

THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.

BY HENRY FRANK.

(Continued)

THE CELL:

Who me
From subterranean depths calls forth and asks
To ope my tiny lips?

BRAIN:

Sing, elfin Child,
Of living substance and its miracle
Of birth.

CELL:

E'en though infinitesimal,
Yet hath Nature reared in me,
Structures rare and magical,
Finer than man's eye can see.

E'en while yet Laurentian rocks
Cooled amid the fires of earth,
I, inchoate, in the shocks
Of flaming carbon, saught my birth.

Upward through Silurian slime,
Coral and cretacious crests
(Wove of carbon, shell and lime)
Caught me in their ageing breasts.

Ichthyosaurs, whose lizard form,
Fish-like, clove the primal seas;
Massive birds, that vied the storm,
Saught me in the ocean's lees.

Mammoth forests, mammals vast,
 Apes, prehensiled or long armed,
 Harbored me from ancient past,
 As life's stream my fellows swarmed.

Up from depths post-pliocene,
 Time hath wove within my web,
 Life's each changing, tragic scene,
 As earth's tides did flow and ebb.

Prophesied in plasmic egg,
 History confirms my fate ;
 None needs God for favors beg,
 He cannot now His laws re-state.

Cells that lie in leaf or bark,
 Leaf and bark alone produce ;
 Self-same insect, ape or lark,
 Unlike cells cannot educe.

Each its kind must reproduce,
 Moulded by the trend of time,
 Urge resistless can induce,
 But what chimes with Nature's rhyme.

Sprung from merging slime and sea,
 Life thro me thus swift revealed,
 Throbbing in a fluid free,
 Shaped me in the soil concealed.

Up from protoplasmic yeast,
 Primally alike, I ween,
 Bubbles plant or man or beast,
 Living fluid, red or green.

Each hath writ within itself,
 Fate that fashions form and soul ;
 I, the inborn mystic elf,
 Urge them on toward final goal.

Nature, nascent, wrought through strife,
Proving what best thrives is best;
In the struggling march of life,
Conquering forms defied arrest.

Cells innumerable have thriven,
In the protoplasmic stream,
Each with primal impulse driven,
Far from Eozoic dream.

Fixed in fated, final form,
Each cell at its office works;
Though in space a myriad swarm,
None its instant duty shirks.

Time was when uncertain fate,
Lingered in unshapen cells;
Struggle, stress, contention, hate,
Destined each where now it dwells.

Magical the structures reared,
By these elfin architects;
Castles, houses, with most weird,
Labarynthian effects.

Tiny, microscopic forms,
Genius, manifold, display;
E'en in trampled, earthen worms,
Marvels lurk that men dismay.

Palpitant, each drop of life
Throbs with vast machinery,
Weaving like a shuttle rife,
Shapes past human mimicry.

Every form of mammal, plant,
Fibred flower, convolved-brain,
Slowly grows from substance scant,
Bit by bit and grain by grain.

We, the magic toilers are,
 Miracles of nature work ;
 Gods cannot create a star,
 But with powers that in us lurk.

Outwardly our form oft dies,
 Deathlessly our substance lives ;—
 Where Life's shuttle swiftly flies,
 There the essence of us thrives.

Life, 'tis ours to give on earth ;
 Dint of our mechanic toil
 Weaves, in planetary birth,
 Soul and sense, from inert soil.

Up from slimy "ooze" we climb,
 Ever on from mite to Man,
 Through aeonic gulfs of time,
 Seeking Nature's vaster span.

BRAIN :

(exultantly)

List, thou benighted Sponsor of the Faith,
 To knowledge falling from the lips of those,
 Who toil with indefatigable skill,
 And build the microscopic majesty
 Of Kingdoms, tho invisible, sublime,
 Inimitable and unparalleled.
 Thou prat'st withal of supersensuous soul,
 —A tenuous, sublimate, encompassing
 Entity—a substance, void of aught
 Substantial—essence superior to laws
 That reign in space—uncorrelated with
 Pan-Cosmic energies that surge from suns,
 Or spiral incandescent Nebulae,
 From chaos weave the planetary spheres,
 Or wake the sleeping buds on vernal boughs.
 Thou reason'st, 'sooth, "Mind is not chemic or
 Cohesive force combining molecules,
 Which shape the infinite phenomena
 Of rolling worlds ; nor is 't electric spark,
 Which from fused atoms confluent forms evokes ;

