

THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.

BY HENRY FRANK.

(Continued).

MOTION :

Let me my secret reveal;
I long that the truth shall be known,
Though the ages have saught to conceal,
What so palpably Nature hath shown.

I never began, but have been
Eternally forging ahead,
To a goal no being hath seen,
Nor ever shall finally tread.

I was not on substance impinged,
When Substance lay silent and still,
Nor a corner of Nature twinged,
And aroused it with my will.

I was not by the hand of a God,
Or a push of titanic Might,
Smote with a terrible rod,
And urged to pursue my flight.

I was and have been and shall be,
Without end or beginning in time,
The Source when eternally
Flows Nature's unending rhyme.

I am the soul of all things,
And ever their spirit inspire,
With hope that forever springs
From yearnings that Godward aspire.

On, on, I urge them ahead,
Yet whither, I know not myself;
My feet with tentative tread,
Climb each dang'rous, rocky shelf.

I must go, I must go, I must go,
On the Stream of Eternity,
Whose waters forever flow
To a shoreless and mystical sea.

'Tis I that's the pain in th' heart;
The throb and the pressure of Will;
I smite with the Lover's dart;
'T is I give Life's first thrill.

I gather the atoms as one,
And congregate worlds in space,
From first scintilla to sun,
I am the Urge in the race.

I chisel and crystal the grains
Of sand that lie on the shore:
I build with infinite pains,
The structure of cell and spore.

I push the seed forward to soul,
That moves from mammal to Man;
O'er brains I rumble and roll,
Till thoughts in the mind expand.

Whither, oh, whither away?
I know not, and care not, no why!
'T is my fate to wander and stray,
Wheresoe'er the winds may ply.

I am the good and the bad:
I am love and hardship and hate:
The soul of the glad and the sad:
I am Destiny and Fate.

For of Motion, all things consist:
 Without Me the world were naught;
 Thou canst not my spirit resist:
 I shall determine thy lot.

BRAIN:

Behold the Truth, by Science first proclaimed:
 The Sphinx's riddle's solved; the crucial proof
 Attained: Creation ne'er began in time;
 Eternity is self-evolving: ever
 The Wheel of Being revolves unceasingly,
 Without beginning and without end! Solved,
 The mystery that so long darkened mind!
 Primeval Motion, increate, is source
 And Mother of all things, inert or quick.
 The vast phenomenal brood of Nature's spawn,
 Infinitesimal or infinite,
 Have, multifarious, sprung from Motion's breast.
 Here, then, inherent is thy God, innate,
 In very essence of the universe.
 With vapid, inane theologic tongue,
 Thou pratest of a God and Spirit vague!
 What knowest thou of either save in dreams?
 Thy gibberish but libels a sane God.
 Wrest Him from Nature's Whole, He hangs upheld
 By nothing—like a dangling root mid-air,
 Unsustanaced by native element,—
 A mythic Being in a maze of myth!
 Why seek Imagination's palate thus
 To tickle with a candied falsehood? Why
 Conceive of Spirit separate, discrete,
 A Thing apart, the Sense cannot partake
 A sublimate figment that confuses thought,
 When Nature hints that Energy, inwove,
 Innate, eternal, plies its ceaseless power
 Unbroken—

MIND:

Base blasphemer, atheist,
 And infidel!

BRAIN :

Withhold thy temper! Thus
Truth conquers not: by objurgations or
Abuse!

MIND :

Why, then, abuse the sacred Faith,
Despairing, millions of the earth sustains?

BRAIN :

Truth, only, can sustain; all else deceives!
Behold, if Science speaks of God, she thinks
Of Nature's Drama, solemn and sublime:
The shifting scenes and climaxes of time:
She thinks of gentle breeze, or battling storm;
The placid meadows and the smoking hills;
The lightning's dart and thunder's roar in heaven;
The quake that cracks the jowl of trembling earth;
The comet's startling tail; the veiled eclipse;
She thinks of Seasons timed by heaven's clock;
Of atoms, ions that whirl in chemic glee,
Or clash in bitter strife for deadly power;
She sees again the cataclysmic rush
Of primal worlds from roaring, fiery mists;
The slow ascent of soils above the main;
The magic leap of life from slime of sea;
The clutch and clash of claw and wing in strife
For food, and mastery of fit and brave.
She contemplates defeat and victory,
The joy of birth, the tragedy of death,
The majesty of mind and thought's emprise;
And well she knows throughout it all there runs
The irrefragable Thread of Destiny!
When Science thinks of Spirit, 't is not a thing,
Personified; a Being flying round
The universe, to clothe itself, withal,
In dull disguises; or, with challenges
Defiant, mock the feeble flash of man:—
A supremely conscious, pre-existing Self
Which weighs all lesser selves in balances
Unequal! Such false, theologic thought,
Has Science scorned, Philosophy denounced.
They best conceive of Spirit as a Breath,

As inf'nite Energy surcharging space
 With ceaseless pulse of Cosmic Urge; a Breath
 That throbs in each iota, vibrant with
 Slight waves that time its being: Breath that moves
 In everlasting motion, and sustains,
 And bodies forth, the essence of all worlds.
 There is no Void whose vacuum expels
 This Spirit; no time it breathed not; nor await,
 Milleniums hence, its dire exhaustion and
 Quietus.

