

Snorers, from The Atlantic Club—Book

Theodore S. Fay

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Thou dost snore distinctly,—
There's meaning in thy snores.

—*Tempest*.

Has it ever befallen thee, gentle reader, to sleep in a crowded hotel, in an apartment shared by several others, or in a stage travelling all night, or on board a steamboat? If so, you have suffered from a nuisance, we fear, beyond the reach of satire, viz. *snoring*. Whether it is an *Americanism*, like whittling, spitting, putting the feet on the mantel-piece, and wearing hats with a long nap, we do not at this time wish to discuss; nor whether it is one of those general evils incidental to human nature, but we *do* say, that your regular snorer is an enemy to society, and ought either to cure his propensity, or turn hermit. Our object in writing this is to solicit the attention of the learned to a subject intimately connected with human comfort, that some means may be adopted either to have the class of snorers kept distinct from other people, in a different part of the town, and compelled to travel in a line of stages and steamboats constructed expressly for them; or else to check the propensity in early childhood, by a rigid course of education. Our youth are taught to dance, sing, play the fiddle, sit straight, eat with a fork, and be virtuous, but not a word about snoring; not a hint of this faculty, growing up in the secrecy of night, like a rank weed, within their character, to break the peace of innocent families, and ruin, night after night, that precious balmy slumber which lies, or should lie, so "starkly in the traveller's bones." Snorers! Why they are monsters. We avoid them in all our rural peregrinations, and smile inwardly on finding their acquaintance cultivated by unwary strangers, who little think what a trap they are falling into. We are one of that extensive class of human creatures who enjoy a fair night's rest. The day emphatically belongs to earth. We yield it without reluctance to care and labor. We toil, we drudge, we pant, we play the hack-horse; we do things smilingly from which, in secret, we recoil; we pass by sweet spots, and rare faces that our very heart yearns for, without betraying the effort it costs; and thus we drag through the twelve long hours, disgusted almost, but gladdened withal, that the mask will have an end, and the tedious game be over, and our visor and our weapons be laid aside. But the night is the gift of heaven. It brings freedom and repose; its influence falls coolly and gratefully upon the mind as well as the body; and, when we drop the extinguisher upon the light which glimmers upon the round, untouched pillow, we, at the same time, put out a world of cares and perplexities. What, then, must be our disappointment to find ourself full length, side by side, with a professed regular-bred, full-blooded snorer, when the spell of sleep is every moment forming on us; and as often broken by the anomalous, incongruous, nasal vociferations, against which, at this particular moment, we are endeavoring to excite the indignation of the reader?

It is one of the advantages of authorship, however, that even evils, by yielding prolific subjects for the pen, become a source both of amusement and profit. We experienced this the other night, when, returning from a day's absence, the traveller's vicissitudes sent us to sleep on board a steamboat, plying between this city and Albany. Fancy our perplexity, good reader; you know, (or, for we have been hand and glove with you for so long a time, you ought to know,) our sly *penchant* for comfort—our harmless pieces of epicureanism on a small scale—our enjoyment of a shady, still corner—our horror of being pushed and thrust about "any how." We have even, on occasions, betrayed too many of our secret tastes and antipathies, and have been rated sometimes by anonymous correspondents, (those familiar, invisible gentry,) for preferring a slant of sunbeam through a heavy curtain to one that comes in like other beams. Imagine us, then, in a "night boat," which even the captain confessed was "slow;" the wind and tide against us, a hot night, numerous passengers, the engine heaving and working laboriously, with

