

**AIRY NOTHINGS;
OR, WHAT
YOU WILL**

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Airy nothings; or, What you will by George Gordon

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GEORGE GORDON

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[Baldwin, Charles Crittenton]

AIRY NOTHINGS

OR WHAT YOU WILL

BY

GEORGE GORDON (pseud.)

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1917

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TO

MISS KATHERINE MACDONALD

In memory of many pleasant evenings spent
at the theatre, and in especial of the
night we witnessed Mr. Granville
Barker's production of "A
Midsummer Night's
Dream."

An antique fable, and thereto a preface on morals, such as Theseus, reputed sometime Duke of Athens, vowed he never could believe. And with good reason: poets, lovers and madmen have such seething brains, bodying forth the form of things unknown, giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. And yet, what's in a name? The first recorded William Shakespeare was hanged for robbery in 1248; the latest Cleopatra dances in burlesque. Mary Fitton or Mistress Davenant — what odds the name? A poet loved a woman and wooed her frailty into immortal rhyme. You are content to read his verses; then why not I? Why must I see all Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt? Because I know there is a world of romance in a name; and when you whisper "Guenevere" to me, my soul harks back to Arthur's court, mine eyes look on the queen, and in a dream I seem to see her walking 'mid the flowers of Camelot; I see her pause and raise her head as on the gravel-walk she hears the tread of Lancelot's mailed feet. And Mary? 'Tis the name of the Mother of God.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Even a long human life is so brief and fugitive that it seems little short of a miracle that it can leave traces behind which endure through centuries. The millions die and sink into oblivion and their deeds die with them. A few thousands so far conquer death as to leave their names to be a burden to the memories of school children, but convey little else to posterity. But some few master-minds remain, and among them Shakespeare ranks with Leonardo and Michael Angelo. He was hardly laid in his grave than he rose from it again. Of all the great names of this earth, none is more certain of immortality than that of Shakespeare. . . . And he is not thirty-six plays and a few poems jumbled together and read *pêle-mêle*, but a man who felt and thought, rejoiced and suffered, brooded, dreamed, and created. Far too long has it been the custom to say, 'We