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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

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the assertion that "God is unknowable" is false. In dealing with the subject, it will be necessary in the first place to consider what is involved in the terms "knowable" and "unknowable."

The word "*knowable*" is, as all are aware, an adjective derived from the verb "to know," and this means—1st, "to perceive with certainty"; 2nd, "to distinguish"; and 3rd, "to recognise." Thus, then, by the "knowable" is meant that which is capable of being discovered or recognised, ascertained or understood. The "*unknowable*," therefore, is that which cannot be discovered or recognised, understood or ascertained. It will be necessary to keep prominently before the mind these definitions when examining Mr. Spencer's arguments by which he strives to prove that, if there be a God, He must of necessity be to man the "Unknowable." In the second place, it will be necessary to show the fallacy with which Mr. Spencer starts, and on which he bases his argument to prove that God is the "Unthinkable" and the "Unknowable."

Mr. Herbert Spencer, in his *First Principles*, ch. ii. "Ultimate Religious Ideas," asserts that the human mind cannot form an adequate idea of the world as a whole—that is, the mind cannot have a conception of the world,—a conception properly so called, but only what he terms a symbolic conception. He says:—

"When on the sea-shore we note how the hulls of distant vessels are hidden below the horizon, and how of still remoter vessels only the uppermost sails are visible, we realise with tolerable clearness the slight curvature of that portion of the sea's surface which lies before us. But when we seek in imagination to follow out this curved surface as it actually exists, slowly bending round until all its meridians meet in a point eight thousand miles below our feet, we find ourselves utterly baffled. We cannot conceive in its real form and magnitude even that small segment of our globe which extends a hundred miles on each side of us; much less the globe as a whole. What conception, then, do we form of it? the reader may ask. That its name calls up in us some state of consciousness is unquestionable; and if this state of consciousness is not a conception, properly so called, what is it? The answer seems to be this:—We have learnt by indirect methods that the earth is a sphere; we have formed models approximately representing its shape and the distribution of its parts; generally, when the earth is referred to, we either think of an indefinitely-extended mass beneath our feet, or else, leaving out the actual earth, we think of a body like a terrestrial globe; but, when we seek to imagine the earth as it really is, we join these two ideas as well as we can, and such perceptions as our eyes give us of the earth's surface we couple with the conception of a sphere. And thus we form of the earth, not a conception, properly so called, but only a symbolic conception." *

* *First Principles*, 2nd ed., chapter ii. pp. 25, 26.

But is Mr. Spencer right in the assertion that the mind of man is not able to form a true concept of the size of the earth? We think he is not right. We admit that there are many persons who, from a want of extended observation, may not be able to form a true concept of the size of the earth, and we are quite willing to admit that Mr. Herbert Spencer, like the writer, may be one of these individuals: but we maintain that he is altogether wrong when he says the *human mind* is not able to form the concept. In point of fact, Mr. Spencer asserts that there is no one to be found who can form this particular concept. To this we demur. Let us put away from our thoughts, ourselves, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and his followers, and take the case of a sea-captain who has many times sailed round the world. Such a man has had many opportunities of observing the curvature of the earth: he has noted the number of miles which he has travelled, each of which he knew was a portion of a curved surface; and putting his knowledge of continuous curvature to his knowledge of distance, he *knows* that the thousands of miles which he has travelled have been on an ocean which is not an extended plain, but a part of a sphere: and then, when he, after a number of days, finds himself entering the same port from which he started, he has an evidence that the earth is a sphere, and the records of his log-book prove that this sphere is twenty-five thousand miles in circumference. This man can, we say, form a true concept of the shape and size of the earth without the aid of any symbol. Now, what one sea-captain can do, a thousand others can do, and so we maintain that Mr. Spencer is altogether wrong when he asserts that the human mind is unable to form a true concept of the size and form of the earth on which we live. His argument in this particular is fallacious.

In the third place, it will be necessary to examine Mr. Spencer's application of this fallacious argument. Having thus shown, as he supposes, that there are tangible things of which the mind of man can form no true concept, Mr. Spencer next proceeds to apply his argument, and endeavours to prove that, concerning the origin of the world and the Person of God, man can also form no intelligible idea.

Respecting the origin of the universe, Mr. Spencer says three ideas are possible:—

1st.—That the universe is “self-existent”; 2nd, that it is “self-created”; and 3rd, that it is created by an external agency. He then examines separately these hypotheses, and endeavours to show that each is “unthinkable.” From this he infers that the origin of the universe is one of the things

which, being "unthinkable," is therefore "unknowable." His line of argument is something like the following:—

A self-existent universe implies a universe existing without a beginning, but existence without a beginning is inconceivable.

