

## THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.

BY HENRY FRANK.

(Concluded.)

MIND:

Then, e'en  
Beside the Grave thou canst but mock the pain  
That writhes and pales the heart with fear; if ask'd  
The question which, unanswered, palsies hope  
And saddens sorrow, thy answer is a sigh!

BRAIN:

What answer can more honest comfort give,  
Till Truth shall unequivocally speak?  
No bars are cast by Science across thy way:  
Seek thou for Truth!

MIND:

All 's vain if this base life  
Be all!

BRAIN:

Despair not. For a higher faith  
Inspires the soul of Science than e'er yet  
Regaled the heart of simplest sacristan;  
Perchance, if Science cannot cheer the hope,  
That casts a dubious radiance upon  
Death's dusty darkness—like a spectral bow  
That moonbeams sometimes cast on cloudy night—  
She still begets a sturdier hope, which, sprung  
From safer soil, shall safe fruition yield.  
What though the goal is far removed on keen  
Endeavor's track; what though with swiftest feet  
We must needs fly nor seize th' inviting prize.

In full, but *ignes fatui* snatch betimes ;  
 What if fruit's promised taste oft disappoints ;  
 What though a dream inspires, which tested, fails ;  
 What though sometimes the house of Theory's cards  
 Is dashed by empiric's hand and Logic's frown ;  
 What though false hope betimes, a glittering toy  
 Bedangles luring to Temptation's void ;  
 What though a promised mine of wealth, a vacuum  
 Prove, and priceless ore but false pretense ?  
 What though a thousand times cast down ; again  
 We must needs rise and struggle on for Truth,  
 That, buried, lies beneath the centuried soils,  
 Or glimmers in a star's faint beam, or floats  
 In vagrant vapor, or entombed in rock  
 Awaits the blow that grants its spirit release ;  
 What though, like sylph, among the forest's limbs,  
 Truth flirts and flutters, inviting but to slip  
 Our grasp, or teases with a perfume that  
 Misguides us from its source, or blindly leads  
 Into a *cul de sac* that halts our course ?  
 What though thro' myriad mazes of conceit,  
 She lead our wandering and bewildered feet,  
 Or bandage our keen view with problems dark,  
 That must be torn aside ere we advance ?  
 You ask where is the peace in such pursuit ?  
 Why follow mysteries that tantalize,  
 Or seek unbottomed sea for treasures 'yond  
 The reach of Man ? Because th' Impossible  
 Suggests the Real. Because the searcher's zest  
 Is, by th' Unfathomable, whetted to a keen  
 And sharper edge, that failure cannot dull.  
 Infinity invites to infinite  
 Research, and prizes that abide.

MIND:

But vain  
 That search for, if it withers to the touch !  
 Vain is the flower of Knowledge that shrivels in  
 Death's hand !

BRAIN:

Nay heed! The individual,  
 Achieving, may himself, like bubble, burst,  
 And leave on ocean's breast no trace behind.  
 Yet he, now vanished and invisible,  
 Hath reared a monument, Time's hungry teeth  
 Cannot devour. In character, in thought,  
 In splendor of achievement, noble speech;  
 In kindly act, and neighbored aid, defence  
 Of Right and stern demolition of Wrong;  
 In succor of the weak, and plaudits for  
 The Brave; in courage on a thousand fields  
 Where moral Valor called for volunteers;  
 There glow the stones that shape his monument,  
 Immortal as the Time-defying hills.

MIND:

But what of them whose deeds have cursed the earth  
 With foul and devious ways, or murderous course?  
 Who shall revenge their deeds?

BRAIN:

Their own revenge  
 They wreak in memoried hate, and warning stern  
 To those who would ape their acts. As rot their bones,  
 So rots their memory in Oblivion's cave.  
 In surging sea of human life each leaves  
 Its momentary impress; some to stay,  
 And some to disappear. The great who are  
 Immortal are inwove in fabric of  
 Mankind, that clothe with beauty and with strength  
 Its stalwart limbs.