MIND:

Then is Spirit Motion; God
 Inert, base Matter, sooth! O shameless faith,
 O vulgar mockery! This heritage
 Of Death and dun Despair is all, alas,
 Proud Science offers to defeated Man!
 This matter, I manipulate and mould
 As I may choose; or trample 'neath my feet;
 That stinks in mire and vulgarises earth;
 A thing, unlike myself, I needs must use
 Yet hate; this thing, the God I worship and
 Adore! Let judgment smite thy pate and blow
 Most fit; or don the motley and the bells,
 Thou Fool, and dance in Court of Folly; but
 Thou can'st not Reason, with such theme convince.

BRAIN:

The vanity of vulgar ignorance
 In thy vain speech o'ervaults itself. Hear, then,
 O, Misinformed, how all unlike is that
 Thou hat'st, from what, myopic vision shapes
 To thy dull gaze! Come forth, Thou, that unborn,
 Most common of the commonest things appear'st.

(in a deep cave, bubbling slimy-mire boils and bursts forth. Great clumps of it rise and fall; it is seen gradually to form into soil and rock, and then submitting to intense rays of flame and currents of electricity, fuses and dissolves into invisible elements. The elements dissolve into their atoms, and as in a Crookes' Tube the stream of violet-hued ions rush swiftly over the scene till finally they envelop everything, and at last they disappear as they merge in an atmosphere which dissolves from violet into an ultra ray beyond the power of the eye or microscope to witness)

MATTER:

If my essence to vulgarous vision alone be revealed,
 And unto the senses opaque and palpable seem,
 Man then discerns but the veils and disguises I wear,
 For my substance is further removed and deeper concealed
 Than vacuous figures that float and dissolve in a dream,
 And changeful as shapes of a cloud the winds shatter and tear.

II.

Unbegun, Like Motion, my being is ever extant,
 For Motion am I, and my source and myself is he;
 In Motion I live, and by motion express and reveal
 My infinite forms, my radiance brilliant or scant.
 In immediate, manifest stuff, I seem but to be,
 Transformed like the vapors the wintry frosts congeal.

III.

To sensuous Man I am aught that his senses compel:
 I play o'er his nerves as a wind o'er Aeolian harp,
 And tune his impression to rhythms of thought-changing
 Time.
 The colors, the senses discern and the heavens distil,
 Are my messengers smiting man's eyeballs, feebly or sharp;
 And sounds are the echo that falls from my swift movement's
 chime.

IV.

None hath yet found me, though oft have I lain in man's
 grasp.
 Ne'er hath eye seen me, nor hand ever touched nor ear
 Heard my innermost tone. Forever invisible,
 Yet I so palpable seem, men ponder and fear:
 For I'm That that men know not, though often they care-
 lessly clasp:—
 I exist in the clod though unseen and insensibly felt.

V.

Think not that MYSELF am the stone or the seed or the
 star;
 The bird in the bush, or flower, or swine in the mire;
 These are but masques of Myself which thy senses discern:—

I come from the Void and infinite distance afar,
 Where Silence sits calm beyond the approach of Time's choir;
 Nor heeds it, how sternly the wheels of grim Destiny turn.

VI.

I am brighter than light or the gleam of the fiery thread,
 That betimes knits the cloud-rent heavens; more illusive than
 mist,
 That veils the face of the dawn: my essence beyond
 The farthest reaches of sensible stuff, I tread,
 With footfall softer than dew that the twilight hath kissed,
 And my breath's more faint than zephyr's breath purring a
 pond.

VII.

I am to man's senses but Nothingness; the approach
 To my deep recess is through avenues Thought must con-
 ceive;
 More worlds have I reared than the genius of man ever
 dreamed;
 Man's mind, undiscerning, heeds not how the scenes encroach
 On Mind's sovereign way, and suffer my sway to deceive;
 For to Man what is real hath oft unreality seemed!

VIII.

Through millennial, myriad gradations, have I long traversed
 My endless, aeonic unfoldment, from nebulous bits;
 Urged ever by impulse eternal, Myself hath availed,
 For the massive formation of infinite systems dispersed
 Through the echoless, icy Void where sovranly sits
 The celestial King, whence thro' Me light and life are en-
 tailed.

IX.

