

II. STRUCTURE OF CORAL ISLANDS.

I. FORMS AND GENERAL FEATURES.

Coral islands resemble the reefs just described, except that a lake or lagoon is incircled instead of a mountainous islands. A narrow rim of coral reef, generally but a few hundred yards wide, stretches around the inclosed waters. In some parts the reef is so low that the waves are still dashing over it into the lagoon; in others it is verdant with the rich foliage of the tropics. The coral-made land, when highest, is seldom more than ten or twelve feet above high tide.

When first seen from the deck of a vessel, only a series of dark points is descried just above the horizon. Shortly after the points enlarge into the plumed tops of cocoa-nut-trees, and a line of green, interrupted at intervals, is traced along the water's surface. Approaching still nearer, the lake and its belt of verdure are spread out before the eye, and a scene of more interest can scarcely be imagined. The surf, beating loud and heavy along the margin of the reef, presents a strange contrast to the prospect beyond,—the white coral beach, the massy foliage of the grove, and the embosomed lake with its tiny islets. The colour of the lagoon water is often as blue as the ocean, although but ten or twenty fathoms deep; yet shades of green and yellow are intermingled, where patches of sand or coral-knolls are near the surface; and the green is a delicate apple shade, quite unlike the ordinary muddy tint of shallow waters.

The belt of verdure, though sometimes continuous around the lagoon, is usually broken into islets separated by varying intervals of bare reef; and through one or more of these intervals a ship-channel often exists opening into the lagoon. The larger coral islands are thus a string of islets along a line of reef.

These lagoon islands are called *atolls*, a word of Maldivian origin. The king of the Maldives bears the high-sounding