

## THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.\*

BY HENRY FRANK.

SCENE:

*Vision of a revolving globe, enwrapped in bright, floating clouds against the blue back ground of the skies. Gradually the clouds disappear, leaving the globe distinct and clear, whereon betimes appear the various characters and scenes as set forth below.*

MIND:

*(represented by a radiant beam of light shining resplendent above ALL OTHERS, and from which THE VOICE melodiously flows)*

How vast and radiant the realm wherein  
I reign! How far the reaches of my power!  
Naught so minute, but in its breast I lie,  
And view the marvel of its miniature world.  
No sphere so vast, nor systems infinite,  
But I, on wings ethereal, surmount  
Their inmost substance, penetrate and delve  
Into their myriad mysteries, to draw  
Aside the veil of ignorance, which long  
Hath mantled men with terror.

MIND:

No mightier power  
Than mine: No substance, or of adamant,  
Or iron, so firm but I, with magic wit,  
Dissolve to primary elements, and fuse  
Again in subtle unions; a world, mine own,  
Creating, marvellous as Nature's work!  
Crowned thus with kingly thought I reign supreme  
In realms reflective, spurred by Reason, and

\* A Philosophical Allegory Setting Forth an Answer to The Riddle of Life.

Wrapped in Imagination's dazzling robes!  
 I hold abjectly at my feet the slaves  
 Who answer instantly at my command:  
 All things material are my subjects base,  
 Which, void of me, were shapeless and inane;  
 For I am mirror of the rolling orbs,  
 And primal Ether, whence they sprang; of Space  
 And Time, whose only registry am I.  
 I trace the Atom's geometric forms,  
 From crystal sand-grain to a human cell,  
 And read the cosmic secret of the stars.  
 Without me all were naught; for naught exists  
 Save I that was and is and is to be.  
 All penetrant and universal.

BRAIN :

*(a whitish grey cloud, RISING above the horizon catching the radiance of the beam of MIND and reflecting its glory, rolls upward bravely and emits a strong, firm, but pleasing VOICE)*

Hold!

Self deceived, misguided Ministrant,  
 And false Ambassador, of Truth! Thy words  
 Have burned into my blood, and raised my gorge,  
 So conjuring my spirit to resist  
 The fell, erroneous eloquence, thy lips  
 Discourse, that silence, hence, were dastardly.  
 Thy boasted regnancy supreme, thy keen  
 All penetrating presence, wizardry  
 Of wisdom, conjuring of knowledge, and  
 Mastery of Time and Space, are plumes  
 Purloined from crown I wear. Not increate,  
 Art thou, nor I; beginningless, nor free  
 From source evincing earthly origin.  
 No freer thou, than I, to soar, thought-winged,  
 Ethereal realms of space, and essence solve  
 Of the pervasive Substance of all things.  
 Like me thou art of Matter sprung, begot  
 Of That without which heaven and earth were void.

MIND:

Who art thou, thus durst thunder in this court,  
 Rebellious tongue, disquieting our peace?  
 Be silent, or fear judgment dire—

BRAIN:

Withhold

Thy anger, nursed by age-insatiate  
 Ignorance, and sprung from vanity.

MIND:

Seize him, ye guards and servitors of Truth,  
 Who dares with impious tongue our wisdom spurn!  
 Clothed in the regal robes AUTHORITY  
 Bestows, my ears are waxed to his vain speech.

*(here THOUGHTS, KNOWLEDGE, IMAGINATION, descend as small,  
 fleecy clouds, shot with white light, and whirl dizzily around the  
 figure of BRAIN as the following conversation proceeds.*

*REASON represented by a violet tinted cloud of  
 somewhat larger and more compact quality,  
 hovers over the scene in meditative sway)*

THOUGHTS:

Hark! We are servants of King Mind,  
 In whose sovran power we find  
 Privilege to mould our form,  
 Tempered by Time's stress and storm.  
 Mark, our weapon's sharpened edge;  
 Service to our lord we pledge!

