

as liable to be upheaved and depressed by it as those of unquestionable igneous origin. With so great and powerful an agent at hand, it seems to me there is no necessity for resorting to a cause inadequate of itself, and at variance with the facts. It seems almost absurd to suppose that these immense reefs should have been raised by the exertions of a minute animal, and positively so to explain the peculiar mode of construction by which reefs of an annular shape are formed, when in nine cases out of ten they are of other figures.

Those who will examine the charts of the Pacific Ocean, and view the relations which the coral islands bear to one another, as well as the extent of ocean through which they are spread in groups, will entertain but little doubt that many of them which are now separated have at some remote period been joined, and formed extensive tracts of land. They must also be inclined to believe that their alteration and dismemberment have been brought about by the same causes that affect other lands. If this be the case, there would be no difficulty in accounting for the lagoons, as they now present themselves. Before I reached the coral islands, I had derived an impression, from the attempts to explain the manner of their formation, that all the reefs would be found level with the water, and have a uniform surface; but so far from this being the case, they are all irregular and much ruptured, some wholly above the water, others awash, and some again altogether submerged, having various depths of water over them.

As the coral islands have sand and limestone for their base, it would appear possible to account for the formation of the lagoons by supposing that, after the several portions of the pre-existing continent were separated from each other, the outer edge or line of coral, unequally worn by the sea, had become more compact in some cases than in others. Thus, while the border of the island resisted in one place, it might be torn asunder in others, and through the washing influx and efflux of the sea, strata underlying the centre might be carried off into the deep sea in the shape of sand and mud, or in solution. The centre, thus undermined, from want of support would cave in, and form the inverted cone or tunnel-shaped lagoon, generally found in the centre of these islands, surrounded by an outer rim, variable in width and elevation.

Actual observation proves that the reefs and islands are undergoing dissolution, for at many points where former navigators have laid down shoals of coral, none now exist. One reef, in particular, noticed by those who visited Tahiti ten years before we did, was found by Captain Belcher, of H. B. M. ship Sulphur, to exist no longer. This officer states that he visited and surveyed the place where it is laid