

How Long Will the World Last ?

Taking the present population of the world at 1500 millions, or thereabout, we have reason to suppose that each of us, has only 200,000 tons of fuel to serve his wants. The average householder might consider this a pretty fair allowance, but what about the manufacturer and the shipowner? It would not keep an Atlantic greyhound long afloat.

Lord Kelvin, basing his calculations on the existing rate of increase in the population, and development of industries requiring fuel, has arrived at the conclusion that it cannot last for more than five hundred years. That is not the worst of it. In burning up this fuel the oxygen of the atmosphere will be consumed, and carbonic acid formed, so that in four hundred years, a century before the fuel is done, the air will be unfitted to sustain life.

Humboldt and others foresaw the exhaustion of the coalfields, but it remained for the penetrating genius of Lord Kelvin to point out the failure of oxygen. We are standing face to face, then, with two sources of extermination. Animals cannot live without oxygen to breathe, and man—at all events, the civilised man—cannot live without fuel to burn.

The outlook may well give us pause in the race for wealth and power, in the preparation of armaments, and the struggle for empire. What is the good of it all, if the world is coming to an end in four hundred years, perhaps earlier? Would it not be wiser to sink our differences, and try to make a good end? The beginning and the middle has not been all that it might have been.—*Cassell's Magazine.*
