CHAPTER IV.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF CORAL REEFS AND ISLANDS.

THE distribution of coral reefs over the globe depends on the following circumstances, arising from the habitudes of polyps already explained.

1. The temperature of the ocean.

2. The character of coasts as regards (*a*) the depth of water,—(*b*) the nature of the shores,—(*c*) the presence of streams.

3. Liability to exposure to destructive agents, such as volcanic heat.

It has been stated (p. 255) that *reef-growing* corals will flourish in the hottest seas of the equator, and over the ocean, wherever the average temperature of the waters during the coldest month of winter is not below 68° F. The isothermal line of this temperature (or isocryme) forms, therefore, the boundary line of the coral-reef seas. Other corals not forming reefs grow in colder seas (p. 255), but to those we do not now refer.

This line traverses the oceans between the parallels 26° and 30°, or in general near 28°. But, as has been stated, in the vicinity of the continents it undergoes remarkable flexures from the influence of oceanic currents, the polar currents bending it toward the equator, while the tropical cause a divergence. From a comparison of the thermometrical