

PHILOSOPHY AND FUN OF ALGEBRA

CHAPTER 14: GO OUT OF MY CLASS-ROOM

A story is told of one of the orderly pupils of Mosaism who got to know a good deal about weather and electricity; and at last he got out of patience with the people who wanted to shout and argue. And he said to them: "What is the good of all this arguing backwards and forwards about things that we do not know and cannot settle? Let us try a fair experiment. You go on shouting and doing whatever you think the Unseen Powers like; and I will do what I think will get them to do what I like. And let us agree that whichever of us can draw a spark out of a thundercloud shall be considered to know most about how to come to an understanding with 'I Am.'"

So the other people shouted and jumped about, and cut themselves with knives; because they had taken it into their heads to imagine that the Maker of things liked to see that kind of behaviour.

Why they thought so I cannot conceive. But there's no end to the rubbish that people get to think when they argue about what X is, instead of trying hypotheses in an orderly manner.

The Unknown Powers let them shout all day long; and then Elijah got a spark out of a thundercloud.

The same sort of thing happened again about a hundred and fifty years ago. Various sorts of priests were shouting and arguing about what "I Am" wished people to believe and to think; and then Benjamin Franklin and his friends, who had not been mixing up with the argument or making wild guesses, but quietly experimenting and dealing logically with the fact of their own ignorance, sent up a kite into a thundercloud, and got a spark down; and the consequence of that is that all kinds of people say, "What a wonderful man Benjamin Franklin was!" and all sorts of people are able to ride about in electric trams.

But the curious part of the matter is that many people use electric trams to go to meetings, on purpose to shout and argue and make wild guesses about things they know nothing about!

However, what they choose to do is not our business. You are living in an orderly school; and of course you do not argue about things you know nothing about. Let us go back to our Hebrew electrician.



He had shown the people of Isra?el what comes of sticking peaceably to one's working hypothesis. If he had been thoroughly logical he would have gone on sticking to it. He would have said to the people of Isra?el, "Now you see that I can teach you electricity; this land is going to be my class-room; make those shouting people hold their tongues, or else go away; so that we can go on with our lessons in peace. When they want to learn electricity properly, they can come back." But he was in too great a hurry to make a complete and final settlement. A good teacher sends a noisy, troublesome pupil out of his class- room for the time, but does not expel her from the school merely for being troublesome. The shouting people were among the facts which "I Am" put before Elijah to deal with. He found it necessary to eliminate them in order to reduce his data within the compass of his power to manage, but he should have done it as a provisional necessity. He should have arranged his mind on the understanding that the eliminated data would have to come back.

Instead of that he used his power and science to kill them; and gave way to the feeling that they were got rid of and done with.

And then his mind began to go wrong. He lost his nerve. He began to talk nonsense about things he knew nothing about, and led a great many people into mistakes.