BRAIN:

O, foolish foundlings, thy vain master serve;  
 Know ye not, ye change as changeful clouds,  
 When rent by winds, dissolved by suns—

KNOWLEDGE:

*(interrupting)*

Hear, then, Dullard Me,  
 Lord of land and sea,  
 Firm as rooted rock,  
 Storm-waves never shock.  
 In me Mind doth mould  
 Sovranty to hold.

BRAIN :

On vain and foolish offspring of my cells,  
 Thou art but temporary stuff I store,  
 To trade for better substance Time provides  
 Ephemeral is thy being, for today  
 Casts yester's garb and waits tomorrow's guise.

IMAGINATION :

Then, to Me, hark!  
 God's living spark,  
 Worlds new-create,  
 Fashioning Fate.  
 Cosmic space, I,  
 Wind-wing'd fly,  
 For estalling truth,  
 In eld or youth.

BRAIN :

Thou, too, O beauteous child, thy liberty,  
 Like birds, pursuest through the ambient air,  
 Beguiled by native poise or Freedom's wings,  
 And thinkest, unrestrained, thy boundless course.  
 Thy wings are not of air but of the earth,  
 Refined and levitant, yet wove by me.

REASON :

*(approaching calmly)*

Then, I, by my unchallenged right,  
 Assert o'er thee my regnant might,  
 Supreme I stand around Mind's throne,  
 And serve, unswerved, for Truth alone.  
 I find, as Logic by my side,  
 That Mind is right, though thou deride:  
 Naught *is* but Mind; all else is vain,  
 Shadows in shadowy domain.  
 Truth gives consent to Reason's sway,  
 Pursue, thou willest, Error's way.

MIND :

Thou hear'st, Intruder base, the Highest Voice,  
 That speaks within the realm of Mind. Depart

E're all my servitors avenge my wrath,  
And clutch thee in the vise of my stern power.

BRAIN :

Thou art deceived, O fatuous King! E're pass  
The Age, delusion's bandage from thy eyes  
Shall fall, and nobler light thy slaves shall guide.  
These minions, Thoughts, Imagination and  
E'en Knowledge, I do fain commiserate,  
Knowing they are but passing phases of  
Thy changing moods: Truth's bastard children sprung  
From thy all-harboring breast. Soon shalt thou shame  
To honor them, and welcome foundlings fresh,  
From loins that champion a bolder love.

MIND :

Silence, impertinent, preposterous,  
And impious monster! Strike, ye Servitors,  
My faithful guards, else venom'd words encoil  
Our hearts and crush our faith.

THOUGHTS :

KNOWLEDGE :

IMAGINATION :

*(together)*

Monster avaunt

And heed the Master's voice or bare thy breast  
To Vengeful blade!

BRAIN :

Nay, hold thy wrath, for see,  
Far off stands Reason from thy ranks and waits  
My calmer words. Him do I fain address,  
Discardant of thy presence and thy threats.  
He knows that Truth ne'er won by bloody blows;  
Therefore, withdraws from coadjutors false.—  
To him then I appeal.

REASON :

*(meditatively)*

And I attend,

Distraught by thoughts that rend my peace.

MIND:

What, Reason, dost thou halt when crisis grave  
Confronts my sovranly and sway of right?

REASON:

Lord, thou canst reign alone as Truth permits;  
I must all claims heed well and Logic's test  
Apply, that majesty of Truth prevail.  
I shall with swerveless and impartial mien  
Withhold my judgment till the last word's said.

MIND:

I would, in sooth, avoid such menial tilt,  
Nor cross my knighted sword with blade so base.  
But that thy calm, impartial dignity  
Assurance gives, I will thy wish obey.  
My argument is simple—known of all,  
To child as native, as to man mature.  
I am eterne and increate—a beam  
Of Infinite Intelligence that throbs  
In inert atom or in vibrant nerve.  
As sun-ray leaps from fiery breast of heaven's  
Majestic King, and dwells in sod and soil,  
In leaf and bough and flower and fruit, awhile,  
And then returns, its labor finished, to  
Its heavenly source, thus I, sojourning here  
Awhile, in mould of clay, my service done,  
Depart from this dissolving house of earth,  
To seek the heights supernal whence I came.  
Were I but mundane matter, whence my power  
To conjure Memory, the pivot on  
Which Consciousness revolves; yea, what were source  
Of Consciousness itself, no clod of earth  
Contains, nor lifeless matter can express?  
Let me but summons them that they themselves  
Divulge the secret of their being:

BRAIN:

*(interrupting with eagerness)*

I

Consent and gladly hear all evidence  
That may sustain Mind's claim, withal.

