

W. S. GILBERT

***ORIGINAL
PLAYS
[FIRST
SERIES]***

W. S. Gilbert

Original Plays [First Series]

EAN 8596547182467

DigiCat, 2022

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An Original Fairy Comedy,

IN THREE ACTS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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FAIRIES.

ETHAIS	MR. KENDAL.
PHYLLON	MR. ARNOTT.
LUTIN (<i>a Serving Fairy</i>)	MR. BUCKSTONE.
SELENE (<i>a Fairy Queen</i>)	MISS MADGE ROBERTSON.
DARINE	MISS AMY ROSELLE.
ZAYDA	MISS M. LITTON.
LEILA	MISS HARRISON.
NEODIE	MISS HENRI.
LOCRINE	MISS FRANCIS.

MORTALS.

SIR ETHAIS	MR. KENDAL.
SIR PHYLLON	MR. ARNOTT.

LUTIN (*Sir Ethais's
Henchman*)

MR. BUCKSTONE.

SCENE: IN FAIRY LAND.

✱✱ *The action is comprised within the space of twenty-four
hours.*

PROLOGUE.

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Spoken by MR. BUCKSTONE.

The Author begs you'll kind attention pay
While I explain the object of his play.
You have been taught, no doubt, by those professing
To understand the thing, that Love's a blessing:
Well, *he* intends to teach you the reverse—
That Love is not a blessing, but a curse!
But pray do not suppose it's his intent
To do without this vital element—
His drama *would* be in a pretty mess!
With quite as fair a prospect of success,
Might a dispensing chemist in his den
Endeavor to dispense with oxygen.
Too powerful an agent to pooh-pooh,
There will be Love enough I warrant you:
But as the aim of every play's to show
That Love's essential to all men below,
He uses it to prove, to all who doubt it,
How well all men—but *he*—can do without it.

To prove his case (a poor one, I admit),
He begs that with him you will kindly flit
To a pure fairy-land that's all his own,
Where mortal love is utterly unknown.
Whose beings, spotless as new-fallen snow,
Know nothing of the Wicked World below.
These gentle sons and daughters of the air,
Safe, in their eyrie, from temptation's snare,
Have yet one little fault I must confess—
An overweening sense of righteousness.
As perfect silence, undisturbed for years,
Will breed at length a humming in the ears,
So from their very purity within
Arise the promptings of their only sin.
Forgive them! No? Perhaps you will relent
When you appreciate their punishment!

But prithee be not led too far away,
By the hack author of a mere stage-play:
It's easy to affect this cynic tone,
But, let me ask you, had the world ne'er known
Such Love as you, and I, and he, must mean—
Pray where would you, or I, or he, have been?

THE WICKED WORLD.

ACT I.

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SCENE—Fairy Land. A beautiful, but fanciful landscape, which is supposed to lie on the upper side

of a cloud. The cloud is suspended over the earth, a portion of which (representing “a bird’s-eye view” of a mediæval city), is seen, far below, through a rent or gap in the cloud.

As the curtain rises ZAYDA is discovered standing in a thoughtful attitude, contemplating the world at her feet. To her enters DARINE.

Dar. My sister, Zayda, thou art deep in thought,
What quaint conjecture fills thy busy brain?

Zay. Oh! sister, it’s my old and favorite theme—
That wonderful and very wicked world
That rolls in silent cycles at our feet!

Dar. In truth a fruitful source of wonderment!

Zay. Fruitful indeed—a harvest without end!
The world—the wicked world! the wondrous world!
I love to sit alone and gaze on it,
And let my fancy wander through its towns,
Float on its seas and rivers—interchange
Communion with its strange inhabitants:
People its cities with fantastic shapes,
Fierce, wild, barbaric forms—all head and tail,
With monstrous horns, and blear and bloodshot eyes,
As all should have who deal in wickedness!

Enter PHYLLON.

