

The Benefit of Farting

Explained

by

Jonathan Swift

and

An Essay upon Wind

by

Charles James Fox



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Contents

An Essay upon Wind (Charles James Fox)	3
<i>Dedicatory Letter to the Lord Chancellor</i>	5
<i>The Author's Anticipation</i>	7
<i>An Essay upon Farting</i>	9
<i>Postscript</i>	23
<i>Afterthoughts upon Farting</i>	27
The Benefit of Farting Explained (Jonathan Swift)	53
<i>A Certificate from the Court of the Princess Arsemini</i>	57
<i>Postscript by Way of Preface</i>	59
<i>On Miss V***e's F***t, in the Philippic Style</i>	63
<i>The Benefit of Farting Explained</i>	65
<i>Meditation on a T***d, Written in a Place of Ease</i>	79
Arse Musica (Anonymous)	83
Notes	103
Biographical Notes	109
Note on the Texts	115

The Benefit of Farting

An Essay upon Wind

by Charles James Fox

with

Curious Anecdotes

of

Eminent Pêteurs

Humbly dedicated to the Lord Chancellor

Perhaps such writing ought to be confined
In mere good breeding, like unsav'ry wind.
Were reading forced, I should be apt to think,
Men might no more write scurvily than stink:
But 'tis your choice whether you'll read or no;
If, likewise of your smelling, it were so,
I'd fart, just as I write, for my own ease,
Nor should you be concerned unless you please.

– *Wilmot*

Creditur ex medio quia res,
Arcessit habere sudoris minimum.¹

– *Horace*

To the
Lord Chancellor

My dear Lord,

I take the liberty of dedicating the following eccentric work to Your Lordship, as a man eminently superior to the prejudices of the world. As you are one of the first subjects in His Majesty's dominions, so you set the most noble and worthy example to your fellow subjects.

I have heard, from several of your brother peers, that Your Lordship farts, without reserve, when seated upon the woolsack, in a full assembly of nobles. This is honest and impartial in Your Lordship, and you merit the thanks of the nation at large, especially the democratic party, for making no more distinction between the proud body of hereditary representatives than Your Lordship formerly did before the plebeians in a full court of judicature at a country assize.

Now this is manly – I admire great Nature in all her operations, and detest the wretched affected being who would check or counteract her in any of her sublime and beautiful works. Fame, my Lord, with her shrill loud trumpet, reports that Your Lordship's farts are as STRONG, and as SOUND, as your arguments – as VIGOROUS as your intellects – as FORCIBLE as your language – as BRILLIANT as your wit – and as SONOROUS and MUSICAL as Your Lordship's voice.

May Your Lordship continue to fart like an ancient Grecian for many years, is the sincere wish of

Your Lordship's

very devoted

humble servant,

THE AUTHOR

The Author's Anticipation

I think I hear the CURIOUS reader exclaim, “Heavens! That the brain of man should be set to work upon such cursed nonsense – such damned low stuff as farting; he ought to be ashamed of straining his dull faculties to such a nasty, absurd subject. But to PRINT his THOUGHTS upon farting, and to dedicate his dirty lucubrations to the Lord Chancellor, is the height of all human impudence and folly.” It may be so, gentle reader, but I am so hardened and incorrigible that I don’t care a rush for thy opinion – but before we part, I will tell thee a secret: know then, that the following singular essay was written, and published, for a considerable wager, so I value not thy criticism – I have won my wager.

*Nos haec novimus esse nihil.*²

An Essay upon Farting

in a Letter

To the Secretary of the Agricultural and
Philosophical Societies in ***.

Montreuil, 22nd Dec. 1783

My dear Secretary,

This is in compliance with your request of the fourteenth instant – that if I met with anything ingenious or philosophical, I would communicate it to you. If you should think the following subject worth your attention, and that you can improve and confirm it by philosophical experiments, I shall be happy in thinking my time extremely well bestowed in thus furnishing you with my thoughts on a subject useful and entertaining; a subject, my worthy Secretary, of great consequence and importance to all mankind, and which I am sorry to say hath hitherto been considered in a too general, loose and light

a manner. I was unfortunately led to these useful reflections upon reading a certain author who in the most positive style asserted, with much pompous gravity, that a fart weighed a grain and a quarter exactly, but what intelligent man will be led away by such impertinent, arbitrary and false conclusions! For myself, I am determined not to be guided by the conjectures and loose opinions of such vain writers, who by their shallow and trite remarks greatly degrade the true depth and dignity of writing. Nothing surely is so unfair and uncandid in any writer as to endeavour to mislead our judgement, and I think it is the duty of every honest man to detect and expose the fallacies of such pretenders to wit and learning. I have therefore taken the liberty (as a man honestly zealous to detect error, and at the same time professedly open to conviction) to consider and judge of this subject in the following manner.

