

# PHILOSOPHY AND FUN OF ALGEBRA

## CHAPTER 13: THE GREAT 'X' OF THE WORLD

A great question which people like to quarrel about is:—Who or What made things be as they are? As soon as people grew clever enough to think about anything except scrambling for food and taking care of their own babies, they began quarrelling about Who or What made things be. Nobody knew anything about it; and most people had a great deal to say about it. Moses saw that there was no hope of getting a country orderly while all this confusion was going on; so he said to the Hebrews, “I must not allow all this confusion to go on among a people that I am made responsible for. None of us have ever seen the Maker of things. We can see the things growing, but not the force that makes them. That is our X; our Unknown. We are going to begin by stating that we don't know. We are going to call the Maker of things ‘I Am,’ or ‘That which is, whatever it is’; and we are going to make two hypotheses to start with. We are going to try thinking of ‘I Am’ as Unity; one, and not several or a fraction. We will also try thinking of ‘I Am’ as No-Thing,—we are not going to suppose at present that any particular kind of thing made the rest; we will suppose that ‘I Am’ is not a thing. When we find that any particular proceeding or behaviour destroys men, or makes them too sickly or weak or stupid or quarrelsome to manage other creatures and keep the upper hand of the world, we will say, for short, that ‘I Am’ does not like or does not intend the people of Israel to go on with that kind of proceeding or behaviour.

“Now these two hypotheses are as much as we can deal with for the present. Anybody who wants to think out other hypotheses than those will have to think to himself, or go out of the country that I am to manage.

“Now we will arrange all the facts that we know round the statement of our own ignorance; and then try our hypotheses on them.

“We know that eating the flesh of certain uncleanly animals gives people certain diseases; we will say, for short, ‘I Am’ does not intend the Hebrews to eat the flesh of those animals. We know that if people are dirty in their habits and careless in preparing their food and in washing their hands before they touch food, they get fevers; we will suppose that ‘I Am’ does not intend the people of Israel to be dirty in their habits. We know that if people burn things the smoke of which makes them drunk and silly, they manage their affairs badly, and make mistakes, and do not grow their crops properly, and are not ready to fight when enemies attack them. The people in neighbouring



countries say that the Maker of things likes or dislikes to smell the smoke of these drugs; they know no more than we do what He likes to smell, but we are going to suppose that 'I Am' does not like us to smell them."

The Hebrews never found out what "I Am" is; but those who stuck loyally by the hypotheses of Moses, and refused to be distracted from the matter in hand, or to talk about anything except the experiment which they were trying, found out several things that were very useful to them. For instance, about weather and the electricity of the atmosphere, and how to take care of their health, and how to use their imagination to supply them with working hypotheses for a variety of sciences, and how to use their dreams to show them where they had been making mistakes and spoiling their brains. Whereas the people who would insist on shouting and arguing and quarrelling about things which were only wild guesses got on very slowly with learning Science.