2nd.—A self-created universe is not conceivable, because before the universe existed, there must have been nothing, and that nothing must have itself produced something, and this is inconceivable.

3rd.—A universe created by external agency is inconceivable, because the human mind cannot link into one proposition something and nothing.

Thus, then, according to Mr. Spencer, the origin of the universe is proved to reside in the region which our minds cannot enter. It lies on the other side of the line which limits the "knowable." Well, suppose this to be so. What then? Are we to refuse to believe that the universe was created by external agency, because we cannot form a just conception of how such a thing can be? See where such a conclusion would lead us! Mr. Ground, in his *Spencer's Structural Principles Examined*, well says, concerning this:—

"'To conceive,' 'to know,' 'to comprehend,' is to stand in mental relation to the thing comprehended. That thing comprehended is the objective fact, and to comprehend it is to stand in mental or subjective relation to it. Consequently, to conceive or comprehend the origin of the universe would demand that the being who conceived that origin should stand in mental relation to it. Now, the 'origin of the universe' is that precise operation which took place when the primal origin 'nothing' passed into 'something.' 'Nothing' is one of the limits of the proposition, 'something' is the other. But, as 'nothing' cannot be conceived by us, the only possible mode of our standing in relation to the origin of the universe would be by ourselves beholding that origin. In no other way could the concept come before us. But before we could behold that origin we must ourselves be existent.

"Now, by the hypothesis, we form no part of the originated universe, because we are to be present at its origin. Clearly, therefore, we could be existing and beholding at the origin only by being ourselves the originator. That is to say, to conceive the origin of the universe is an operation possible only to the Creator! One of the things 'unknowable' is thus shown to reside in the realm where Deity only can enter. All that Mr. Spencer shows is that man is not God, which is a truism needing no logic to prove."

Much in the same way, Mr. Spencer argues as to the nature of the universe, and the Person of God, which he holds to be also "Unknowable." Stripped of its figures, and reduced to a number of propositions, the reasoning of the Agnostic is this: "Because I am not myself the Infinite and the Absolute, I decline to believe in the existence of any Infinite and Absolute Personality. Because I am not myself the Supreme God, I decline to believe that there is any

Personal God. Because I do not comprehend in myself the entire Totality of Existence, I decline to believe there is any person who does comprehend that Totality."

But such reasoning as this is unphilosophic. As well might a man say, because I do not understand all the principles of a science, I will not believe in that science. A little reflection on the part of any thoughtful person will convince him that he *does* believe in a great many things which he does not entirely comprehend. Many examples of this may be found in the circle of the sciences; such, for instance, as crystallography on the one hand, and mental phenomena on the other. We do not know *why* it is that one substance when it crystallises always assumes the cubic form, while another always assumes the rhomboidal. We do not know how it is that the faculty of memory is able to store up its treasures—keeping each set of facts separate, and reproducing each at will. Why these things are as they are is a question which cannot be answered, and yet we are fully convinced that they are so: both are most certain truths. And in the case of memory, the unknown truth is one which daily influences our actions. If a person were to say, because I cannot understand how it is that my memory can keep the facts of history distinct from the facts of geography, I will not trust either to its keeping, would he not be considered wanting in wisdom, or even sense? In like manner, is not the man wanting in wisdom who says, because I cannot understand the whole nature of God, I will not acknowledge His being, nor my relation to Him as a creature? We think he is.

Admitting, then, for argument sake, that as finite creatures we are not able fully to understand the whole of God's nature,—for "Who by searching can find out God?"—yet we maintain that it is possible to know *something* of Him; enough, in fact, to lead us to revere Him, and enough to enable us to hold conscious intercourse with Him who is the Father of Spirits.

We will now proceed to show how this knowledge is gained.

First Proposition.—*It is beyond doubt that Mind exists in the universe.* Mind is an attribute of personality. Mind, therefore, is one of the phenomena by which we recognise a Personal God.

The existence of mind is an undoubted fact. But its existence independent of matter is denied by some persons. A little reflection, however, will show that the human mind is a distinct thing from the substance of the brain which is its organ.