Have not the ages coined  
 The sweat and suffering of human toil,  
 And purchased thus each Epoch's waiting prize?  
 The Earth, once niggardly and crude, now yields  
 Exhaustless cornucopias of wealth  
 To Man's compulsory, stalwart Will!  
 Vast centuries ago lived he, who first conceived  
 The cunning art that tickled sleeping soils  
 With the plow's awakening edge? Lives he not still,

And hath long lived, in every plowman who  
 For eager substance champs the idle earth?  
 And he who, first on rugged stone or bark,  
 Wrought forms that mimicked objects he observed,  
 Lived not his soul in Angelo again;  
 Did not Praxiteles his spirit breathe;  
 Were not Murillo's brush and Raphael's dreams,  
 His own returned to life and labor's love?  
 Of him who first the vulgar symbols of  
 Man's speech discerned and traced on sand or rock  
 The magic semblance of Man's voice, lives he  
 Not still in learning and in lit'ratures,  
 In ponderous tomes of thought: in Homer and  
 In Hesiod, Plato and Confucius, and  
 In all the Great, have trod Parnassus' heights?  
 And what of him who first entuned his harp,  
 That lingers still in trembling lays of love:  
 In Orpheus' and Anachreon's strains divine.  
 In Sappho, Byron, Goethe, Shelley, Keats,  
 And all whose music hath mellowed human hearts?  
 Is not he immortal who inspires  
 The race?

And he, who, first, thatched branches seized,  
 Himself to shelter rudely from the storms,  
 Lives he not still in architrave and arch,  
 That glorify cathedrals, or in roofs,  
 Whose humble gables have housed a myriad souls?  
 Lives he not still in gorgeous temples, domes,  
 In castled turrets, towering minarets,  
 In stately structures that adorn the marts  
 Of Commerce, and in architectural dreams  
 Divulged in statant stone and steel? Is he  
 Not deathless who enhances Progress thus?

MIND:

Nay, 't is but a pale and sallow ghost,  
 To substitute for Hope's fair form! What  
 Though millioned generations follow me,  
 Upon this globe, inspired by my deeds,  
 And I forever vanish, save in traces  
 Of dim Memory—a filmy wraith

Of Thought, that Time shall dissipate? Does this  
 Afford me comfort? If I, unconscious, live  
 In other lives, but I myself expire,  
 Of what avail are all my toils and tears,  
 The strain of labor, the fruit of sweat, the woe  
 That Disappointment wreathes upon the brow?  
 If I live not, what care I who lives after?  
 Though Shakespeare, once upon supernal heights,  
 The wing'd Pegasus be-reined, and Bruno  
 Peered through mystic depths of knowledge; Plato  
 Vied with Olympian gods, and Socrates  
 The masque of vapid sophistries exposed;  
 Though Aristotle swept all fields of thought,  
 And Copernicus traced the paths of distant stars;  
 Though Grecian lore exalt Themistocles,  
 And Rome the praises of a Cæsar sing;  
 Though myriad voices laud a Luther brave,  
 Or Britain, trumpet-tongued, of Cromwell tells;  
 Though mankind, Washington shall ne'er forget,  
 And Lincoln be by Freedom's votaries  
 Forever hymned; and I were each of these,  
 Or all combined, what comfort this, if I  
 Live not?

BRAIN:

*(derisively)*

This is the native passion of  
 Persistent life. We live and therefore wish  
 To live, both now and on eternally.  
 It is the craving of the self for self—  
 Delight: it is the selfish egotism  
 Of Earth's supremely egotistic god—  
 It is the acme of self consciousness.  
 He who lived midst swirl of dying worlds,  
 That measure life by aeons as he by years,  
 And yet whirl on toward Dissolution's maw;  
 He whom dead worlds, bestrewn on vacuous skies,  
 Remind of fate with seal of surety;  
 While massive mists of incandescent worlds,  
 Depicting cosmic slaughter, fall round,  
 To suggest how suns and globes and stars,

And myriad constellations, swarming space,  
 Shall all dissolve—yet, is so spurred by love  
 Of conscious self, he clings tenaciously  
 To the last straw of sinking hope—is primed  
 For crass and painful disappointment, should  
 Convincing proof disintegrate his faith.  
 But if this, too, should pass like else earth-sprung,  
 (Time's product that like Time itself shall wane) ;  
 If, 'faith, this earth-life be but flower and fruit,  
 Planted in aeonic bowels of the Past,  
 Whose seed contains the innate worm of death,  
 That gnaws and gnaws and gnaws, till it devour  
 The last frail vestige of existence: 't were vain  
 To hope, in palpable defeat of hope!  
 If we live, we live—the Future's door is closed.  
 What is to be, no Pythoness reveals.  
 Though Fancy's gossamer threads may weave fair dreams,  
 And Imagination 'body, what Fantasy  
 Surmizes, of unexplorable demesnes,  
 The mind but plays with toys, that please and tickle,  
 When it thus assures itself of fabled hope.  
 So please we babes, not yet begloomed by dun  
 Reality, and charm them with sweet lies.  
 So they, whose brains vacated of sane thought,  
 Are lured by mintage of a mind diseased.  
 We know not what may be; the stars say not.  
 The Grave evokes no voice beyond its bars.  
 The rest is silence; and sacred is the spell.  
 But if we know not what may be; what is,  
 We know; and what has been is finally  
 Incarved upon the rocks of centuries.  
 The Future dreams; the Past is all achieved.  
 What we may, in unfrequented realms  
 Become, none ventures to foretell. But what  
 Portrait of ourselves the Brush of Truth  
 Paints on the storied canvases of Time,  
 Looms high in all the Halls of Memory.  
 One's self is one's monument! The deeds  
 We do alone commemorate our lives.  
 Achieve! Achieve!

