

**AJAX LOQUITUR, OR, THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN
OLD LOCOMOTIVE
ENGINE**

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Ajax Loquitur, or, the Autobiography of an Old Locomotive Engine by Robert Weatherburn

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ROBERT WEATHERBURN

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BY

ROBERT WEATHERBURN
M.I.M.E.



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S.I.R.P. 3-18-96

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IT would be pretentious with so small and unassuming a book to give a Preface. Besides, Prefaces have always appeared to me to have been written to fulfil one or more of three purposes, viz. :—

- (1) To give the Author's reason or reasons for writing ;
- (2) To furnish some explanation or excuse as to the method, preparation, or quantity of his writings ;
- (3) To serve by way of introduction, too often of an apologetic nature.

Well, dealing with the first, I candidly avow that I sought to kill time during a short period of convalescence following a sharp and painful illness ; secondly, I do not know that any explanation or excuse is required for having done so ; thirdly, as regards an introduction, " Ajax " does not require any, but will, without apology, introduce himself in lieu of a Preface, and with the hope that none of his readers will be the worse for the reading of his history.

R. W.

PROLOGUE

DOUBTS may be cast upon the authenticity of this communication. If so, the fault will not be mine that I have become the recipient (so to speak) of the antecedents, life-history, and testamentary dispositions of Old No. 9, and thus, perforce, its biographer.

It may be that I always had a lingering and reverential regard for the old engine—a connecting link with the past—itself a rare combination of excellences gathered from diverse sources of thought and successful practice, and skilfully blended. Thus it was that, as I was passing one day, the old engine—which always won from me at least a momentary regard—looked so eloquent of past activity and work, and so lightened up by the burst of sunlight which peered and glinted over the gable ends of the workshop, as to appear like the features of a

weather-beaten veteran, bronzed and wrinkled, and yet very interesting. So I stayed me; and the reflection born of the moment found utterance in words, and I muttered audibly, "Old boy, if you could only speak!"

For a moment I was more than surprised; for if fancy had not played me a trick, surely that dissipated-looking and rusty old chimney vibrated, the wheels made a palpable slip round, and what sounded at first very inarticulate, more like the spasmodic gasps of escaping steam, with a jingling of rods, at last led to intelligible utterance as follows:

"Speak? Most certainly. Why should I be longer mute? Neuter gender? Nonsense, my friend: they all speak, some through one medium, and some another. Why, all Nature speaks. Even the flowers, trees, and brutes, have all told their secrets through those cheerful listeners and sympathetic interpreters Hans Andersen and the old moralist Æsop. The half-obliterated records of the earlier Pharaohs on the temples and Pyramids talk daily; and old Memnon the mysterious speaks audibly at

times, only his priestly interpreters are no longer there. Hence the total absence of all records. . . . You appear astounded, doubtful and hesitating ; yet, as I may not have another opportunity, being under sentence to be broken up, take down my life's history, which at all events merits the title of a useful one."

Thus abjured, though startled, I took down, as nearly as possible in its own words, the following utterances of the old engine.