

## THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.

BY HENRY FRANK.

(Continued).

COSMOS:

I am the infinite and all!  
My compass and circumference  
Outreach the far ethereal wall  
That halts the march of human sense.

Myself the Nebulae begot,  
And substance of the rolling orbs,  
That from my breast arise and rot,  
As Time the subtle stuff absorbs.

Most plastic of all essences,  
I whirl the Ether round and round,  
Which, firmly in an atom, is  
In after ages sought and found.

The titan force thus Ether-born,  
And whirled revolving from my grasp,  
Sucks to itself all forces torn  
From atoms, flying from my clasp.

Thus atom flies to atom far,  
Awhirl unconsciously and blind,  
From sand-grain to a flaming star,  
Till worlds their spiral orbits find.

Yea spheres with fiery auras whirl  
Round flaming worlds through vistas wild;  
Their banners to the Void unfurl,  
And seek far spaces undefiled.

At length, the fiery mist is chilled ;  
The cooling globe, athirst, absorbs  
The moisture of the air, that filled  
The firmament of seething orbs.

Earth, erst, was watery waste, and void  
Of vital element or form,  
Till soil and sea enmixed and cloyed,  
When from the slime sprung seed and worm.

For aeons, long, vast jungles swept,  
Unchallenged, earth's redundant breast,  
Where monsters clomb or slyly crept,  
With murd'rous jaw and bloody crest.

Through strife and stress and war-some strain,  
The most unwieldy fell, whilst few,  
More agile, could their place maintain,  
And thus victorious waxed and grew.

Life came from lowly origin,  
And basest forms at first prevailed ;  
Till Time the thickly ranks did thin,  
And brains for doughtier toil were mailed.

All things have come by stages slow,  
All forms from other forms were shaped :—  
The myriad plants did unlike grow,  
Because some variant escaped.

From Time's benumbing usage old,  
The vagrant, in its freedom young,  
Far from its parents ventured bold,  
Whilst they to ancient custom clung.

Thus species all from species grew,  
All forms of life from one prime norm,  
As each, the fitter, caught and slew  
The slowthful and unvantaged form.

All life streams on from primal drop  
 Of protean protoplasm's mould;  
 Nor aught the reddened stream can stop,  
 Once it begins in Nature's wold.

No eye can trace it to its source,  
 Nor microscope discern its trend:—  
 Whether in leaf, its ruddy course,  
 In ape or man, shall seek its end.

#### MIND:

I cannot longer hold my silence while  
 Such rash assertions smite my ear!  
 This pompous witness, Matter's menial slave,  
 Here summonsed, speaks as by authority,  
 Whose shallow ignorance his vapid breath  
 Divulges. Whence is he, who vauntingly  
 His infinite immensity proclaims?

#### THOUGHTS:

*(fluttering round excitedly)*

Yea, whence his origin;  
 Whence came this Force that moves,  
 Through subtle matter thin,  
 Like hands astir in pliant gloves?

#### IMAGINATION:

*(hiding behind a fan-shaped cloud, and looking askance)*

Who first conceived, and patterned vast,  
 In mental imagery, the whole,  
 Stupendous plan; whose mind first cast  
 The swaying worlds from pole to pole?

#### KNOWLEDGE:

*(blowing through a brazen trumpet)*

'Tis true; naught is, save first conceived:  
 The mind's eye sees ere matter moves;  
 All form and substance hath received  
 The pattern, God himself approves.

MIND:

For this corroboration, Children true,  
I yield thee thanks; whoe'er this Cosmos be,  
He hath no wisdom childhood's simple faith  
Assures, or can the wounded heart assuage,  
Which stands confounded midst the maze of worlds!  
Boast on thou pompous puff of vacant wind,  
None but fools, denying God, would give  
Thee heed.

BRAIN:

I pity them that, uninformed,  
Dare smite their shallow pates against the walls  
That Science rears. Speak on majestic Voice,  
Howe'er they storm and rave vexatiously.

COSMOS:

*(continuing more vigorously)*

Know, then, beginning there is none:  
What is, hath always been innate  
Within the worlds, from Ether spun,  
Whose soul is motion, change whose fate.

The substance of the Universe  
Is increate; itself creates,  
By Motion's laws, the things diverse,  
That amply thrive till Time abates.

The God who is, is All in all,  
Inseparate, revealed in aught,  
That looms in heaven or this slight ball,  
Where human tragedies are wrought.

Ask ye whence came the Force that thrives  
In ocean slime and starry flame?  
As well ask ye whence He derives  
His being, whom ye bravely name!

Ye think Ideas throve, full formed,  
Within the primal cosmic Mind,  
Where aeons long they lay endormed,  
Like, in some cave, the wintry wind?

But naught has come, full formed, from birth:  
 From primal Chaos I was brought,  
 With halting step and treach'rous dearth,  
 Whilst vast, contentious Powers wrought.

Not tiniest seed, but Nature strove,  
 Oft failing in her trials and tests.  
 To shape the form that Wisdom wove,  
 When Function answered Need's behests.