MIND:

But if all yields to dust  
 And earth's itself consumed in final fires,  
 How useless is ambition, how inane  
 Achievement!

BRAIN:

Why, with nobler faculty,  
 Despise the humble labor of the birds?  
 They gather, mark you, rubbish of the fields—  
 A leaf, a snapped off limb, a casual thread,  
 A piece of paper, a breeze-blown string—and then,  
 With inf'nite patience, weave therefrom a rare,  
 Tho' miniature, house, in which the winds shall rock  
 The eggs they lay, and fledglings they shall rear;  
 Which labor, ended, the house, abandoned, may  
 Be food for shattering storms. Shall we decry  
 Their toils as fruitless, and their noble art  
 And cunning craft all vain because so soon  
 Destroyed? Yet, note, how Nature, honoring  
 The Present, drives, by sheer compulsion of  
 Instinct, all life to more abundant life.  
 The species of the birds and beasts abide,  
 Unhindered by the thought that Death awaits!  
 From moment unto moment the pulse of life  
 Throbs on—though individuals expire.  
 Though death pervades, immortal is the race.  
 Thus Man, unreasoning, his reason scorns,  
 And builds for waiting generations, who  
 Shall thrive on what his sweating toil achieves.  
 Shall eyes despaire and vengefully disgorge  
 Their straining balls, because the covering Blue  
 Withholds from them the myriad spheres that lie  
 Beyond their ken? Or shall the hand hew off  
 The shortened arm, that cannot reach the stars,  
 Or smite the thunderous clouds?

Nay, limit is

The father of the very madness that  
 Begets the glorious genius of mankind!  
 'T is challenge of th' Impossible that spurs  
 The mind to loftier endeavor; t' search

Unfathomable, super-spacial depths,  
 Wherein the salient mysteries abide,  
 Thrills the heart with passion, panoplied  
 With hope of promised trophies; it impels  
 The hungry soul to Fortune's ripened fruit;  
 It lures the Intellect with splendid wreath,  
 A promised crown—though Ignorance deride.  
 'T is very scorn of mystery, that spurs  
 The thought to action! Each generation toils  
 For centuries yet unborn, and they, anon,  
 Their brilliant heritage impart to those  
 That follow them. Thus human life is thrilled  
 To venturous deed, inventive thought, and vast  
 Increasing splendors of renown. Why, then,  
 Repine, though these few pregnant years of earth  
 So soon into oblivious silence sink?  
 The race still lives, and Life's inspiring still!

MIND:

I say no more; let Reason now decide.

REASON:

With patience and with pleasure have I heard  
 Your several discourses and appeals.  
 Mind truthfully hath plead, vast worlds beyond  
 Are ever untraversed by human thought,  
 And ever shall be; while Brain hath decried  
 The frailty and uncertainty of Faith,  
 Compared with usages of Knowledge brave.  
 Profoundly conscious of its unique power,  
 Intent on being, gifted with inner sight  
 Into regions unfrequented by the thoughts  
 That tenant th' ostensible houses of the Brain,  
 Mind justly chafes at boundaries, the flesh  
 Imposes, and dreams of realms whereto, alone,  
 Its winged feet can fly whilst Brain still plods  
 The sodden and necessitous paths of earth.  
 Mind, life-conscious, dreams of life without  
 An end, eternal, sublimate, and free.  
 Dull sense it scorns, well knowing a better sense,  
 Refined with spiritual vision. Thus pinioned for