Nor magic Motion metamorphosed in
 The vital, throbbing cells, whose ruby breasts
 The stage become whereon enacted is
 The mirage and tragedy of Life."
 Hence Mind is other than aught manifest,
 Within all visible or viewless realms,
 Uncorrelated, super-spacial, free!!
 Thou prat'st of an Architect of worlds,
 Though infinite, beyond Infinity.
 A Being compassing Infinity,
 Himself beyond an infinite universe!
 Such logic would befoul a sea of thought!
 'T is contradiction's very self. Or Mind
 Is all, or Matter: or, perchance, the two,
 Identical, are opposite sides of each.
 Diverse in function, once, inseparate
 In nature; in essence all identical.
 Whatever Mind may be, it must needs be
 Invisibly inwove in visual forms,
 And one with Energy that moves the world.
 'T is inconceivable that Mind's a Thing,
 Apart and extricate from substance, which
 Is all-pervasive. If Matter be, 'tis Mind;
 Or mayhap—Mind is Matter's other self,
 Both immaterial and material,
 As sense-perceived, or felt insensible.

MIND:

Halt, thy too rapid speech! O Reason hear:
 This boaster claims machinery and mind
 Are one: The Thought which organizes is
 The thing itself, self-shaped from shapeless mass
 Into organic grandeur. The Builder and
 The building are the same: The Clock creates
 Itself with genius increate. O Fie!
 O how has Logic fallen to base use
 And merged in mimic nonsense. 'Tis too true
 The age is all distraught, confused, by wild
 And senseless admiration of a false
 And boastful Science.

BRAIN :

'T is sad to hear thy groans.

These are the piteous grievings of an Age,
 Though moribund, unconscious of its death.
 If Reason grant I will my summons send
 For still another witness who shall prove
 That what prevails, and called the universe,
 Was not directed to its end by some
 Intelligence that played upon 't, as plays
 With clay the potter. 'T is Man is self-deceived.
 He, standing on the topmost summit of
 Age ascending peaks, *chef d'œuvre* of Time,
 Himself, the acme and supreme apex
 Of Nature's moulding powers, motivated and willed
 By conscious purpose, thinks that Nature is
 Thus purposed by some pre-existing Mind.
 He would the infinite confine within
 The bounds and limitations of the laws
 That operate within his narrow being.
 Beholding stationary objects moved
 By his initial impulse, he recks not
 Of Motion beginningless, inherent in
 The universal essence; knowing he
 Discerns but objects moved externally,
 He halts at thought of Builder dwelling within
 The building of life evolving from itself!
 He sees the *outer* world: 'T is Science casts
 Its penetrating eye beyond the mist
 Of momentary vision, weighs the stars
 And suns upon its balances; dissects
 Their vast anatomies, dissolves their beams,
 And learns the secret of their origin.
 The intimations of a buried Past
 She scents, and, sleuth-like, trails the mystery,
 Through cosmic labyrinths, till solved at last!
 Behold her work: She causes the glistening sand
 Upon the beach to ope its flinty lips,
 And speak its truth; she makes the boneless worm
 Its parentage reveal; the bell-domed flowers
 Upon the sea, the urchins, starry-shelled,
 And bony-shielded reptiles makes tell whence

They sprung, and from what fiery soils: and e'en
 The earth, prolific mother of all forms,
 Must needs divulge her inmost secrets; speak
 Her origin from flaming Nebulae:—
 She must again disport the fiery robe
 That once enveloped her; the plangent mists
 And watery envelope which once concealed
 Her mountainous breasts, that heaving bulged anon
 Above subsiding seas; she must reveal
 Whence soil and seed begun, and whence the life
 That surged and swelled in thousand rivulets
 From self-impregnant womb; she must give tongue
 To every leaf and pebble, to layers of dirt
 That stratify the globe; to fossiled stone
 And bones, the teeth of centuries have gnawed!
 The panorama of the world, the eyes
 Of Science survey with penetrating gaze:—
 Its cosmic transformations, tragedies;
 Its cyclic births and deaths, recorded in
 Millennial resurrections; its unbegun
 Beginning and its endless end. Bethink:—
 To listening ears of Science, Time narrates
 What countless centuries have left untold.
 This knowing, no more should humble Man, bewitched
 By sacred ignorance, belie the plan
 Of Nature, measured by his paltry powers.
 Man strives t' achieve by conscious will; therefore
 His limitations: Nature, self-evolved,
 Forges forth from Atom's unsensed throb,
 To crowning Consciousness in Man sublime!
 Hail, first-begotten, foremost offspring of
 Self-forming, self-evincing cosmos, speak!