I take it there are five or six different species of farts, and which are perfectly distinct from each other, both in weight and smell.

First, *the sonorous and full-toned, or rousing fart*;

Second, *the double fart*;

Third, *the soft fizzing fart*;

Fourth, *the wet fart*;

And fifth, *the sullen wind-bound fart*.

Now, nothing can be plainer, to the most common understanding, than that the exact weight of all these distinct nature of farts must necessarily vary from each other, as much as the different weights of air which issue from diverse instruments by different performers from various causes of repletion.

This I take to be fundamentally true – therefore to judge so hastily upon such a nice and delicate point is arrogance itself, and an insult to our understandings, as it tends to confound and lump in one general mass all species of farts

whatsoever, without in the least considering the nature, texture, formation and feature, and the various causes operating upon the said farts; therefore, I say, this positive author betrays a very nasty disposition; it is, indeed, replete with sound, but then it is mere wind, and by no means a sound and full-toned argument; it lays down one general rule, liable to no exceptions, neither as to the age, strength or food of such farters: for example, suppose an experiment was methodically tried to produce the different farts as I have classed them – I am not infallible, but I humbly propose the following efforts to produce them, and have little doubt but that they may be happily and satisfactorily procured.

For fart no. 1 – let a person of a sound, strong and healthy constitution eat one pound of cow heel, a pound and a half of tripe, and two pounds of beef steaks, and let the farter *elect* quietly wait the digestion, and you will

find him make a pretty vigorous exertion of his noble farting faculties, and in all probability he will produce the good, sonorous, full-toned fart – and if it is of the true kind, without any offensive smell, except indeed to those who have not been much used to farting, or who have an extreme nervous irritability upon the nasal faculties.

Now for the experiment upon fart no. 2 – let a healthy person, after much exercise, eat one quart of strong pea soup, one pound of fried onions and two pounds of fried beef and cabbage, and, most probably, he will soon entertain you with the double fart in rapid successions.

For fart no. 3 – let a person of rather a relaxed constitution eat about nine dozen of boiled onions and drink three quarts of strong, thick new ale, and he will delight you with plenty of soft fizzing farts. This fart hath the advantage of stinking better than any other – or, as some

authors have it, of stinking intolerably and confoundedly.

Fart no. 4 – commonly called the *wet fart*, is very easily procured. Let any person, fond of overeating, cram himself with pies, custards, whip syllabub, prunes, etc., etc., and he will do his business with effectual dispatch, so as to need an immediate washing. Ladies produce this species of fart better than gentlemen, so that it is advisable to try this experiment upon a strong healthy young lady of about eighteen, and who is very apt to be hungry.

As to fart no. 5 – which I have emphatically denominated the sullen wind-bound fart, it is the most uncomfortable, unhealthy and troublesome of all farts whatever that have been yet discovered, as it comes slowly forth, with a painful sensation and sudden rumbling, like to pent-up air in a volcano, which sometimes produces earthquakes and horrible shakes of the earth

from not having a free and open passage for the gas or phlogistic air to escape. Those who are unhappy as to issue such farts from their unwholesome premises are really patients; they cannot be well with such a plenitude of impure and foul air pent up in every cavity of their volcano. However, this produces the sullen fart, issuing slowly, and mournfully murmuring at long and stated intervals; medicinal assistance is here necessary. As I have often suffered in this case myself (particularly last week, when, in a sleepless night, I thought of penning this useful essay), I think I may, with some confidence, take the liberty of saying to what I attribute the farting malady and, as a benevolent man always ready to assist my fellow creatures, and being a sincere friend to ease and liberty, I shall at the same time point out the cause.

The *sullen wind-bound* arises from various causes of repletion: indigestions from overeating