An illustration taken from the science of physiology may be useful here. Suppose the assertion to be made that the human lungs exhale carbonic acid gas. A person altogether ignorant of the science might say, I cannot see this particular gas, how then am I to know that what is asserted is true? The proof would have to be worked out in the following way. Some lime-water having been procured, the individual would be directed to breathe through a glass tube which had one of its ends immersed in the solution. After breathing for a few seconds, he would be asked to say what he observed. Namely, that the water had assumed a milky appearance; and this, he would be told, was due to the union of carbonic acid gas with the lime held in solution by the water—thus forming a carbonate of lime—chalk—which is of a white colour. As this change was due to the presence of carbonic acid gas, which he had himself put in by breathing, it must have had its origin in the lungs; and so it would be proved beyond doubt that the human lungs do exhale carbonic acid gas. So much, then, for the *physical* fact. But then there is the *mental* fact, the sense of whiteness. How comes this? Is that due to a physical act or a mental phenomenon? Let us see. Colour is produced, we are told, by the length of the rays of light as they impinge upon the retina of the eye, and set up certain currents, which ultimately reach the brain. All, then, that the brain receives is *motion*, but mere motion is not whiteness. How, then, comes the consciousness of the fact? In other words, how can we pass from the mere fact of a nerve-motion to the fact of consciousness? Only, we think, on the hypothesis of an interpreting mind. We conclude, therefore, that there is such a phenomenon as mind. But whence this mind? Mind can only be originated by mind. No effort enables us to think that the motion of a nerve-molecule could ever give birth to that immaterial mind which we have seen present in the individual—that mere motion is intelligent is indeed “unthinkable.” Even Professor Tyndall admits this. His words are well worth careful consideration. He says:—

“What is the causal connexion between molecular motions and states of consciousness? My answer is, I do not see the connexion, nor am I acquainted with anybody who does. It is no explanation to say that the objective and subjective are two sides of one and the same phenomenon. Why should the phenomenon have two sides? This is the very core of the difficulty. There are plenty of molecular motions which do not exhibit this two-sidedness. Does water think or feel when it runs into frost-ferns upon a window-pane? If not, why should the molecular motion of the brain be yoked to this mysterious companion—consciousness? We can form a coherent picture of all the purely physical processes,—the stirring of the brain, the thrilling of the nerves, the discharging of the muscles,

and all the subsequent motions of the organism. We are here dealing with mechanical problems, which are mentally presentable. But we can form no picture of the process whereby consciousness emerges, either as a necessary link, or as an accidental by-product, of this series of actions. The reverse process of the production of motion by consciousness is equally unrepresentable to the mind. We are here, in fact, on the boundary line of the intellect, where the ordinary canons of science fail to extricate us from difficulty."

And Professor Huxley in his *Lay Sermons* says :—

"The man of science, who, forgetting the limits of philosophical inquiry, slides from these formulæ—and symbols into what is commonly understood by Materialism, seems to me to place himself on a level with the mathematician who should mistake the x's and y's with which he works his problems for real entities, and with this further disadvantage, as compared with the mathematician, that the blunders of the latter are of no practical consequence, while the error of systematic Materialism may paralyse the energies and destroy the beauty of a life."

If, then, no effort enables us to travel from one to the other, it is clear that no effort can enable us to think that one originated the other. Mind only, we are forced to think, could originate mind; matter only change into different forms of matter. Now, as the originating mind was the cause of our being, *our own sense of personality enables us to know that God is*, and that He is the Great Intelligence to whom we as intelligent beings should render homage.

Second Proposition.—*If man uses his own intelligence in his study of nature, he will discover that matter in its qualities and combinations is stamped with the seal of intelligence.* Now, as intelligence is one of the attributes of mind, and as mind is an attribute of personality, we see in matter the footprints of a Personal God.

It will be easy to show that the laws which govern inanimate nature, and the organisation which characterises all living things and sentient beings, are each and all stamped with the unmistakable seal of intelligence, and in these we say we can learn something of God, and therefore know Him. A few examples must suffice :—

1. *In the arrangements for the production of the seasons we can recognise the footprints of God.* In consequence of the axis of the earth being inclined twenty-two and a half degrees out of the perpendicular, both poles are brought opposite the sun once in every complete revolution round that orb, and hence the alternation of seasons. Winter, spring, summer, and autumn are secured. If the axis had been either perpendicular or horizontal to its orbit, then there would have

been no variation either in the length of days or in the character of the seasons. Eternal cold in the arctic circles would have caused eternal death in those regions, and the full blaze of summer heat would have beat on the torrid zones. But, in consequence of the present arrangement, every part of the earth is in its turn cheered by the sun, and the total sum of daylight and darkness is the same in all parts of the globe. As a consequence of this, countries which would otherwise have been unproductive are now rendered fertile. Whence, we ask, this benevolent arrangement? If by the unconscious action of unthinking molecules of matter, or by the means of molecular motion, surely the result is very surprising, surpassing thought,—in a word, “unthinkable.” But, given an intelligent Creator, who was working for the good of His creatures, then the present arrangement is perfectly intelligible. And thus as the earth moves on its course it silently, but unmistakably, proclaims the power and wisdom of God, and so we may well say in the words of the Psalmist,—

“The heavens declare the glory of God ;
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night showeth knowledge.”

Or, with the Christian poet,—

“The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
The spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great original proclaim.
The unwearied sun from day to day
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.”