Oh, Phyllon! picture to thyself a town
Peopled with men and women! At each turn,

Men—wicked men—then, farther on, more men,
Then women—then again more men—more men—
Men, women, everywhere—all ripe for crime,
All ghastly in the lurid light of sin!

Enter SELENE.

Phyl. In truth, dear sister, if man's face and form
Were a true index to his character,
He were a hideous thing to look upon;
But man, alas! is formed as we are formed.
False from the first, he comes into the world
Bearing a smiling lie upon his face,
That he may cheat ere he can use his tongue.

Zay. Oh! I have heard these things, but heed them
not.

I like to picture him as he should be,
Unsightly and unclean. I like to pair
Misshapen bodies with misshapen minds.

Sel. Dost thou not know that every soul on earth
Hath in our ranks his outward counterpart?

Dar. His outward counterpart!

Sel. Tis even so;
Yes, on that world—that very wicked world—
Thou—I—and all who dwell in fairy land,
May find a parallel identity:
A perfect counterpart in outward form;
So perfect that, if it were possible

To place us by these earthly counterparts,
No man on earth, no fairy in the clouds,
Could tell which was the fairy—which the man!

Zay. Is there *no* shade of difference?

Phyl. Yes, one;
For we are absolutely free from sin,
While all our representatives on earth
Are stained with every kind of infamy.

Dar. Are *all* our counterparts so steeped in sin?

Phyl. All, in a greater or a less degree.

Zay. What, even mine?

Phyl. Alas!

Zay. Oh, no—not mine!

Phyl. All men and women sin.

Dar. I wonder what
My counterpart is doing now?

Sel. Don't ask.
No doubt, some fearful sin!

Dar. And what are sins?

Sel. Evils of which we hardly know the names.
There's vanity—a quaint, fantastic vice,
Whereby a mortal takes much credit for

The beauty of his face and form, and claims
As much applause for loveliness as though
He had designed himself! Then jealousy—
A universal passion—one that claims
An absolute monopoly of love,
Based on the reasonable principle
That no one merits other people's love
So much as—every soul on earth by turns!
Envy—that grieves at other men's success,
As though success, however placed, were not
A contribution to one common fund!
Ambition, too, the vice of clever men
Who seek to rise at others' cost; nor heed
Whose wings they cripple, so that they may soar.
Malice—the helpless vice of helpless fools,
Who, as they can not rise, hold others down,
That they, by contrast, may appear to soar.
Hatred and avarice, untruthfulness,
Murder and rapine, theft, profanity—
Sins so incredible, so mean, so vast,
Our nature stands appalled when it attempts
To grasp their terrible significance.
Such are the vices of that wicked world!

Enter ETHAIS, LOCRINE, NEODIE, LEILA, and other Fairies.

Eth. My brothers, sisters, Lutin has returned,
After a long delay, from yonder earth:
The first of all our race who has set foot
Upon that wicked world. See! he is here!

Enter LUTIN.

Sel. Good welcome, Lutin, back to fairy land!
So thou hast been to earth?

Lut. I have indeed!

Sel. What hast thou seen there?

Lut. Better not inquire.
It is a very, very wicked world!
I went, obedient to our King's command,
To meet him in mid-earth. He bade me go
And send both Ethais and Phyllon there.

Eth. Down to mid-earth?

Lut. Down to mid-earth at once.
He hath some gift, some priceless privilege
With which he would endow our fairy world;
And he hath chosen Phyllon and thyself
To bear his bounty to this home of ours.

Zay. Another boon? Why, brother Ethais,
What can our monarch give that we have not?

Eth. In truth, I can not say—'twould seem that we
Had reached the sum of fairy happiness!

Sel. But then we thought the same, before our King
Endowed us with the gift of melody;
And now, how tame our fairy life would seem
Were melody to perish from our land!

Phyl. Well said, Selene. Come, then, let's away,
(*going*)

And on our journey through the outer world
We will take note of its inhabitants,
And bring you fair account of all we see.
Farewell, dear sisters!

[*Exeunt PHYLLON and ETHAIS.*]

Sel. Brothers, fare-you-well.