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a heavy and regular impulse, that jarred through the massive vessel with jerks and shocks like little earthquakes, and the subtle languor of slumber stealing through our limbs, and hanging on our eyelids. A hundred or two travellers had already "turned in," and we were ushered below into the cabin, and directed by a clerk to a berth, where, our guide informed us, we were to *sleep*. To sleep! We looked at the fellow's face. It was perfectly grave and respectful. A glance satisfied us he had intended no insult. He left us, and we paused to look around. Ah! the cabin of a steamboat is a melancholy affair to a sleepy gentleman, about eleven o'clock at night. A dim lamp, suspended from the ceiling, shed a doleful light upon the long, low, narrow apartment. The curtains of the berths were mostly drawn. Divers boots, which, when enlivened by their respective legs, had clambered mountains or paced over fields, now lay in groups here and there, and hats, valises, and umbrellas, rested by their owners, being probably the only vestiges of them we should ever encounter. One fat gentleman had just lifted his unwieldy person into bed, and was tying a bandanna handkerchief around his head, preparatory to his lanching off into glorious repose; while a cross-looking lean person opposite, having wound up his watch, and rescued his feet from his boots, with a prodigious deal of straining and ill-humor; having with considerable difficulty discovered where he was to dispose of his cloak and other matters; bumping his head, moreover, while getting into his couch, and easing the pain with the fragment of an execration, at length also disposed of himself apparently to his satisfaction. Few things, when a man is really out of humor, exhaust his philosophy more utterly than hitting his head sharply against a hard object. My friend cursed the builder of the steam-boat, in a half-smothered growl, and then all was quiet. And now we were floating off into a pleasant sleep, when a low and gradually increasing sound from the berth of the fat gentleman arrested our attention. We listened, all was silent; and then again the same sound, more palpable and better developed. It was at first a long breath, of the consistency of a loud whisper. We turned over, still it went on. We turned back again, there it was yet. We rose on our elbow, in a passion, and poked our head out between the red curtains. There was the fat gentleman's berth. We could just detect a glimpse of the bandanna handkerchief, by a feeble glare of the lamp. Our sleepy eyes passed disconsolately over the boots and valises. We laid down again, but could not, "with all the weary watching of our care-tired thoughts," win the coy dame sleep to our bed. What was to be done? Go up and hit the fat gentleman a blow? Impossible. Complain to the captain? He would laugh at us. Never was man so weighed down, so oppressed with sleep, and never did man so suffer from a snorer. The fat gentleman, as if aware of our misery, and mocking it, went on, like an orator getting warm with his subject. He grew loud, vociferous, outrageous. We laid and listened. He inhaled, he exhaled. Now the air rushed in between his extended jaws, now it burst forth obstreperously through his sonorous nose. He took it in with the tone of an octave flute, he let it out again with the profound depth of a trombone. He breathed short, he breathed long; he gasped, whistled, groaned, gurgled. He quickened the time; became rapid, agitated, furious.

Hitherto he had snored with the sound of a rushing, regular stream, hastening onward over a deep channel—now it was the brawl, clash, dash, hurry, and discordant confusion of the same tide, hurled down a cataract of broken rocks—at last he gave an abrupt snort, and ceased altogether. We were thanking heaven for this relief, when a treble voice from the berth directly beneath, announced new trouble. It was some one—whom, we knew not, nor do we ever covet his friendship, who belonged to a different class of snorers. He made a regular, quick, sharp, hacking sound, like that of a man cutting wood. Hack, hack, hack—we heard it at intervals all night. The lean gentleman, in the opposite part of the room, now put in his claim as a snorer. He had four notes. It was a tune. It could be written and played any day. We laughed outright, and inwardly resolved to find the fellow out, and see what he was like by daylight. He played on some time, and then finished with a sudden combination of sounds, among the constituent parts of which we could plainly distinguish a hiss and two sneezes. His exit reminded us of those pyrotechnic creations to be seen at Niblo's, Castlegarden, &c. which whirl round and round and round, and then explode with a phiz and a whiz, sure to be bounteously applauded by the enlightened audience. There was something in this gentleman's snoring which touched our feelings. A fine spirited fellow he was, we warrant. Full of life and animation, and not inclined to hide his light under a bushel. What became of him, however, after the explosion, we cannot say. He left a dead silence, and his evaporation we almost lamented. We should like to know, however, whether any law can be put in requisition against these gentry, or why we have not the same right to practise on the trombone, on board the steamboat, that they possess of "piercing the night's dull ear" by such pompous displays of nasal ability?