

“ Encircling reefs differ in no respect from the atoll ring, except in having islands in their lagoons, surrounded also by coral reefs. Barrier reefs are of the same structure as the atoll rings, from which they only differ in their position with regard to land. They form extensive lines along the coast, from which they are separated by a channel of the sea of variable depth and breadth, sometimes large enough for ships to pass. A very long one runs parallel to the west coast of New Caledonia, and stretches for 120 miles beyond the extremity of the island. But a barrier reef off the north-eastern coast of the Australian continent is the grandest coral formation existing. Rising at once from an unfathomable depth of ocean, it extends for 1000 miles along the coast, with a breadth varying from 200 yards to a mile, and at an average distance of from 20 to 60 or 70 miles from the coast, the depth of the channel being from 10 to 60 fathoms. The pulse of the ocean, transcendently sublime, beats perpetually in peals of thunder along that stupendous reef, the fabric of almost microscopic beings.”—*Mrs. Somerville, “Molecular and Microscopic Science”* (London, 1869), ii. 148, *et seq.*