*(slowly above the surf-laden surface of the waters, emerges the peak of
 a rising mountain. When the embossed knoll is well above the
 water's edge, the sea gradually stills, lapping at last in
 leisurely waves, and upon the mountain-top there
 appears the perfect shape of a human bust, as if
 cut out of the rocks of the peak. It represents
 the ideal Goal toward which all the
 manifold shapes and forms of
 Nature have been moving)*

FORM :

Naught but myself exists, nor can
E'en primal mists unshapen move
From primal urge to final man,
From flaming gas to stars above.

All energy seeks path in space;
Ultimate shape each motion takes;
No less the ray in rapid race,
Than wave, the tempest madly shakes.

The vapor floating in the sky;
The viewless germs that ride the air;
The flakes of snow that wayward fly;
By me are fashioned, frail and fair.

The cystalled grain, the fibred leaf,
The fronded fern, the crawling worm,
The wriggling sperm in neural sheaf,
Have struggled toward their final form.

I have not always been as now,
But slowly through millennial strife,
Time shaped the fashion of my brow,
And lineaments carved by struggling life.

I was not, ere all worlds began
Predestined and forethought by fate:
Or cast athwart the infinite span,
Full-formed in embryonic state.

None saw me, erst I trod the Void,
Or latent lay in Chaos wild,
Or, seized by Chance and oft decoyed,
Was toward some distant goal beguiled.

For none so rash to prophesy,
How sprung from far chaotic womb,
Each myriad possibility,
Would final form in time assume.

Behold the snow flakes on the pane!
 Their sparkling crown and star-formed crest,
 (From moisture fashioned grain by grain)
 The plan of Nature well attest.

Ne'er Man's ingenious mind hath wrought,
 Such magic as these vapors weave,
 When frosts, which have their bosoms saught,
 With chilling passion to them cleave.

The mists' white feet, in variant form
 Flit vagrantly through frosted air—
 Unlike in calm or gathering storm,
 When skies are dun or sun is fair.

'T is chemic or electric touch,
 The pulsive heat, or radiant sky,
 The weight of gravitation's clutch,
 Or cosmic stress, determines why.

I shall thus variously disport,
 In multifarious moulds, the power
 That reigns supreme at heaven's court,
 To shape a star or humble flower.

Thus throughout the natural world,
 All forms evolve from forces, welled
 From primal source and onward whirled,
 Till by conflicting forces quelled.

Naught pre-exists as final form;
 No destiny foretold its end;
 Else useless were the stress and storm,
 That from eternity contend.

The stars whose constellations swing
 Their pendulous orbits through the sky,
 Heard not the morning angels sing
 Creations hymn from thrones on high.

With cosmic and concussive shock,
 Their cataclysmic course they saught;
 Their whirling seas of fire did rock
 The world, as ruthlessly they fought.

Their breasts with titan blows oft smote;
 Their shaping forms to atoms crushed:—
 Restored, upon the heavens they wrote,
 Their fiery epic as they rushed.

Whence come, or whither fleeing, they
 Uncharted, knew not, nor shall know;
 But onward, through the stellar way,
 Their courses seek like whirling snow.

Thus, Whate'er in heaven or earth,
 Is cast within Expression's mould,
 Reveals the meaning of its birth,
 When read in Nature's tale, oft told.

Millennial epochs come and go,
 The stars repeat their ancient life,
 And cyclic resurrections flow
 From cyclic death and cosmic strife;

Still, whatsoe'er my changes be,
 I am eternal, infinite;
 The world's vast drama is of ME,
 And yields me homage requisite.

BRAIN:

Thus speaks the wisdom of the star and stone,
 Or crude and nebulous essence that once surged
 Through seas primordial, till shaped to worlds.
 And thus all substances, from ghostly rays
 And vanishing atoms, carve their native forms:—
 No less, impond'able than opaque things
 Leap from invisible sources of the air.
 O womb of infinite Fecundity:
 O, cosmic, procreant, all-filling Ether,
 Abysmal vista of Eternity,

Thou, too, by form immeasurable, art
 Encompassed, beyond the mental grasp of Man,
 As natural law and reason postulate.
 To Man the infinite is compassed by
 The horizon of his mental vision, which
 Fades in vague, vertiginous distances.
 Immeasurableness is not unmeasured, save
 By incommensurate minds. The sky-kissed mount,
 Whose hooded brow is studded by the stars,
 Is measureless to crawling worm; and, well,
 The gilded mote might deem the golden ray,
 In which it floats, immeasurable, if
 'T were conscious; forest monarchs would to grass
 Blades seem beyond the reach of rule or chart.
 In Nature, all is due proportioned and
 Perceived as relative.