2.—*In the general arrangement of the mountain systems of our globe we see the evidence of God's benevolent work for the good of His creatures.* The students of physical geography know that the elevation of the land is, generally speaking, from the Poles towards the Equator, the culminating point being in the neighbourhood of the tropic of Cancer on the one side and of Capricorn on the other side. One of the effects of this general arrangement is to temper the burning heats of the tropical regions and give them a variety of climate.

If this order were reversed and the elevation of the land went on increasing toward the Arctic and Antarctic circles, that which is the most civilised half of the world at the present day would be a frozen and an uninhabitable desert. And

what would India and Africa be without their mountains? Without the Himalayas no great Mustakh glacier, and without this 36 miles of ice there would have been but puny streams in the place of the mighty rivers of the present day—if, indeed, there would be any rivers at all.

Without the mountains of Abyssinia, there would be no Lake Nyanza or Victoria, and without these no Nile, and what would Egypt be without her one water-course? Without the snows on the mountains of Central Africa, there would be no rising of the Nile, even if the river existed. And without the annual inundation caused by the rise of the Nile, Egypt would long ago have been a great Sahara.

Surely, then, we are justified in attributing the present arrangement in this particular to the operations of intelligence—intelligence guided by benevolence; and hence, as we look at the hills and mountains rearing their summits higher and higher as they approach the equatorial region, we see the marks, the footprints, of a personality,—in other words, the footprints of God, whom we are thus able to recognise, and on those very summits that proclaim His existence we can hold conscious intercourse with their Maker.

3. *We can recognise God in the operations of the laws which govern matter, and in some cases, as with water, the beneficent exception to a general law.* One of the effects of heat is expansion, and the abstraction of heat is accompanied by contraction. Now, water is an exception to this general rule, being expanded both by heat and by cold. Between the temperatures of 40° F. and 212° F. water expands fully one-thirtieth of its bulk; but when it is at 40° F. its greatest density is obtained, and any further cooling causes the water to expand, so that its tendency is to rise and occupy the surface. In this way the top layer is the first to attain the temperature of 32°, and crystallise into a thin film of ice, while below it the water retains its temperature of greatest density of 40°. Now, as neither ice nor water is able to conduct heat with rapidity, they have but little tendency to transmit the cold downwards. Hence, the ice is not only slow in attaining any great thickness, but it also protects the water below from the effects of cold winds and low temperature. Now, if it were not for this exception to the general law, whenever ice was formed it would be at the bottom of rivers and lakes, and they would, in the frigid zones, long ago have become solid blocks of ice, which no summer sun could have melted; and thus death and desolation would have held their sway. But the Divine Mind, seeing the end from the beginning, and having regard for the

welfare of man, whom He intended to place on the earth, arranged this exception; and thus it is that in every piece of ice that is formed we can recognise the stamp of intelligence—the footprint of a personal God.

Third Proposition.—*God can be recognised in the marvels of organisation.* If it is possible to recognise God by His footprints on inorganic matter, it is even more easy to see those footprints in the world of organisation, both animate and inanimate. One example must suffice. It shall be taken from among the lowest forms of animal life,—one of the *Protozoa*, a sponge,—and the particular point shall be the means provided for the oxygenation of the circulatory fluids, and for obtaining food. This lowly creature, like all animals, must be nourished by food. It is, however, except as a germ, fixed during the whole of its life, and so is unable to go in search of its prey. What, then, must be done? The food must be brought to it. How is this accomplished? Thus: Its internal structure consists of a number of canals and cavities. The cavities are furnished with numerous delicate cilia, and these ciliated cavities are in connexion with an incurrent and excurrent system of canals. The former are connected with numerous pores, which are periodically opened and closed in the dermal membrane: the latter are in direct connexion with the oscula, as the permanent open channels are called. When, therefore, the pores are opened, and the cilia which line the cavities are moved rapidly, the water in them is set in motion, and passes out by the oscula, more water, of course, passing in to take the place of that which flows out, and thus a constant current is produced. The water, as it passes through the structure, brings with it both the oxygen and the food which are necessary for the support of the creature.