(*To LUTIN.*) And thou hast really met a living man?

Lut. I have indeed—and living women too!

Zay. And thou hast heard them speak, and seen their
ways,

And didst thou understand them when they spake?

Lut. I understand that what I understood

No fairy being ought to understand.

I see that almost every thing I saw

Is utterly improper to be seen.

Don't ask for details—I've returned to you

With outraged senses and with shattered nerves,

I burn with blushes of indignant shame.

Read my experiences in my face,

My tongue shall wither ere it tell the tale.

It is a very, very wicked world!

Dar. But surely man can summon death at will;

Why should he live when he at will can die?

Lut. Why, that's the most inexplicable thing.

I've seen upon that inconsistent globe—
With swords and daggers hanging at their sides,
With drowning seas and rivers at their feet,
With deadly poison in their very grasp,
And every implement of death at hand—
Men live—and live—and seem to like to live!
[Exit LUTIN.]

Dar. How strangely inconsistent!

Se/. Not at all.

With all their misery, with all their sin,
With all the elements of wretchedness
That teem on that unholy world of theirs,
They have one great and ever glorious gift,
That compensates for all they have to bear—
The gift of Love! Not as we use the word,
To signify mere tranquil brotherhood;
But in some sense that is unknown to us.
Their love bears like relation to our own,
That the fierce beauty of the noonday sun
Bears to the calm of a soft summer's eve.
It nerves the wearied mortal with hot life,
And bathes his soul in hazy happiness.
The richest man is poor who hath it not,
And he who hath it laughs at poverty.
It hath no conqueror. When death himself
Has worked his very worst, this love of theirs
Lives still upon the loved one's memory.
It is a strange enchantment, which invests
The most unlovely things with loveliness.

The maiden, fascinated by this spell,
Sees every thing as she would have it be:
Her squalid cot becomes a princely home;
Its stunted shrubs are groves of stately elms;
The weedy brook that trickles past her door
Is a broad river fringed with drooping trees;
And of all marvels the most marvelous,
The coarse unholy man who rules her love
Is a bright being—pure as we are pure;
Wise in his folly—blameless in his sin;
The incarnation of a perfect soul;
A great and ever glorious demi-god!

Dar. Why, what have we in all our fairy land
To bear comparison with such a gift?

Zay. Oh! for one hour of such a love as that;
O'er all things paramount! Why, after all,
That wicked world is the true fairy land!

Loc. Why, who can wonder that poor erring man
Clings to the world, all poisoned though it be,
When on it grows this glorious antidote?

Zay. And may we never love as mortals love?

Sel. No; that can never be. Of earthly things
This love of theirs ranks as the earthiest.
'Tis necessary to man's mode of life;
He could not bear his load of misery
But for the sweet enchantment at his heart
That tells him that he bears no load at all.

We do not need it in our perfect land.
Moreover, there's this gulf 'twixt it and us:
Only a mortal can inspire such love;
And mortal foot can never touch our land.

Zay. But—is that so?

Sel. (surprised). Of course.

Zay. Yet I have heard
That we've a half-forgotten law which says,
That when a fairy quits his fairy home
To visit earth, those whom he leaves behind
May summon from the wicked world below
That absent fairy's mortal counterpart;
And that that mortal counterpart may stay
In fairy land and fill the fairy's place
Till he return. Is there not some such law?

Sel. And if there be, wouldst put that law in force?
(horrified).

Zay. No; not for all the love of all the world!*(equally
horrified).*

Sel. A man in fairy land! Most horrible!
He would exhale the poison of his soul,
And we should even be as mortals are,
Hating as man hates!

Dar. (enthusiastically). Loving as man loves!
(SEL. looks reproachfully).

Too horrible! Still—

Sel. Well!

Dar. I see a trace
Of wisdom lurking in this ancient law.

Sel. Where lurks this wisdom, then? I see it not.