MIND:

Come forth,  
 Dear Memory, sweet solace and rare source  
 Of spiritual assurance, my mystic self.

MEMORY:

*(a thin, vague cloud is seen slowly RISING from far beneath the horizon, struggling through heavier and darker clouds to wend its way to the upper part of the globe where the other characters are talking)*

Who hath summonsed me from sleep,  
 So fondly on my eyelids lay?  
 Up from crypts of silence deep,  
 Why am I called to garish day?

MIND:

Speak, Child, the source and essence of thyself,  
 And thus base Matter's minion here confute.

MEMORY:

I know not aught of Matter, I,  
 Who weave the mystic web of time,  
 From Past to Present fondly fly,  
 And epochs merge in every clime.

I conjure Childhood's smile or tear,  
 And Youth's impulsive vanity,  
 Or Manhood's dignified career,  
 And Age's noble dignity.

Like as a spring from fountain deep,  
 Unfathom-bedded in the earth,  
 The waters of my being leap,  
 Exhaustless in renewing birth.

I come when mother Mind doth bid,  
 Defiant of the coarsen flesh,  
 E'en though for years I lay there hid,  
 All undiscerned within its mesh.

I'm ever young; and elder time  
 Renew I, in the birth of thought.  
 With my rejuvenescent rhyme  
 Is happiness or sorrow wrought.



BRAIN :

Pause, poor, untutored Child ; how little taught  
 In knowledge of thyself ! Did'st thou but know  
 I am the womb whence sprung thy being ; I,  
 The cradle, wherein rocked and lulled so oft,  
 Hath sleep perched on thy brow ; did'st thou but know  
 No notion thine, nor link twixt sep'rate thoughts  
 Were possible to thee, save as I wrought ;  
 Did'st thou but know the many mansions of  
 My complex structure, where I thee enclose,  
 And suffer thy release at Mind's loud call ;  
 Did'st thou but know thy very life depends  
 On my existence——

MIND :

Silence him, O Judge ;

Let not my child's chaste ears be thus abused  
 With foul defilement of contemptuous lies ;  
 I summons Consciousness, the Self of selves,  
 The mystic element and source of life,  
 Which was and is to be whom none  
 Can comprehend or fathom. Sourceless source  
 Of Being and Intelligence, speak thou !

BRAIN :

*(half to himself in low voice)*

'Tis well she comes ! I would behold her clear  
 And naked in her native form ; so long  
 Hath mystery mantled her to mortal eyes,  
 I fain would tear the evil from her fair face.  
 Thou Pythoness whose false, deceptive fane  
 Compels the worship of thy myriad dupes,  
 Come teach me who am sponsor of thyself !

*(a bright mist appears in the background as at sunrise, which increases in splendor and gradually gathers into folds of various brilliant hues, pouring forth a flood of unusual effulgence. The folds then seem to part and singly float around as if blown by a gentle wind, then slowly assemble, coming closer and closer till, mingling, THEY RISE together spirally, gathering into one body, the upper portion of which is of brilliant golden hue, which gradually fades into orange, violet, indigo, green and blue at the bottom. Whirling round and round the brilliant cloud slowly assumes a human shape resplendent beyond description)*



## CONSCIOUSNESS:

I am the Self of self, self-found,  
 Unknown to all save to myself;  
 I climb Life's ladder, round by round,  
 And make the books on Memory's shelf.

I antedate all form and force,  
 And build by my intelligence  
 All living things, of which the source  
 I am, the substance, soul and sense.