Eternal flight, it seeks the aid of faith,  
 And thinks itself immortal. Well it may!  
 Impossible it should conceive a state,  
 Unlike its conscious mood. Can Life know aught  
 Of Death? Knows Light the Dark; can Substance feel  
 Its shadow? Can aught its opposite discern?  
 Light knows but light, and darkness, darkness; else  
 Were Error truth, and falsehood fair. The dream  
 Of life beyond the dusty House of Death,  
 Is, therefore, justified by Life itself.  
 Nor more is conscious mind unjustified  
 In claiming thought itself immortal. For Thought  
 Cannot conceive of Thought unthinking, chained  
 In spiritual flight. Its feathered arrows reach  
 The outmost distances, and far impinge  
 On unsuspecting brains, which they impress  
 Unwittingly with their intelligence.  
 Invisible are thoughts; and, truly, Mind's  
 More tenuous substance seems from substance free.  
 Therefore, it challenges restraint, and feels  
 Its habitation is not in this house of flesh,  
 And spurns the flesh's power. Thus rightly, Mind  
 May deem itself supreme, howbeit misled  
 By supercilious pride. For it o'ermoulds  
 The brain, and shapes anew its cells, that thought  
 Devours; it rides the rivers of the blood,  
 And charges them with new, invigorant life;  
 It e'en may poise the nerves, the pulses calm,  
 When feverish heat inflames; yea, some contend,  
 It hath such potency that Matter yields  
 To its invincible touch, when the temples cease  
 Their throbbing, and sleep secures th' unwilling lids;  
 At which strange times the body is as wax,  
 To the controlling mind. What wonder Mind  
 Conceives itself of super-sensuous stuff,  
 And regal to all subjects else!

MIND:

O Joy!

O Gratitude! O noble Judge, be praised!  
 The world is saved and mankind is redeemed!

## REASON :

But pause—Were this the final word; were this  
 The end of knowledge, the spokesman, here, of Science,  
 Brain, were humiliated and demeaned:  
 Unsolved the Ages' Riddle of the World,  
 And fear of the Unknowable remain,  
 The last and palsying state of Man! Mind,  
 As Brain hath truly said, is moving stuff,  
 Too tenuous and immaterial  
 For eye's or instrument's detection; yet  
 Whose faintest glimpse the chemic plate may seize—  
 Its ghostly substance imprison and proclaim.  
 In essence, then, are matter and spirit, one:—  
 Brain and Mind, a dual-faced shield.  
 In Unity is ultimate and grand  
 Superlative, of Life's ascending scale.  
 'T is true, and here, perhaps, the Sphinx is slain.  
 In all the universe is there but One:  
 That One, the All: Diversity's a masque!  
 Though Science yet but tentatively tread  
 This perilous and unfrequented ground,  
 She hath already glimpsed sufficient of  
 The truth, to call for newer readings of  
 The Sphinx's puzzle and Nature's cryptic Book.  
 Here hints promised peace for conflict thought,  
 And settlement of Problems, Time hath vexed.  
 Mayhap, in this solution rests the place,  
 Twixt sublunar and super-starry realms,  
 Where Science and Philosophy, with Faith,  
 Shall build an honest Religion, and  
 Unfettering Mankind from fear of Truth,  
 May usher in Earth's last, irenic Age.  
 Then Unity shall be discerned throughout  
 The infinite scope of seen and unseen zones—  
 One life, one element, one law, alone,  
 Shall then prevail, and Man, supremely dowered,  
 Shall reign with sceptred Knowledge and Wisdom's crown.  
 As for that last enigma whereat mankind  
 So long hath shuddered, none finally has answered.  
 Unwise the peering of the heavens, to seek  
 The voice that thence shall answer. Man's faith is slight:

Yet while Disproof cannot a shattering spear  
 Hurl at the heart of hope, Despair repines,  
 Nor durst her gloomy locks shake threat'ningly.  
 Faith oft hath falsely used this vital hope,  
 Wherewith to chain the mind's aspiring course,  
 And justly men revolt, preferring death  
 To slavery. The better part is search,  
 And silent waiting for the truth. Brain wins ;  
 For that, too soon the fog of faith bedims  
 The vision of the intellect that peers  
 Into unpathed abyssms of the world  
 None but Nature herself can answer, true,  
 The dread, detested Sphinx, mankind appals.  
 Who heeds another's voice, though fair, is lost ;  
 Man's Mind with toil the shafts of search must sink,  
 And who forestalls with faith, unprovable,  
 Deludes the blind and shackles them with fear.  
 As star, slow rising from horizon's skirts,  
 Its far, cerulean path pursues, and glows  
 Increasingly as 't nears the zenith's dome,  
 To sink and rise again in morrow's dawn ;  
 To Truth from Ignorance ascending moves,  
 Across the vaulted sky of doubt and search,  
 Outshining Error's dimmer orbs, that pale,  
 To its ascendant splendor and renown ;  
 And bides the day that yet a fairer Dawn  
 Shall grant, to lift still darker veils of night  
 From Error's potent reign and gloomy power.  
 Truth's word is forward ; she never strikes the knell,  
 That tells the midnight of Man's final toil.

BRAIN :

*(courteously bending)*

I thank thee, Judge, and await the larger Age.

FINIS.