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 cretaceous 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;
Selfsame insect, ape or lark,
Unlike cells cannot educe.

Each its kind must reproduce,
Moulded by the trend of time,
Urge restless 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.
The skeptic's challenge.

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 guls 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 pratt'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 miracle 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.
THE SKEPTIC'S CHALLENGE.

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 fossilized 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 unbegan
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)
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 crystalled 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 sought;
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.

Millenial 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'erable 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
Protectived, 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 grandeur's 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 intermin-
gling harmony among the moving objects, while the globe
itself revolves leisurely. Finally a zephyr seizes a mist
upon the surface and whirs 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.)