Dar. (with emphasis). Man is a shameless being,
steeped in sins
At which our stainless nature stands appalled;
Yet, sister, if we took this loathsome soul
From yonder seething gulf of infamy—
E'en but for one short day—and let him see
The beauty of our pure, unspotted lives,
He might return to his unhappy world,
And trumpet forth the strange intelligence:
“Those men alone are happy who are good.”
Then would the world immediately repent,
And sin and wickedness be known no more!

Loc. Association with so foul a thing
As man must needs be unendurable
To souls as pure and sinless as our own:
Yet, sister dear, it has occurred to me,
That his foul deeds, perchance, proceed from this—
That we have kept ourselves too much aloof,
And left him to his blind and wayward will.

Zay. Man is every thing detestable—
Base in his nature, base in thought and deed,

Loathsome beyond all things that creep and crawl!
Still, sister, I must own I've sometimes thought
That we who shape the fortunes of mankind,
And grant such wishes as are free from harm,
Might possibly fulfill our generous task
With surer satisfaction to himself
Had we some notion what these wishes were!

Neo. We give him every thing but good advice,
And that which most he needs do we withhold.

Dar. Oh! terrible, dear sister, to reflect,
That to *our* cold and culpable neglect,
The folly of the world is chargeable!

Sel. To *our* neglect!

Zay. It may in truth be so.

Lei. In very truth I'm sure that it is so.

Sel. Oh! horrible! It shall be so no more.
A light breaks over me! Their sin *is* ours!
But there—'tis easy still to make amends.
A mortal *shall* behold our blameless state,
And learn the beauties of a sinless life!
Come, let us summon mortal Ethais.

Dar. But—

Sel. Not a word—I am resolved to this.

Neo. But sister—

Sel. Well?

Neo. (*timidly*). Why summon only one?

Sel. Why summon more?

Neo. The world's incredulous;
Let *two* be brought into our blameless land,
Then should their wondrous story be received
With ridicule or incredulity,
One could corroborate the other.

Dar. Yes—

Phyllon has gone with Ethais. Let us call
The mortal counterpart of Phyllon too—

Sel. Two mortals—two unhappy men of sin
In this untainted spot!

Loc. Well, sister dear,
Two Heralds of the Truth will spread that Truth
At the least twice as rapidly as one.

Sel. Two miserable men! Why, *one* alone
Will bring enough pollution in his wake,
To taint our happy land from end to end!

Zay. Then, sister, two won't make the matter worse!

Sel. There's truth in that. (*After a pause.*)
The two *shall* come to us.
We have deserved this fearful punishment;
Our power, I think, is limited to two?

Lei. Unfortunately.

Sel. Yes—more might be done
Had each of us a pupil to herself.
Now then to summon them. But, sisters all,
Show no repugnance to these wretched men;
Remember that, all odious though they be,
They are our guests; in common courtesy
Subdue your natural antipathies;
Be very gentle with them, bear with them,
Be kind, forbearing, tender, pitiful.
Receive them with that gentle sister love,
That forms the essence of our fairyhood;
Let no side-thought of their unholy lives
Intrude itself upon your charity;
Treat them as though they were what they will be
When they have seen how we shall be to them.
What is the form?

Dar. Two roses newly plucked
Should each in turn be cast upon the earth;
Then, as each rose is thrown, pronounce the name
Of him whose mortal self it typifies.
Here *are* two roses plucked from yonder tree.

Sel. (taking them). Well then, fair rose, I name thee
Ethais!—
Go, send thy mortal namesake to our cloud; (*throws
rose to earth*).
'Tis done; conceal yourselves till they appear!

The fairies conceal themselves. Hurried music; to which enter SIR ETHAIS and SIR PHYLLON, hurriedly, over the edge of cloud, as if impelled by some invisible and irresistible power from below. SIR ETHAIS and SIR PHYLLON have their swords drawn. They are dressed as barbaric knights, and, while bearing a facial resemblance to their fairy counterparts, present as strong a contrast as possible in their costume and demeanor.

Sir Eth. Why, help, help, help!

Sir Phy. The devil seize us all!
Why, what strange land is this? How came we here?