Thus, then, whenever we look at such a lowly creature as the common sponge, we can, if we are so minded, see the evidences of both power and wisdom; and as these are the attributes of personality, we can in them see or recognise God; and if we can recognise Him, we must know Him. And so we are bold enough to say that when Mr. Herbert Spencer asserts that God is “Unknowable,” he is asserting what is not true. We know that everywhere we are surrounded with the evidence of God’s existence in the marks of intelligence which are stamped on matter. We can recognise His footsteps impressed, as it were, on the laws which govern matter, and also on the wonders of organisation. And, if we thus recognise His presence in His works, we can know Him—that is,

we can know Him as a God of power, a God of wisdom, and a God of benevolence. True, we may not know all that is to be learnt of God, for He is the Infinite, and we are finite. We are, as it were, but one of the little streams which run down the mountain-sides, while He is the mighty ocean, and of course the lesser cannot contain the whole of the greater. Man's mind is but a part of the fulness of the Creator, and so it cannot contain the whole; but yet, as it is a part, it is able to recognise and understand something of the nature of its great Original, and so we maintain that God is known by His works, and known, not as a mere abstraction, but as a Being. Every blade of grass that springs up out of the ground, every tiny insect that flies in the air, every sentient being that walks the earth, and every law of nature bears the impress of intelligence; and thus we can know enough of God to lead us to acknowledge His power and give Him our service. And what the understanding fails to grasp, for want of capacity, faith, the soul's eye and hand, perceives and embraces; and thus there is an inward realisation that "this God is our God for ever and ever, and that He will be our guide even unto death."

Fourth Proposition.—*God has made a revelation to man of those things which could not otherwise be known.* Having shown why we consider God to be in a measure "knowable," and having conceded the point that, inasmuch as God is an Infinite Being and man but finite, there must of necessity be in His nature much which cannot be found out, we pass to the consideration of the means by which the unknowable element in the knowable may be known.

Those persons who receive the teaching of Mr. Herbert Spencer consider that a revelation from God to man is not "conceivable," is not "thinkable," and therefore they do not accept the Bible as a book containing such a revelation. To such we offer the following considerations:—

First.—It is beyond doubt that man is able to recognise in himself a personality which is endowed with a certain freedom of will. And it is also beyond doubt that man's mind—that is, the power by which he becomes conscious of his own personality—owes its existence to a greater mind, a greater Personality, who by the very act of bestowing it on man proved He possessed absolute power to communicate. In other words, it is beyond doubt that the Divine Mind did at the first endow man with a mind—did, in fact, communicate to man a quality found only in connexion with personality.

Second.—Admitting that the communication of the Divine

Mind with the human mind may be a mystery, its mysteriousness is no valid ground for its denial. There are many things in nature which are mysteries, and yet we know them to be facts. Thus the transmission of the magnetic force is a mystery. Every student of science knows that the attractive force of the magnet can pass through both solids and liquids, as well as through gases. But not even a Faraday nor a Tyndall can explain how it is done. There stands the fact that the intangible power penetrates the solid mass, and passes through it without losing any of its properties in its passage; but to the question, How is this accomplished? there is no answer. What is true, in this particular, of magnetism, is true also of many other forces of nature. If, then, there be mysteries connected with the physical sciences which we cannot unravel, and yet we believe in them, why should we hesitate to accept the mystery of the communication of the Divine Mind with the human mind? In other words, why should we doubt the possibility, or probability, of a revelation from God concerning those things which relating to Himself and man's future could not otherwise be known? Admitting, then, the possibility, and assuming the probability, of a revelation from God, it may naturally be asked, Are the Scriptures as we have them a Divine revelation? are they the communication of the Divine Mind to certain individuals?

In considering this part of the subject, it will be necessary to notice the ways in which the Divine Mind could communicate His will to His creatures.

In the first place, it is conceivable that God could, if He pleases, make known His will to man through the instrumentality of angels. But such a revelation would need to be constantly repeated, in order that each succeeding generation might be made acquainted with the truth thus made known. In the second place, it is conceivable that God could, if He pleases, make known His will to man by the instrumentality of language, or mental suggestions—God himself speaking to man either by an audible voice, or by silent suggestion, or by visions. If it is possible, as we know it is, for an intangible force to pass into a solid body, producing—as in the case of heat—an alteration in the condition of the body, why should it be considered impossible for the Divine Mind to pass into the human mind, and thus reveal truths which could not otherwise be known. Nor is it unreasonable to believe that God can, if He pleases, grant to man visions of Himself, and thus hold converse with His creatures. And so we claim the right to adopt the language of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and say, "God

having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”* This revelation, which we call the Bible, in its entirety puts man in possession of all he requires to know respecting God’s character and his own responsibility to his Maker in this present world, and his relation to Him in the future.

The full consideration of the various evidences which may be adduced to prove that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are what they profess to be does not come within the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say, that when those evidences are submitted to the test of reason, they are found to be credible.

First.—There stands the fact that some of its writers uttered predictions respecting persons and places which were in subsequent times fulfilled to the very letter.

