

islets distinguished as *atolls** some are of such recent date that their birth was witnessed by our fathers.

Accumulations of coral masses form in the waters of Oceania an incredible number of reefs.

The great islands of that newly-formed archipelago are surrounded, through the slow labour of the polypes, by a barrier of reefs, rising at a certain distance from the coast, and rendering the approach both difficult and dangerous. The eastern coast of New Holland is fenced, between the 9th and 25th parallels of south latitude, by a cincture

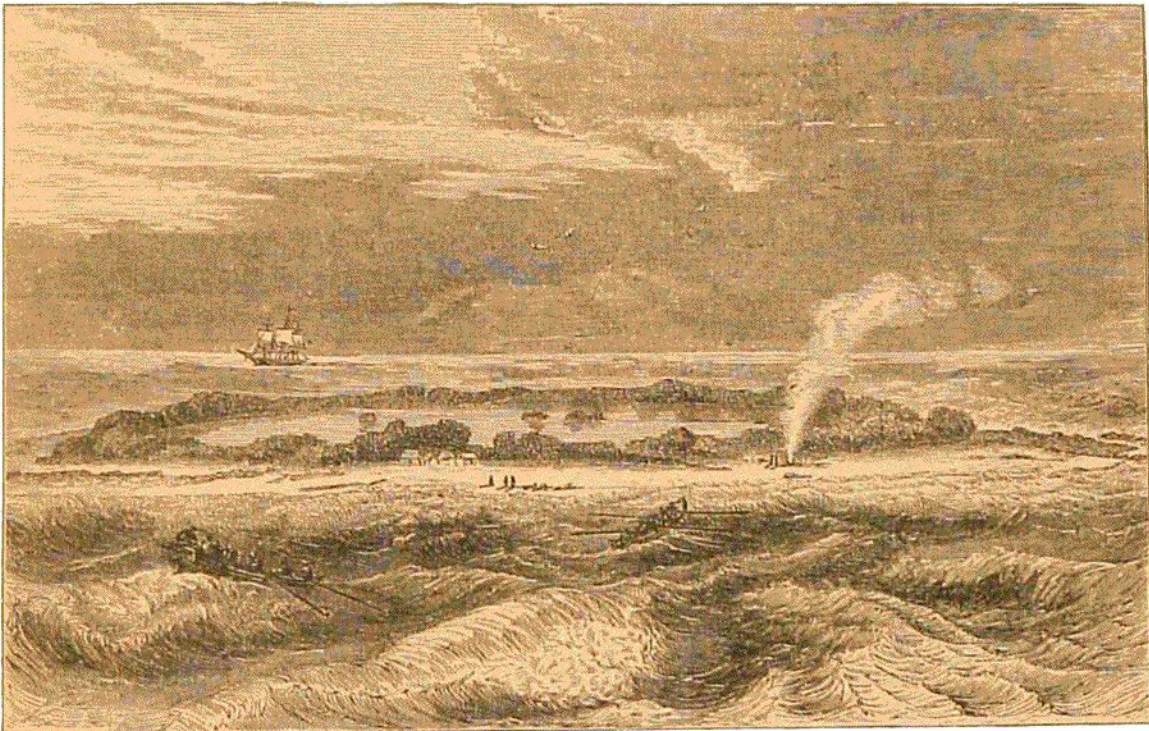


FIG. 210.—WHITSUNDAY ISLAND.—(After Beechey.)

of this description. The coral bank known as the *Great Barrier Reef* is 1200 miles in length, with a breadth varying from 200 yards to a mile, and at an average distance of from 20 to 30 miles from the shore, increasing at some points to 60 and even 70 miles.

[The roll of the billows against this formidable rampart offers a magnificent spectacle. The long ocean-swell, says Mr. Jukes, lifts itself in one great continuous ridge of deep blue water, which, curling over, falls on the edge of the reef in an unbroken cataract of dazzling white foam. Each line of breaker runs often one or two miles in

* Alfred Maury, "La Terre et L'Homme," p. 118.