"The flower in the crannied wall",  
 The wing-songed insect in the air,  
 No cosmic Genius shaped withal,  
 By magic mind or cunning stare.

The crystallised sand-grains on the shore,  
 No less than sentient cell or nerve,  
 Their final shape and fashion wore,  
 When best they could fair Nature serve.

She runs her blind, persistent course,  
 Like river-beds that carve the earth,  
 And follows where the Moving Force  
 Directs, throughout the cosmic girth.

Not true, God thought and worlds began:  
 But worlds themselves are Thinking-God:  
 Self-shaping moves the Cosmic Plan,  
 In stellar dust or verdured sod.

The lowest, as the highest, seeks  
 Through Man the climax glorious;  
 In whom no less the reptile lurks,  
 Than angel soars from substance gross!

MIND:

I could my heart tear from my breast than list  
 To such invidious words that Hell itself  
 Inspires. I ask thee, gracious Judge to heed  
 My plea, and though my noble witnesses,  
 Thus far, should amply claim thy judgment fair,

Yet I would crave one more to summons, whose  
 Inviolatè fame and ancient probity,  
 Will stultify insidious sophistry,  
 That blaies so blasphemously from yon lips.  
 Thy patience, Judge, I crave.

REASON :

But I must wait  
 The willingness of your contestant. Should  
 He not yield, I cannot him gainsay.  
 The time's his ; if he int'ruption spurns,  
 You must await the final hour :

BRAIN :

Halt not,  
 Majestic Judge, I would that all the force  
 And vigor of mistaken error lay  
 Exposed to observation clear. I seek  
 But Truth's acclaim, whate'er thy verdict be.

REASON :

Thou hast permission, Mind, to summons whom  
 Thou wouldst that utterance relevant hath.

MIND :

Then rise  
 From where the mystic crypt conceals thy form,  
 Thou ancient Messenger and Voice of God ;  
 Mysterious Visitant, who art the womb  
 Whence I, myself, leapt forth in infantile  
 Expression, and have since to wisdom grown,  
 Thy tutelage vouchsafed : O Soul divine  
 Implanted in my breast by God Himself,  
 This tenement of clay to guard and save,  
 Speak the indisputable word shall crush  
 Irrevocably the lie this miscreant shouts.

*(soft, filmy, velvety clouds of white, shot with delicate pink and lurking  
 hints of blue or violet, roll gently over the face of the globe,  
 gradually gathering into a lissom figure, draped with  
 ethereal gauze, revealing the rounded limbs and  
 perfect figure of a female form divine)*

## SOUL:

I am the pure ethereal Ray,  
That flutters on the breast of God;  
I vitalize the vulgar clay,  
That looms in man from earthen sod.

Co-eval with Man's mortal frame,  
And prisoned in its crumbling walls,  
My presence, like a Vestal flame,  
Forestalls the Fate that Man appals.

Instinctively, as scented flower,  
Seeks freedom for its perfumed breath,  
I seek release from mortal power,  
Ere freed by courtesy of death.

My feet, like down in dewy dusk,  
Fall stealthily and soft;  
My wings, like follicles of musk,  
Ascend unseen the airs above.

As mist arises from the sea;  
And, wind-wound, wends its moon-lit way;  
Casts silver sheen athwart the lea,  
And, dying, greets the new-born day;

So, float I o'er the minds of men,  
And filter on their trembling hearts,  
A light ne'er seen on field or fen,  
That briefly lingers and departs.

Who seeks me, loses ere he finds:  
As dusk with gloaming vapor reeks,  
My form in tremulous folds unwinds,  
Like vanishing clouds on mountain peaks.

Nor here, nor there, yet everywhere;  
Though rooted in the earth yet free:  
As steals a perfume through the air,  
I float through space insensibly.

The flower that earns its golden crown,  
Through death's decay and struggle came :  
Thus I, this mortal flesh outgrown,  
Shall elsewhere flaunt my wings of flame.

Perchance begot in blighted birth,  
Man's natal curse devolves on me,  
And I, Perdition's flame-swept girth,  
Mayhap shall wend eternally.

Or, haply, not begot nor born,  
But, primally, my substance one  
With God, fell from His breast forlorn,  
As stars from primal loose-swung sun.

I know not how my Fate is writ ;  
The stars my destiny may scorn :  
His judgment will my deeds befit,  
Who summons me to Death's dark bourne.

Perchance, like wraith of sun and sea,  
Which glides awhile o'er crested wave,  
Then melts in air invisibly,  
I may dissolve above the grave.

Methinks, as soul of soil and seed  
Is winged upon the flower's breath ;  
So I, from fleshly substance freed,  
May, like a breath, float on through death.

Or, mayhap, like a hovering cloud,  
That lingers in the moon's pale light,  
—A faintly limned and filmy shroud—  
I may disturb the viewless night.

