

**AJAX DEFIED  
THE LIGHTNING**

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Ajax Defied the Lightning by Leon F. Douglass

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**LEON F. DOUGLASS**

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TO MY  
ANNUAL



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## AJAX DEFIED THE LIGHTNING

Ajax, it is said, defied the lightning. If he did, he was a fool. A zip-cr-r-ack, and Ajax, as the old Latins would tell us, "has been." Far saner would he have proved himself, had he allowed the thunder to do the talking, while he quietly slipped out of his armor and made record time for the nearest shelter. When the lightning was zigzagging in the sky it was time for him to get in out of the rain. It was silly stage-play to defy the forces of Nature. He had nothing to gain. He had everything to lose. Jupiter needn't have been very particular in taking aim: a coat-of-mail would, by its very attractiveness, have drawn the bolt to the right spot. Ajax, we repeat, was a fool, and every sensible man will agree with us. Far wiser was Franklin. He wooed the Nature that Ajax had defied, and with a simple plaything of childhood enriched mankind with forces that have made the modern world. "Thy eye," said the lover in Shakespeare, "Jove's lightning bears, thy voice his dreadful thunder, Which, not to anger bent, is music and sweet fire." (Love's Labor Lost.) Defy Nature, contend with Nature and you reap destruction; bend to her will, observe her laws, and the discords of life will be blended into music, the dross of our humanity will be purified by her sacred fire. Ajax, defiance of Nature, war, decadence; Franklin, conformity with Nature, peace, progress; good and evil, to be determined by choice; this is the lot of human life. The choice is life to the individual. The choice is life to the race. The part of Ajax is manifold and many play it unawares. In condemning him it behooves us to examine in how far we are condemning ourselves.

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For the Laws of Nature are not those only that regulate and harmonize mere material existence; that now bind now separate the atoms in her wondrous laboratory; nor to these that robe the earth in verdure; that swell in the bud and ripen in the fruit; that pulse in the sea, and vibrate in the sun, and bind the spheres in harmonious unity. Her sway is not limited to these. She reaches up into the higher lives of her children and establishes laws for our humanity which, if observed, are more beneficent than electricity, if defied or even deviated from, are more destructive than the thunderbolt. Far back in the ages she had formed all. In each instance she rules all. Nothing is too small to escape her notice: nothing too great to tax her power. Her laws are universal and fixed. Strive as we may, rebel as we may, we cannot escape them.

All successful human laws, therefore, must be based upon the Laws of Nature. For the solution of the problems of every phase of life, conformity to Nature's code is necessary, for she is the source and the guide, the ultimate rule of all human achievement.

And note how wonderfully, and simply, and on what broad lines she proceeds. The beauty and fairness of Nature is, that she makes one set of laws for all. Rich or poor, strong or weak, great or small, all must obey alike. She knows no favoritism. She grants no exemption. Her laws are immutable. She judges impartially and punishes infallibly all transgressors. Human law is imperfect, hence its need of equity. Where equity is absent, there enter privilege, immunity, exemption, partiality. Exemptions breed jealousies; and jealousies, war. Were man to conform to



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and co-operate with Nature's laws, we would enjoy a paradise on earth; by ignoring and violating them, we have the world as it is.

But Nature not only supplies a rule for human conduct, she is equally generous in supplying a remedy for every human ill. Selfishness, envy, greed, egotism and vanity are the most common failings of mankind. They are deviations from the beauty of her ideal, but Nature is never thwarted. Love undermines the fortress of selfishness; open-handedness will level the ramparts of envy; shame will put greed to flight; the desire for the respect of our fellowmen will fetter our egotism and vanity. Man is ruled by the degree of intelligence bestowed on him by Nature. His every act is weighed in her unerring scale. When by his misdeeds he violates virtue, Nature punishes him that she may restore the balance she exacts of all. To see her equalize the balance, we have only to consider the simple, ordinary incidents of every-day life, in which selfishness, greed, envy, egotism and vanity form the chief cast, with selfishness in the leading rôle.

It behooves us, therefore, to bend to her wise and potent sway, and accept, with a willing heart, laws that are made solely for our benefit. The farmer must observe them if he wishes the earth to open up her treasures. The doctor's work is vain if Nature withhold her aid. For every poison she has supplied an antidote. No scientist can invent successfully except by strict adherence to her laws. The manufacturer knows that he must make no effort to evade them. All success in life is their product—attempts at evasion result inevitably in failure.

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The framers of human laws, however, from time immemorial, have foolishly sought to evade Nature's precepts and have broken the higher code; and the pages of history are stained with the tears of the millions who have suffered in consequence. Defiance of them is the defiance of Ajax, and we know him for a fool. It is because human laws and human lives conflict with Nature's laws, that, in retaliation, she punishes us with strikes and rebellions, and unleashes upon humanity the dogs of war.

We do not need to delve deeply into the records of the past to prove our assertion, for the history of the hour reveals it in a flood of light. What is responsible for the present state of Russia? The unnatural condition of her laws. Her rulers, glutted with an autocratic power, made the laws subservient to their private interests, partial to their favorites, and unfair and adverse to the common people. The laws of Nature were set at nought. The Czar, as Ajax, defied the lightning, and it struck, struck with fearful precision and resulting havoc, and the tempest of rebellion swept across the land. Throne and palace crumbled in its path, and the hut of the hitherto oppressed and despised peasant became the seat of power. But alas! and this is the sad part, the masses rising in their might, have been as false to the laws of Nature as the ruler whom they dethroned; and glutted in turn with power, have fallen into equal if not worse excesses. Nature's pendulum of justice and of fairness is not allowed to oscillate in obedience to its laws, and drawn too much to one side by ignorance, and rapacity, and thirst for revenge, it has swung violently to the other side into the hands of those who, led astray by idealistic, unpractical and

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unnatural principles, can never work out the peace and happiness of humanity. By its fair and even and well-balanced motion instituted by Nature, its regulator, the pendulum of justice, should swing impartially between ruler and ruled, marking out for each the blessings of our common existence; but violently drawn to either side in defiance of its laws, both must ultimately suffer in the inevitable reaction. But human authority is ever greedy and history repeats itself.

Nature is unselfish and loves to give of her abundance. Man too often is selfish and clinging tenaciously to what he has, strives to grab from others. Selfishness is the root of most of the faults of mankind individually and collectively. Overlooking the golden mean, men usually sin against discretion and lose that for which they are striving as well as that which they already have. Ajax was not satisfied with the arms with which he defied the lightning. He wanted those of Achilles, and when they were given to Ulysses, he lost his mind completely; and imagining that the flocks that supplied food to the camps were the Grecian princes, his imaginary enemies, he laid about him with the sword that bid defiance to the lightning and slaughtered the innocent victims.

Our country has been divided between the "Wets" and "Drys." It has not been a fair division of our people, for multitudes who are not "Drys" have had no sympathy with the excesses of the "Wets." Still, had the "Wets" been content to abandon strong drink, they might easily have obtained a compromise with the "Drys," and eliminating the saloon evil, have saved light wines and beer. Being selfish and unwilling to cede anything, they lost all. But the "Drys," equally unreasonable, have abused their victory by