vast oceanic basin, which, under the tropics, extends over 145° of longitude, the *Great Ocean*, in contradistinction to all other seas. The southern and western hemispheres (reckoning the latter from the meridian of Teneriffe) are therefore more rich in water than any other region of the whole earth.

These are the main points involved in the consideration of the relative quantity of land and sea, a relation which exercises so important an influence on the distribution of temperature, the variations in atmospheric pressure, the direction of the winds, and the quantity of moisture contained in the air, with which the development of vegetation is so essentially connected. When we consider that nearly three fourths of the upper surface of our planet are covered with water,* we shall be less surprised at the imperfect condition of meteorology before the beginning of the present century, since it is only during the subsequent period that numerous accurate observations on the temperature of the sea at different latitudes and at different seasons have been made and numerically compared together.

The horizontal configuration of continents in their general relations of extension was already made a subject of intellectual contemplation by the ancient Greeks. Conjectures were advanced regarding the maximum of the extension from west to east, and Dicæarchus placed it, according to the testimony of Agathemerus, in the latitude of Rhodes, in the direction of a line passing from the Pillars of Hercules to Thine. This line, which has been termed *the parallel of the diaphragm of Dicæarchus*, is laid down with an astronomical accuracy of position, which, as I have stated in another work, is well worthy of exciting surprise and admiration.† Strabo, who was probably influenced by Eratosthenes, appears to have been so firmly convinced that this parallel of 36° was the maximum of the extension of the then existing world, that he supposed it had some intimate connection with the form of the earth, and therefore places under this line the continent whose existence

* In the Middle Ages, the opinion prevailed that the sea covered only one seventh of the surface of the globe, an opinion which Cardinal d'Ailly (*Imago Mundi*, cap. 8) founded on the fourth apocryphal book of Esdras. Columbus, who derived a great portion of his cosmographical knowledge from the cardinal's work, was much interested in upholding this idea of the smallness of the sea, to which the misunderstood expression of "the ocean stream" contributed not a little. See Humboldt, *Examen Critique de l'Hist. de la Géographie*, t. i., p. 186.

† Agathemerus, in Hudson, *Geographi Minores*, t. ii., p. 4. See Humboldt, *Asie Centr.*, t. i., p. 120–125.