BRAIN :

Alas, perplexed, bewildered Soul, I ween,  
Thou canst not better read thy lore than I,  
Or whoso marks the glamor of the sun,  
Or pale grimaces of the moon, in Heaven's



Transforming phases, or who reads the book  
The stars indite upon the vaulted Blue.  
No wiser, thou, though spirit, sprung from God,  
Than I; no knowledge thine intuitive,  
Profounder than that I permit the mind  
To grasp by labor's search. Wert thou innate,  
Co-eval with unfathomed Deity,  
Then would His Wisdom like resistless stream  
From fountain-head through all thy being flow.  
But thy frail vision is oft blurred by fumes,  
That rise from ruddy rivulets of flesh,  
And dim with temporal deceit the eyes  
That search for truth. Beshrew me not; thou art  
Not heaven-sprung but earth-begotten as  
All substance else that Nature weaves, withal ,  
In Magic tapestries of her conceit.  
Wert thou as sanely privileged as Mind,  
Who wanders through the myriad corridors  
Of my housed cells, wherein she sleeps and wakes,  
And waxes with experience; wert thou  
Conducted and sustained, like Mind, my ward,  
(Howbeit she conceives herself estranged,  
And crows o'er me with supercilious pride)  
If guarded thus, I say, thou wouldst well know  
That not by magic nor by mummary  
Of words, haphazard intuition, nor  
Vain Imaginings, is knowledge gained,  
That guides the path of man, or Truth's impress  
Engraves upon the tablets of the brain.  
As grows the subtle essence of the leaves,  
That crown and plumage noble trees, the Mind  
Is wrought; as buds that burst from flaming breasts  
To winged flowers, and perfumes rare exhale,  
Wrought from embosomed cells of complex life,  
So mind is essence of the cells, that spin  
Through me the myriad miracles of thought.  
The mind, as thou, is not so sublimate,  
It can disown the realm of matter or  
Of sense.

MIND:

Halt! disputatious Fiend, think'st thou  
 Revolting ignorance can sway this court?  
 Think'st thou the mace of logic thus to wield,  
 With juggler's nimbleness and wit? Am I  
 But juice of thee, as bile of liver; I,  
 But sweat that seethes from toil belabored cells,  
 Or oil that fatty muscles squeeze about  
 The surface of the skin; or like the flame,  
 The torch releases from the fibrous wood?  
 Where were all thy complex, trembling cells  
 That mark the crowning miracle of earth,  
 O Brain, without the architected plan,  
 God images in me to guide withal  
 And goad them to their tasks? What throbbing cell,  
 That seems autonomous, is not my slave?  
 What motived fibre vibrates, not impinged  
 By me; what nerve is conscious of itself?  
 Hath cell a soul that is not mine; or mind,  
 Not mine imparted?

Is the radiance of  
 The sunbeam not the sun's? Shall dewdrop vie  
 The heavens, or think the universe itself,  
 Because it mirrors them? No more the cells,  
 Thou vauntest, which but mirror me, can me  
 Disown—their source—! Shall instrument disclaim  
 The fingers thrumming music from its heart?

MIND:

As well believe that yonder golden sun,  
 Who treads the zodiacal path and hails  
 The seasons at appointed times; who marks  
 Diurnal hours, and wooes the swelling tides  
 With arms invisible in vacuous space,  
 Or clothes the humble grass with verdant robe,  
 Might dissipate to nothing, and leave whole  
 The world, as to assume, O foolish One,  
 That Mind's imperious reign is not supreme,  
 And rules all lesser kingdoms within Man.

KNOWLEDGE: *(interrupting)*

Else were mind but titillation  
Of a nerve some motion caught:

THOUGHTS: *(chiming in)*

And fruit of cellular vibration,  
Were each rare and noble thought.

IMAGINATION: *(sarcastically)*

And Genius, lofty inspiration,  
Would from cell-coils oft receive:

MEMORY: *(solemnly)*

Whilst ancient scenes, their intimation,  
Would only in scarred fibres, leave!

MIND:

Yea sore and sodden were the world, and dim  
With murky visage of grim pessimists:—  
And Mind with Mud were co-efficient in  
Negation's fatuous sum as Nothingness  
Were multiplied by Nothingness to make  
Infinity of Naught. The bankrupt Age,  
Would like a croaking raven reign, in black  
Despair, o'er solemn rookeries of ruin!  
No more, good Reason, prithee, suffer such  
Base calumnies an utterance so vile!

BRAIN:

Ha! Ha! Fear sits with trembling wing upon  
Thy brow and bats thy blinking eyes. Hark ye!  
Ere yonder Judge his verdict renders, ye  
Must hear the serious utterance of Sense,  
And solemn Science. Hence I summons those  
Who bear the records of their lives within  
Their substance; who on metaphysic wing,  
Seek not to fly or hide in foggy mist.  
Hail, microscopic Dot wherein mankind  
And all earth-life is registered:

*(there is a tremulous stir throughout the planetary substance while the waters gather to a mantling cream, from whose slimy green arises a slight FIGURE, globulous, with a large head, whose color is green or glaucous, shimmering and vibrating ceaselessly, and covered with filmy oscillating fibres which are constantly reaching out as if to grasp invisible germs in the air)*