

# PHILOSOPHY AND FUN OF ALGEBRA

## CHAPTER 12: JACOB'S LADDER

In Chapter X. I set you children a question:—Why did Jacob's angels come down a ladder, whereas other Hebrews saw angels mixed up with romantic pretty things such as wings and clouds?

I hope some of you have made a guess before now; but some are not good at guessing. I will tell you what may help you to find out.

If a bird wants to go up and down from the roof to the garden, it trusts to its wings. A man has to use a ladder: step,—step,—step.

If a bird is not fully fledged or has a broken wing, it has to find something more or less like a ladder; and go up and down bit by bit: hop,—hop,—hop.

If an artist wishes to draw a parabola, he does it freehand, that is to say, he just draws the curve. He does not take all the trouble which Mrs Somervell's book makes little children take, of getting the curve step by step by the method of Finite Differences.

Jacob wished to be rich. Some angel, but a very bad one, inspired him with an idea of getting rich in one big sweep, by cheating his father and brother. By wanting to do things in that sort of quick, easy way, when he did not yet know how to do things both quickly and rightly, he got into terrible trouble and had to leave his country.

Now I suppose that the angels who converted him meant to say something like this: "It is all very well for good, holy, God-fearing men like your father and grandfather to go where they are taken by angels who can move about on wings; but you are at present a stupid, clumsy person; your wings have not grown yet, or you have broken them by being covetous. We are going to show you how you should go about: step,—step,—step. Have patience, and take pains; and don't go about on magic carpets."