Sir Eth. How came we here? Why, who can answer that
So well as thou?

Sir Phy. As I?

Sir Eth. Yes, cur; as thou!
This is some devil's game of thy design,
To scare me from the task I set myself
When we crossed swords.

Sir Phy. I use no sorcery.
A whirlwind bore me to this cursed spot;
But whence it came I neither know nor care.

Sir Eth. There—gag thy lying tongue; it matters not,
Or here or there we'll fight our quarrel out.

Come! call thy devils; let them wait at hand
And when I've done with thee I'll do with them.

(They fight. The fairies watch the combat unobserved with great interest.)

Dar. What are they doing?

Sel. It's some game of skill.
It's very pretty.

Dar. Very. *(Knights pause.)* Oh, they've stopped.

Phy. Come, come—on guard. *(Fight resumed.)*

Zay. Now they begin again.

Eth. *(Sees fairies, who have gradually surrounded them.)*

Hold! we are overlooked. *(ETHAIS, who has turned for a moment in saying this, is severely wounded by PHYLLON.)*

Sel. You may proceed.
We like it much.

Dar. You do it very well—
Begin again.

Eth. Black curses on that thrust!
I am disabled. Ladies, bind my wound;
And if it please you still to see us fight,
We'll fight for those bright eyes and cherry lips

Till one or both of us shall bite the dust.

Phy. Hold! call a truce till we return to earth—
Here are bright eyes enough for both of us.

Eth. I don't know that! Well, there—till we return.
(*Shaking hands.*)

But once again on earth, we will take up
Our argument where it was broken off,
And let thy devils whirl me where they may,
I'll reach conclusion and corollary.

Dar. (*looking at PHYLLON*). Oh, fairyhood!
How wonderfully like our Phyllon!

Sel. (*looking at ETHAIS*). Yes.
And see—how strangely like our Ethais.
Thou hast a gallant carriage, gentle knight. (*Sighing.*)

Zay. How very, very like our Ethais.

Eth. It's little wonder that I'm like myself;
Why, I am he.

Sel. No, not *our* Ethais. (*Sighing.*)

Eth. In truth, I am the Ethais of all
Who are as gentle and as fair as thou.

Sel. That's bravely said; thou hast a silver tongue;
Why! what can gods be like if these be men.

(During this dialogue, DARINE shows by her manner that she takes great interest in ETHAIS.)

Say, dost thou come from earth or heaven?

Eth. (gallantly putting his arm round them).
I think I've come from earth to heaven.

Sel. (to DARINE with delight). Oh! didst thou hear?
He comes from earth to heaven! No, Ethais,
We are but fairies—this, our native home.
Our fairy-land rests on a cloud which floats
Hither and thither, as the breezes will;
At times a mighty city's at our feet,
At times a golden plain, and then the sea,
Dotted with ships and rocks and sunny isles.
We see the world; yet saving that it is
A very wicked world, we know it not—
We hold no converse with its denizens;
But on the lands o'er which our island hangs,
We shed fair gifts of plenty and of peace—
Health and contentment—charity—goodwill;
Drop tears of love upon the thirsty earth,
And shower fair waters on the growing grain.
This is our mission.

Eth.'Tis a goodly one!
I'd give my sword—ay, and my sword-arm too,
If thou wouldst anchor for a year or so
O'er yonder home of mine. But tell me, now,
Does every cloud that hovers o'er our heads
Bear in its bosom such a wealth of love?

Sel. Alas! Sir Ethais, we are too few
To work the good that we could wish to work.
Thou hast seen black and angry thunder-clouds
That spit their evil fire at flocks and herds,
And shake with burly laughter as they watch
The trembling shepherds count their shriveled dead?
These are our enemies, sir knight, and thine.
They sow the seeds of pestilence and death—
May heaven preserve thee from their influence!

Eth. Amen to that!

Phy. But tell us, gentle maid,
Why have you summoned us?