Second.—There stands the fact, that the writings of forty individuals living in different places, and embracing a period of sixteen centuries, are on examination found to have a perfect unity; and running through them all there is a silver line, which, when followed through all its windings, is found to lead to the one incomparable Being, the man Christ Jesus. Surely these things tend to prove that “holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Third.—When the contents of the Bible are carefully examined, they are found to contain revelations of those things which man desires to know. The human soul sighs to know something of the future, and this the Scriptures reveal; man wants to know how the future, which he instinctively believes in, can be spent in happiness, and this the Scriptures reveal. When man looks around him and sees wickedness unpunished and virtue unrewarded, his moral sense is shocked, and he is perplexed. But, when he opens the pages of sacred writ, he finds that there will be a time when virtue will be rewarded, and when vice will be punished, and thus he learns that in the end the God of all the earth will do right, and thus he finds that the revelation which God has given to man in the Scriptures is in harmony with the moral sense of the race.

And this is what might be expected, since God is the infinitely good. Of such a Being it is inconceivable that He, “loving man as His offspring and desiring his welfare, should withhold from him that knowledge which must be the noblest, the most desirable, and the most useful—the knowledge of

* Heb. i. 1, 2.—R. V.

Himself." And this knowledge we have in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and

"This lamp from off the everlasting throne
 Mercy took down ; and in the night of time
 Stands, casting on the dark her gracious bow,
 And evermore beseeching men, with tears,
 And earnest sighs, to hear, believe, and live."

Our work is done. We have shown that God can be known, and is known, by His works ; that those things respecting the nature of the Infinite which could not be discovered by human reason, because it is finite, God has revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments ; and that this revelation is in harmony with the religious sentiments and the moral sense of man, and satisfy the cravings of the human mind by making known the nature and occupation of the future to which all are hastening. And thus we claim the right to place over the assertion of the Agnostics, that God is "Unknowable," the epitaph "Unreasonable," and append the words of Robert Browning :—

"God and the soul the only facts for me.
 Prove them facts ? That they o'erpass my powers
 Of proving proves them such :
 Fact it is I know I know not something
 Which is fact as much."

The CHAIRMAN (D. HOWARD, Esq., V.P.C.S.)—I am sure we shall all join in thanking Mr. Hassell for his valuable paper on a very important subject. It is, perhaps, difficult for some of us to realise how great a need there is for this sort of paper, beginning as it does at the beginning of the questions that are connected with religious thought. I cannot help thinking that the particular type of want of religious thought, which goes by the name of agnosticism, has a twofold cause. There is that weariness of mind which most of us have felt in these days, when so much has to be read and thought of, and which renders a great many subjects of human knowledge simply unknowable, because we have not time to study them ; and thus to many the most important truths of all take, in their minds, the same position that the Zendavesta, or the early history of Roman law, or some of the more recondite problems of modern science, may take in the case of others, namely, that of things which life is really too short to enable them to attend to. It is, I think, a strange habit of mind that can be content with the less important, and leave the more important, subjects ; but, still there are many such, and when people in that mental condition shelter themselves behind the theoretical objection, that, as the common expression goes, God is unknowable, it becomes necessary that, in order to deal with such persons, we should begin at the very beginning, as Mr.

Hassell has done. Of course, it is perfectly true that God is, in one sense, unknowable ; but so are many of the other things we are, nevertheless, most certain of. Our knowledge of the majority of subjects is relative, and does not amount to absolute certainty. For instance, no one man thoroughly knows another ; we none of us know anything of the forces of nature ; no one pretends that he fully knows any of those sciences of which we are so proud ; and yet, we have amply sufficient knowledge to regulate our lives. To nineteen out of every twenty persons, the idealistic hypothesis of Bishop Berkeley is something so absurd that it is very difficult to grasp ; and yet, Bishop Berkeley was much nearer the mark, as a matter of absolute logic, than Mr. Herbert Spencer. It is of no use for us to shut our eyes to the fact that there is another and a more obstinate cause of agnosticism, and that this lies in the will, and not in the intellect. It is more and more evident to those who carefully inquire into the reason for the agnosticism of the present day, that the real difficulty lies in the will, and not in the intellect. It would seem that there is not that will on the part of the agnostics to know God's will, which is the condition precedent of the knowledge of Christ. I do not mean to say this in the way of harsh judgment upon those with whom I differ ; but I do feel that it is our duty, in dealing with our fellow men, to lead them, if possible, to ask themselves—do they really want to understand this important question ? It is of no use to try and teach science to a parcel of country labourers, if they do not wish to be taught, or, if they simply will not learn, because they do not care to know, and merely say, "what is that to oi" ? That class of persons represents the type of which I was speaking just now, and I repeat, that it is useless to speak of anything to a man who has the best, or rather, the worst, of all reasons for not wanting to understand that which it would be exceedingly uncomfortable for him to comprehend and have a knowledge of. You do not suppose it is a very easy thing to make a man understand the law he has broken. The singular want of intelligence in a section of the British mind with regard to questions of our civil law, is wonderful to trace ; but this want of intelligence is much more amazing in the case of the Divine law. When we consider the question of readiness to do God's Will, we must regard it on the widest possible basis. I do not mean that this defect of the will merely attaches to those who are outrageously breaking the Ten Commandments ; because it may be an assertion of a more subtle spiritual pride, which really underlies a great deal of the agnosticism of the present day. I have already spoken of our late President, and I think we cannot but feel that, in his case, the absolute surrender of a free intellect was an act of will—that the anxiety to know and do God's will was the real foundation of his faith. Of course, one finds the same thing in every-day life. There is the obstinate impossibility of understanding which we so constantly meet with. When a person cannot afford to understand us, we have got the best comment we could have on agnosticism itself. If I may allude to a matter that is, at the present moment, somewhat prominent in