Though blindly, through ages ascending with faltering wing,
 I have flung afar on the Void Time's perennial forms,
 Or of living or unliving things, that through aeons were
 spent;
 For life is the climax of motion from vulgarer thing,
 That arose more refined and complex amid clashings and
 storms,
 As onward I travelled toward Mind and the Soul's far ascent.

X.

From molecular movement hath Instinct by habit come forth;
 From instinct Emotion, and thence to the Mind's replete
 thought;
 From Matter to Mammal, from Mammal to Man, and his
 frame,
 Undesigned, unforeseen, hath Progress, from far latent birth,
 Though empirical Nature oft failed, enduringly wrought,
 In sublime and increasing achievement, thro' glory and shame.

MIND:

(defiantly)

So, this is, then, the be all and the end
 Of Life's prophetic promise! This the blight
 That chills the heart of hope; the damp upon
 The infant's brow, that hints of death ere life's
 Begun! This, the too furtive worm that gnaws
 The root and robs the blossoms of life's tree,
 Which leaves a stenchful rot where sunny fruit
 Should hang! O fie! What mockery and curse,
 That these few years should cling so fondly to
 Eternity, and, then, with ruthless scythe,
 Be smitten and thrown carelessly upon
 Time's rubbish heap! Is this the fruitage of
 Our sorrows and endeavors, trials and tears,
 That some sardonic Demon drag us here,
 To mock, with burning thirst, our passion for
 Eternal life, that ages cannot quench—
 Our hunger sate with venom'd food? What use
 These years, if ere begun their virtue cease?
 Why buffet the untoward waves that halt
 From far Hesperian isles if reaching there,
 They vanish into mist? Why crack the jaws
 Of mountainous Ignorance which darkens earth,
 Or sink the shafts of Intellect with sweat
 And eager toil, if Knowledge be but hous'd
 In some worm-eaten brain that with it rots?
 Why should the soul be spangled with bright gems
 Of Friendship; why the pendants of fond Love
 Disport around the heart and fascinate

With promise of unending joy, if struck,
 Ere yet their novelty is worn, with blow
 That shatters them to naught? Why 'rich the mind,
 With galleries of thought and imagery
 Sublime, which oft inspired the heart of Man
 To deeds of sacrifice and heroism,
 If Mind at last dissolve like crumbling dust?
 Why round the heart do clinging tendrils grow
 When new-born babe the mother's suckling breast
 Exalts, if nevermore, when torn from her,
 She shall behold its face? Are these few years,
 Like column broken mid-way from its base,
 Or master-painting gashed with vandal blade,
 Or edifice consumed with roaring flame,
 From temporal ruin ne'er to rear again
 More noble structures, loftier columns, and
 Sublimier art, that shall survive decay?
 Then sits a Monster on the rim of Heaven,
 Who hurls us here to laugh at our dismay!
 Silence! thou seven-deviled Tempter, lest
 Earth gape with horror and dash thee into Hell!
 There is no Demon deeper-damned than he,
 Who seeks to blight the young and blossomed buds
 Of Hope with blasts of Doubt! Enough; O Judge,
 My pleas is ended; ended thus the shame,
 This Boaster's blasphemy would wreak withal!

BRAIN:

What lies beyond the rim of circling heavens,
 What dreams may be attained in yon dim realm,
 Whereof no proof is valid here, concerns
 Not rigid Science. She, too, mourns at the grave,
 And in the solemn sanctuary of
 Man's common woe, seeks soothing comfort here.
 And yet she scorns an idle fancy, fraught
 With vacuous promise. Her faith is fastened not
 To an unwieldy chain, whose rivets fix
 The shackles round her feet and stay her. She
 Tests dreams, which if but vacant bubbles prove,
 Howe'er their iridescence charm the eye,
 She casts aside, despite her appetite

For pleasure and achievement. Peace of mind,
To her, must be no bastard offspring of
False Hope. If gloom and shadow of the Grave
Shall be the everlasting shroud of life.
Beneath whose sable folds no memory throbs,
Calm Science will to simple truth submit.
If universal hope, which temporal life
Inspires here, which conscious thought conceives,
Imagination glimpse—shall prove vain,
Why seize a straw and think 't a succoring cable?
But if with palpable and ample proof
It be sustained—as ultra-violet rays
Which eye sees not, yet proof whereof is sure,—
None shall more cheerfully attest than she,
Who disemboweled Earth to read its past:
The stars dissected; the far-most impulse faint,
Which palpitates in Ether, seized on screen,
And forced it to divulge its chemic source;
Who caught on photographic plate lost worlds,
That flout, a myriad million miles away,
The naked eye of Man! She stands prepared
And unafraid to welcome Nature's facts.
She knows the universe is true, and lies,
An open Book, whose hieroglyphics must
By Man be patiently deciphered, ere
Truth's Riddle be disclosed and Knowledge served
By honest labor. For Truth's surety
Alone can final peace entail.

(To be Continued).