high-water mark, but destitute of vegetation ; whilst others are overflowed with every returning tide.

“ It seems to me, that, when the animalcules which form the corals at the bottom of the ocean cease to live, their structures adhere to each other, by virtue either of the glutinous remains within, or of some property in salt water ; and the interstices being gradually filled up with sand and broken pieces of coral washed by the sea, which also adhere, a mass of rock is at length formed. Future races of these animalcules erect their habitations upon the rising bank, and die in their turn, to increase, but principally to elevate, this monument of their wonderful labours. The care taken to work perpendicularly in the early stages, would mark a surprising instinct in these diminutive creatures. Their wall of coral, for the most

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\* Vol. II. p. 114, 115, 116.