The stony part of the lamelliform zoophyte may be likened to an internal skeleton; for it is always more or less surrounded by a soft animal substance capable of expanding itself; yet, when alarmed, it has the power of contracting and drawing itself almost entirely into the cells and hollows of the hard coral. Although oftentimes beautifully coloured in their own element, the soft parts become when taken from the sea nothing more in appearance than a brown slime spread over the stony nucleus.*

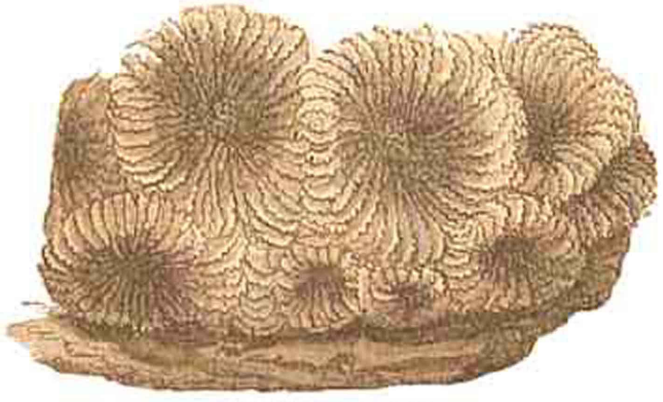
The growth of those corals which form reefs of solid stone is entirely confined to the warmer regions of the globe, rarely extending beyond the tropics above two or three degrees, except under peculiar circumstances, as in the Bermuda Islands, in lat. 32° N., where the Atlantic is warmed by the Gulf stream. The Pacific Ocean, throughout a space comprehended between the thirtieth parallels of latitude on each side of the equator, is extremely productive of coral; as also are the Arabian and Persian Gulfs. Coral is also abundant in the sea between the coast of Malabar and the island of Madagascar. Flinders describes a reef of coral on the east coast of New Holland as having a length of nearly 1000 miles, and as being in one part unbroken for a distance of 350 miles. Some groups of coral islands in the Pacific are from 1100 to 1200 miles in length, by 300 or 400 in breadth, as the Dangerous Archipelago, for example, and that called Radack by Kotzebue; but the islands within these spaces are always small points, and often very thinly sown.

Fig. 85.

Meandrina labyrinthica, Lam.

Of the numerous species of zoophytes which are engaged in the production of coral banks, some of the most common belong to the Lamarckian genera Astrea, Porites, Madrepora, Millepora, Caryophyllia, and Meandrina.

Fig. 86.



Astrea dipsacea, Lam.

* Ehrenberg, Nat. und Bild. der Coralleninseln, &c., Berlin, 1834.