

CORALS AND CORAL ISLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

CORALS AND CORAL MAKERS.

A SINGULAR degree of obscurity has possessed the popular mind with regard to the growth of corals and coral reefs, in consequence of the readiness with which speculations have been supplied and accepted in place of facts; and to the present day the subject is seldom mentioned without the qualifying adjective *mysterious* expressed or understood. Some writers, rejecting the idea which science had reached, that reefs of rocks could be due in any way to "animalcules," have talked of electrical forces, the first and last appeal of ignorance. One author, not many years since, made the fishes of the sea the masons, and in his natural wisdom supposed that they worked with their teeth in building up the great reef. Many of those who have discoursed most poetically on zoöphytes have imagined that the polyps were mechanical workers, heaping up the piles of coral rock by their united labours; and science is hardly yet rid of such terms as polypary, polypidom, which imply that each coral is the constructed hive or house of a swarm of polyps, like the honeycomb of the bee, or the hillock of a colony of ants.