MIND:

(angrily expostulating)

Ah, relative,

Indeed! But who ordains the appointed bounds
 Of relative function? Who hath swarmed the Void
 With fecund Forces that beget in womb
 Of Time, the diverse forms that Nature needs?
 Who hath these all-substantial worlds evolved
 From Naught? Who hath so armed the Atom's breast
 Protected, that it drives what it dislikes
 From its embrace, and what it likes attracts?
 Who first conceived of Form, while Matter was
 Invisible, chaotic and unshaped?
 Who carved the contour of the Universe,
 With matchless grandeur and sublimity?
 Who urged initial impulse on inert,
 And moveless Matter, whose inertia wells
 Within, and drives it on its endless course?
 Who twirled the spiral rings of Nebulae,
 And from their substance rolled the golden orbs,
 That glorify the amethystine skies?
 Who timed the clock-like movement of the spheres,
 And tonal rhythms of aerial waves?
 What, then, is Matter but the mould of form,

The Potter casts in matrix of the Mind?
 Without His conjuration, where were worlds
 And planets that populate the bluey Void?
 Speak, if thou canst, whence Matter, Force, or whence
 The electric clasps that wanton atoms bind?
 O, wondrous wisdom, crowning Nature's work!
 Came all by Chance, that specious god of thine?
 Or was't ordained by Him, the Infinite,
 From whose supernal Mind, the blending beams
 Of Wisdom and Intelligence pervade
 The visible and invisible paths of space?

BRAIN :

I previously have said, that Science sunk
 Its probing shafts into the mysteries
 Of Nature to such depths, already it
 Has reached the vanishing rim of substance and
 Ostensible reality, where sways
 Tumultuous Energy, unheard, unseen.
 Man, now, amazed, pursues the floating wraith
 Of Matter, past visual zones till it dissolve
 In Motion's vibrative, ethereal waves.
 Thou speak'st of Naught, whence sprung created worlds!
 That Nothing is, which lies beyond the reach
 Of human sense; yet 't is but nothing to
 The unperceiving sense. When substance fades
 Beyond the zone of sense, tho dissipant
 And swallowed by Vacuity, 't is not
 Dissolved to Nothingness, tho lost to sense.
 There is no nothingness, nor vacuum,
 In the far, abysmal depths of shoreless space!
 If Nothing were, then God were nothing, too;
 Or Nothing were true God. For how can Aught
 Exist in Naught, save as the Naught itself
 Become existent Aught? Be not befooled!
 If God made Matter, Himself, then, matter is.
 Else were He ignorant of what He made,
 And His omniscience were a vapid boast.
 The Universe is not a sphere, and bound
 In space, outside of which a God may live;
 'T is neither here nor there, but everywhere;

All-comprising, boundless, infinite, supreme!
 And God himself is therein full expressed,
 Or else unsought by thought of rational Man.

And, prithee, what of Spirit? Knowest thou aught?
 Where is't? If insubstantial, where abid'st it?
 If not of Matter how shall Matter sense
 What is insensible? Impassable
 The gulf twixt Sense and Spirit if diverse
 And incommunicant each be. Thou, loud,
 Of Spirit speak'st; but Science, of Energy:
 In Nature both must be the same, the Source
 Primeval, whence from seeming nothingness
 Majestic grandeurs of the world unfold.
 Here then may reason rest at last in peace,
 Discerning harmony in human thought:
 Here found, at last, the final unity;
 In Nature and in Man, the conflict ends,
 And energy and spirit breathe as one:
 They are but breathing wave and waving breath,
 Eternal Motion whence evolves the world.
 Come forth, then, Thou eternal Source and speak:

(over the entire globe a strong, stirring but evenly modulated breath of wind sweeps round, carrying with it all movable objects, yet not creating commotion, but rather a pleasing sense of intermingling harmony among the moving objects, while the globe itself revolves leisurely. Finally a zephyr seizes a mist upon the surface and whirls it slowly round and round in spiral form till it assumes a lofty graceful figure, whirling round in the gentle breeze, and lit with green and red and violet rays. The figure, MOTION, speaks)

(To be Continued.)