I was before e'en Matter moved;  
 I shaped thyself, O menial Brain,  
 Which thou thyself, unwitting, proved  
 As instrument to artist's strain.

No cell athrob within thy sphere,  
 Nor fibre vibrant to a thought,  
 But I, its impress in a tear  
 Or smile, within thyself have wrought.

My mystic touch endues with life  
 The chemic substance of the soil,  
 Nor suffers planetary strife,  
 Unfought, its destiny to spoil.

There is no bridge twixt consciousness  
 And Matter's far-off shelving shores;  
 Myself on substance I impress,  
 As sun in seed its presence stores.

## BRAIN:

Absurd thy claim, as I had thought, for thou  
 Thyself, on Life depend'st, without whose throb  
 And magic work what were thy prowess brave?

## MIND:

Well said; then let me summons Life herself,  
 To prove how she with magic thrill awoke  
 Earth's inert mass, that hailed the Breath divine  
 Into the living clod and gave it soul.

BRAIN :

Nor shall I disapprove ; for I would face  
 The combined hosts that parry Common Sense  
 With fragile arrows hurled from Fancy's sheath.

*(the globe begins to writhe and throb, swelling and sinking; here and there little nodules of soil strive for shape and expression, till slowly some unseen power seems to mould them into shapes that creep upon the sands, fly in the air, climb the limbs of trees, and assume the human form. Shining round the figure that represents Man, is an electric glow that completely envelops him)*

LIFE :

I am the power divine that breathed  
 In inert clod a living soul ;  
 Which, in coarsen clay though sheathed,  
 On earth hath played a varied role.

Of lifeless mould I fashioned rare,  
 The things that crawl and creep and fly :  
 I caused fructiferous seeds to bear  
 Rare fruitage, reared twixt earth and sky.

I surge and sweep, a ceaseless stream,  
 Through soil and seed and leaf and cell,  
 And work God's miracle supreme,  
 More wonderful than tongue can tell.

I give thee life, O Matter base,  
 And from thee life I take again :  
 Upon thee, like a tablet, trace  
 The impress of my joy and pain.

And thou, impertinent, O Brain,  
 How couldst thou throb with thought divine,  
 If I fed not thy cells again,  
 Though dying, with immortal wine?

MIND :

I thank thee, brave and valiant Prince of Power,  
 Thus to set forth with clarity and truth,  
 What well I know, but thou canst best express,  
 Thyself supremest miracle of God.

REASON :

*(to mind)*

Thy witnesses are strong and eloquent :  
 Almost persuaded I would verdict yield,  
 Full favorable to thy claims sublime ;  
 Yet am I forced, ere judgment from my lips  
 May fall, to ask if Brain can aught rebut ?

BRAIN :

Most noble Reason, calmly have I heard,  
 And patiently endured the subtle stuff,  
 These servitors of Mind have blown, withal,  
 To blind the eye and stultify the sense.  
 I marvel not such plausibility  
 Should lure thy judgment. For Ages, thus, has wit  
 Suffused the skies of Ignorance with Truth's  
 Reflected glow ;—a moon in nightly skies  
 Pretending to supplant the luminous globe  
 Of day. But I, O Reason, witnesses  
 Shall summons, who shall swift refute the false  
 And spurious doctrines, have misled the world,  
 Of these too purblind leaders of the mind.  
 These laggards, Mind and his vain retinue,  
 Have slept the while that Truth hath upward climbed,  
 From lowly valleys where Ignorance prevailed  
 To sun-crowned peaks of Learning's lofty range.  
 Speak, then, ye, who know how came the World.

*(a great convulsion ensues: Tempests tear the darkling clouds to shreds, which sweep madly through the torn and thundering branches felled in the deep forest. Earthquakes break forth and the entire globe rocks with furious gales. At length, slowly, calm settles on the scene and swaying in mid-heavens there RISES the kingly and majestic figure of COSMOS, who slowly descends upon a lofty peak and thus declaims)*

(To be Continued.)