It has been a more popular theory that the coral structures were built upon the summits of volcanoes,—that the crater of the volcano corresponded to the lagoon, and the rim to the belt of land; that the entrance to the lagoon was over a break in the crater, a common result of an eruption. This view was apparently supported by the volcanic character of the high islands in the same seas. But since a more satisfactory explanation has been offered by Mr. Darwin, numerous objections to this hypothesis have become apparent, such as the following:—

a. The volcanic cones must either have been subaerial and then have afterward sunk beneath the waters, or else they were submarine from the first. In the former case the crater would have been destroyed, with rare exceptions, during the subsidence; and in the latter there is reason to believe that a distinct crater would seldom, if ever, be formed.

b. The hypothesis, moreover, requires that the ocean's bed should have been thickly planted with craters—seventy in a single archipelago,—and that they should have been of nearly the same elevation; for if more than twenty fathoms below the surface, corals could not grow upon them. But no records warrant the supposition that such a volcanic area ever existed. The volcanoes of the Andes differ from one to ten thousand feet in altitude, and scarcely two cones throughout the world are as nearly of the same height as here supposed. Mount Loa and Mount Kea, of Hawaii, present a remarkable instance of approximation, as they differ but two hundred feet; but the two sides of the crater of Mount Loa differ three hundred and fourteen feet in height. Mount Kea, though of volcanic character, has no large crater at top. Hualalai, the third mountain of Hawaii, is 4,000 feet lower than Mount Loa. The volcanic summit of East Maui is 10,000 feet high, and contains a large crater; but the wall of the crater on one side is 700 feet lower than the highest point of the mountain; and the bottom of the crater is 2,000 feet below the rim of the crater. Similar facts are presented by all volcanic regions.

c. It further requires that there should be craters over fifty