

the sea. The transit of Venus across the sun's disk was to take place on June 3, 1769. At the request of the Royal Society, the Government granted the "Endeavour" to convey an astronomer to one of the islands of the Pacific Ocean. Cook, with Green, an astronomer from the Royal Observatory, and Banks, the naturalist, started from Plymouth on August 26, 1768, and reached Tahiti on April 12 following. After the observations had been taken during the transit, Cook completed the map of Tahiti (Otaheite), and within the subsequent twelvemonth the navigator had explored with every hydrographic detail the great archipelago of the Society Islands, surveyed the two islands of New Zealand, traced the whole eastern coast-line of New Holland for a distance of more than 1600 miles, and discovered Torres Strait, thus showing that Australia was an island.

The great discoveries of Cook, by demonstrating beyond doubt that neither New Zealand nor New Holland formed part of an Austral continent, considerably discouraged the view of the existence of any southern continent. The Royal Society, wishing to solve once for all this important question, induced the Government to fit out a new expedition to the South Seas. Cook set sail again with the "Resolution" and "Adventure," accompanied by the naturalists Forster, father and son. In this voyage, commencing in 1772, Cook circumnavigated the South Sea in its highest latitudes, and crossed it in such a manner as to leave no room for the supposition of an Austral continent, unless at the pole.¹

The great navigator in his last expedition, during which he was massacred by the savages of the Sandwich Islands, worthily crowned his career. During that expedition he surveyed and drew the general outlines of north-west America, from the point where the Spanish explorations and those of Drake and Bering stopped, thus showing exactly the region where the extremity of the American continent approaches the furthestmost point of Asia, and pointing out the real direction in which a passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific was to be sought.

It has already been noted that Hipparchus thought Ceylon a part of a southern continent, and that Ptolemy enclosed by his Southern Ethiopia the Indian Sea, which thus became a mediterranean. In the sixteenth century, when the Ptolemaic geographical notions were revived, geographers thought they had discovered the southern continent in New Guinea. At the time of Cook's embarkation people still regarded New Zealand as part of this great Austral land. Up to that time many learned men could only conceive the equilibrium of the globe by supposing the existence of a polar continent in the south to counterbalance the accumulation of land in the northern hemisphere.²

The observations of Cook are very numerous and remarkably precise; they are a storehouse of data for geography, terrestrial physics, and the natural sciences. The most important fact to be noticed, however, is that after these voyages of the famous English explorer the chart of the Pacific, until then almost a blank, differed but little from that

¹ See Rainaud, *Le Continent Austral*, Paris 1893, p. 437.

² See Dalrymple, *An Historical Collection of Voyages in the South Pacific*, London, 1770.