most of our minds, I would refer to the singular difficulty that is found in the endeavour to make one political party understand what the other means. Now, this difficulty is, surely, not an intellectual one. There must be some action of the will involved in it; and, although, of course, each of us is profoundly convinced of the wilful obstinacy of the other party, nevertheless, I do think that these practical difficulties of every-day life furnish very important commentaries on the greater and more vital question contained in the paper wherein the author has so clearly treated a point of great importance. I now trust that some of those present will give us the benefit of their thoughts and suggestions on this subject.

Mr. W. GRIFFITH.—Perhaps I may be permitted to make a few remarks on the able paper before us. I would first of all say that one of the difficulties started by Mr. Herbert Spencer is due to the way in which he plays with words, some of which he uses in more senses than one. For instance, I might point out that a thing may be unknowable in one sense, and yet knowable in another. We may not fully know the properties and attributes of each person or thing we come in contact with, and yet, although unknowable in that sense, either may be knowable so far as its existence is concerned. We are well acquainted with the existence of many things in chemistry, and yet we do not understand all the qualities impressed upon them, although as to the fact that the things themselves do exist, that is perfectly knowable to all. Therefore, I think Mr. Herbert Spencer may be to some extent correct when he states that the attributes of power, goodness, and wisdom, are not fully knowable or comprehensible; though, at the same time, that is a very different thing from saying that the existence of a Supreme Being is not knowable; because the existence of a thing may be knowable, although its attributes and qualities are not. I must say that I do not quite agree with those who say that the whole question is merely a matter of opinion, because there are many facts we may adduce that prove the existence of the phenomena we witness. We may regard the universe around us, and those who study the matter cannot fail to be convinced that it furnishes evidence of design. If, then, there is design, there must have been a designer. If there be a human soul with intelligence impressed on its faculties, there must of necessity have been some power possessed of intelligence which implanted that intelligence on our race. I think Mr. Herbert Spencer does, in one of his later works, admit that there is something greater—something beyond the universe which is distinct from matter—that there is, in fact, a great unknowable mind, though he is not able to understand and explain it, and cannot express its limitations in words. I believe I am correct in stating that in one of his later works this is so, and, if it be so, then the assertion that that greater one is unthinkable has nothing in it, and, in reality, falls to the ground. But the more serious part of the case (I speak as a barrister from the brief which the author of the paper has provided me) is that the young students mentioned by the author of the paper, and who it seems must be taken as types of a large class, not only profess themselves unable to understand what no one, Theist or Christian, professes himself fully able to

understand—the existence of the attributes of a Supreme Being—but they also say they do not understand or comprehend the nature of responsibility. This, certainly, is a very important matter, and if we can show that they are in error we shall have made a great advance. It is useless for them to say that general ideas of responsibility do not exist at the present day. The existence of the law courts, the verdicts of juries, the sentences of the judges, show that there is general responsibility which all must admit to exist. There is responsibility under the common law, and it would be folly and absurdity to say there is no responsibility of any kind. Perhaps, however, they may say, “We do admit that; but there our knowledge terminates.” This knowledge is certainly most important as far as it goes. Then we would further answer our students in this way: “You admit a responsibility recognised by law as to a great many duties, and you say the law enforces them all. Are there no duties beyond those which the law would enforce? Is there no such thing as gratitude, parental affection, filial affection? and do not these, in the existing relations of society, imply a certain responsibility on the part of its different members, one towards the other?” I really cannot see what answer they can give to this question. They may say they cannot understand all the grounds of responsibility; but that they must admit many grounds of responsibility do exist I can scarcely think will be denied. Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy*, compared the difficulties of revelation with those found in the existing state of things, and showed that such as were discernible in the one existed also in the other, and that, if we are to be consistent, we must not only give up revelation and our belief in supernatural causes, but we must also give up our belief in the analogy of existing facts, and in natural religion, which obtains amongst all societies and races of men. If this were to be the case, what, I ask, would be the result? It would be found in a complete chaos of thought, which has only to be mentioned in order to show its absurdity. There is no doubt that in the ordinary course of life we do get evidence which is not strictly mathematical and only amounts to probability; but, unless we act on probabilities in our customary business, that business could not be carried on. We are never sure of all our facts. We form an idea of what is most probable, and begin to act accordingly. If we were to act in reference to divine things in the same way as we do in human matters, we should see that we were no more unreasonable in the one than in the other. If persons will only consider the evidence put before them fairly, candidly, and impartially, they will see that there is sufficient evidence as to liability here and retribution hereafter, and upon that evidence they ought to act.

