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THE AGE OF THE EARTH AS AN ABODE FITTED FOR LIFE.*

§ 1. The age of the earth as an abode fitted for life is certainly a subject which largely interests mankind in general. For geology it is of vital and fundamental importance—as important as the date of the battle of Hastings is for English history—yet it was very little thought of by geologists of thirty or forty years ago; how little is illustrated by a statement,† which I will now read, given originally from the presidential chair of the Geological Society by Professor Huxley in 1869, when for a second time, after a seven years' interval, he was President of the Society:

"I do not suppose that at the present day any geologist would be found *** to deny that the rapidity of the rotation of the earth may be diminishing, that the sun may be waxing dim, or that the earth itself may be cooling. Most of us, I suspect, are Gal- lios, 'who care for none of these things,' being of opinion that, true or fictitious, they have made no practical difference to the earth, during the period of which a record is preserved in stratified deposits."

§ 2. I believe the explanation of how it was possible for Professor Huxley to say that he and other geologists did not care for things on which the age of life on the

* The annual address (1897) of the Victoria Institute, by Lord Kelvin, with additions written at different times from June, 1897, to May, 1898. Printed also in the Philosophical Magazine.
† In the printed quotations the italics are mine in every case, not so the capitals in the quotation from Page's Text-book.
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