

separate strands, and a fresh, pliant lead-line manufactured by twisting two of these strands together. In this way we made a line of between 4000 and 5000 metres (2150 to 2700 fathoms) long, and could now at last reach the bottom. The depth proved to range between 3300 and 3900 metres (1800 to 2100 fathoms).

This was a remarkable discovery, for, as I have frequently mentioned, the unknown polar basin has always been supposed to be shallow, with numerous unknown lands and islands. I, too, had assumed it to be shallow when I sketched out my plan (see page 24), and had thought it was traversed by a deep channel which might possibly be a continuation of the deep channel in the North Atlantic (see page 28).

From this assumption of a shallow Polar Sea it was concluded that the regions about the Pole had formerly been covered with an extensive tract of land, of which the existing islands are simply the remains. This extensive tract of polar land was furthermore assumed to have been the nursery of many of our animal and plant forms, whence they had found their way to lower latitudes. These conjectures now appear to rest on a somewhat infirm basis.

This great depth indicates that here, at all events, there has not been land in any very recent geological period; and this depth is, no doubt, as old as the depth of the Atlantic Ocean, of which it is almost certainly a part.