Mr. H. CADMAN JONES.—The reference made to Mr. Herbert Spencer in page 64 gives, I think, an idea that may be worked out to some advantage. We may admit his proposition that the human mind cannot form an adequate conception of the universe as a whole, and that “we cannot conceive in its real form and magnitude even that small segment of the globe which extends a hundred miles on each side of us, much less the

globe as a whole," that we are unable to comprehend this on account of its vastness. Just in the same way we are unable to conceive the distance of the sun from the earth. Ninety millions of miles is such an enormous distance that the mention of it conveys no distinct idea. I have tried to get a more distinct conception of what these figures imply by referring the matter to a comparison founded on the familiar idea of ordinary railway travelling. In a rough sort of way it about comes to this, that if there could be such a thing as a railway from this planet to the sun, and if a messenger had been sent thither by an express train for the purpose of carrying the news of Charles the First's execution, he would, by travelling at full speed all the way, be just about getting to his destination now. This, I think, gives a better idea of the enormous distance between us and the sun than can be got from any statement of mere numbers. The proposition comes to this, from the vastness of the earth we cannot form a distinct idea of it, and just in the same way we cannot form an adequate conception of God. Yet no one can say we have not a great amount of knowledge with regard to the world, its shape and size, as well as other matters. Our knowledge is, doubtless, imperfect; but it does not follow that we know nothing about it. This being so, it cannot be unthinkable. Moreover, we are obliged, from experience, to believe many things which, without that experience, we should pronounce unthinkable. One of the most familiar phenomena is the falling to earth of anything we may let drop. Now, supposing we had been brought up in a place—and it would not require omnipotence to produce such a place—where the effect of gravitation was neutralised, we should be unaware, unless magnetic and electric experiments had been made, of any instance of one body acting on another from a distance; and I am satisfied that, in that case, everybody would have said it was impossible and unthinkable that one body could act on another or exert any influence upon it in that way. The fact is, however, admitted, and few people think of its being a mystery; yet it was a mystery which puzzled so great a mind as that of Newton, and even now we cannot understand how the result is produced, and probably we never shall. At all events, it is not understood, and cannot be explained. Therefore I think it is an idle thing to say we cannot believe anything because we have no conception how it can take place.

MR. TYLER (a Visitor).—Although I do not usually agree with Mr. Herbert Spencer, I was inclined to think, while Mr. Hassell was reading his paper, that I did concur with him, as the last speaker seems to have done, as to our not being able to form any conception of the world as a whole. I do not know whether Mr. Hassell has met with any captain who, having sailed several times round the world, has told him he could form such a conception. Perhaps he has; but, if so, I should be rather inclined to doubt the captain's testimony. The case is somewhat similar with regard to the conception of time. We can form some idea of a small space of time; but, when we have regard to a period of forty or fifty years, I cannot conceive of

any one being able to conceive of that extended duration of time at once. At any rate, I could not do it. With regard to Mr. Hassell's paper, it goes over such a wide range, that if we were to attempt to discuss or criticise it we should be kept here till midnight.

THE AUTHOR.—I am sorry to disagree with my friend, Mr. Tyler. I maintain that a traveller at sea has abundant evidence that he is passing over a curved surface—a portion of a sphere; and, as he speeds his way, day by day, the same kind of evidence will be afforded, and, when he enters the port, after having circumnavigated the globe, the records of his "log" will proclaim the size of the sphere. So much, then, for the idea of space. Then, as to the idea of time; the study of history will, I think, help a person to grasp the idea of the extreme length of periods which have passed, say, for instance, a million of days. We can take the known present space of time included in one day, and, proceeding step by step backwards, we can go from day to day until we reach the period when the Jews were carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, and then, counting backward again for sixty years, we come to a time which is represented by one million of days. Thus, then, we have a conceivable period, of great duration, and so I contend that the mind of man is able to grasp the conception of both space and time. With regard to the question of will, I have only to say that I have not touched upon that subject. I was anxious that my paper should be on the scientific, not on the theological side. My point is, that all men can have, if they like to look for it, abundance of evidence of the existence of a personal God, "in whom they live and move and have their being."

The following subject was then taken up :—