Sel. Because we seek
To teach you truths that now ye wot not of;
Because we know that you are very frail,
Poor, blind, weak, wayward mortals—willing reeds,
Swayed right and left by every tempting wind;
And we are pure, and very, very brave,
Having no taste for trivial solaces (*taking Ethais'*
hand);
Scorning such idle joys as we have heard
Appeal most strongly to such men as you;
And we have cherished earnest hope that we,
By the example of our sacred lives,
May teach you to abjure such empty joys,
May send you back to earth, pure, childlike men,
To teach your mothers, sisters, and your wives,

And those perchance (*sighing*) who are to be your wives!

That there are fairy maidens in the clouds,
Whose gentle mode of thought and mode of life
They would do well to imitate. We would
That every maid on earth were such as we!
(*Placing her arms round his neck*).

Eth. In truth we would that every maiden were,—
(*Aside*) Except our mothers, sisters, and our wives!

Sel. If you will be our pupils, you must give
Some token of submission to our will,
No doubt you have some form of fealty?

Eth. When man desires to show profound respect—
To indicate most forcibly his own
Inferiority, he always puts
His arm round the respected object's waist,
And drawing her (or him) towards him, thus,
Places a very long and tender kiss
On his (or her) face—as the case may be.

Sel. That form is not in vogue in fairy land;
Still, as it holds on earth, no doubt 'twill have
Far greater weight with you poor sons of earth,
Than any formula we could impose.

Phy. Its weight is overpowering. (*About to kiss.*)

Sel. But stay!
We would not *wrest* this homage from you, sir;

Or give it willingly, or not at all.

Eth. Most willingly, fair maid, we give it you.

Sel. Good! Then proceed.

(ETH. kisses SEL. and PHYL. kisses ZAY.)

Eth. There! does it not convey
A pleasant sense of influence?

Sel. It does.
Some earthly forms seem rational enough.
Why Ethais, what ails thee? (*ETHAIS staggers.*)

Eth. Why, I'm faint
From loss of blood. My wound—here, take this scarf,
And bind it round my arm—so—have a care!
There, that will do till I return to earth;
Then, Lutin, who's a fairly skillful leech,
Shall doctor it.

Sel. (*amazed*). Didst thou say Lutin?

Eth. Yes,
He is my squire—a poor, half-witted churl,

Enter LUTIN unobserved.

Who shudders at the rustling of a leaf;
A strange, odd, faithful, loving, timid knave;
More dog than man, and, like a well-thrashed hound,
He loves his master's voice, and dreads it, too.

Why, here he is! (*In intense astonishment.*)

Lut. Who is this insolent,
A mortal here in fairy land?

Loc. Yes, two!

Lut. Oh, this is outrage!

Eth. (crossing to him). Why, thou scurvy knave,
How cam'st thou here? Thou didst not come with us!
What is the meaning of this masquerade? [*Alluding to
LUTIN's dress.*

Be off at once; if I could use my arm,
I'd whip thee for this freak, but as it is,
I'll hand thee over to that wife of thine;
Her hand is heavier than mine. (*To Sel.*) This churl
(So rumor saith) is mated to a shrew;
A handsome, ranting, jealous, clacking shrew;
And he, by means of this tom-fool disguise,
Has 'scaped his home to play the truant here;

Lut. Who are these men?

Sel. The mortal counterparts
Of Ethais and Phyllon. Look at them! (*Crosses to
LUTIN.*)

Dost thou not love them?

Lut. (indignantly). No!

Sel. How very strange!
Why we all loved them from the very first.

Lut. Is this indeed the truth?

Dar. It is indeed.

Obedient to our queen's command, we have
Subdued our natural antipathies.

Zay. They are our guests, all odious though they be,
(*Takes PHYLLON'S hand.*)

And we must bid them welcome to our home,
As if e'en now they were what they will be
When they have seen what we shall be to them.
(*Kissing his hand.*)

Lut. Be warned in time, and send these mortals
hence;
Why, don't you see that in each word they speak,
They breathe of love?

Sel. (*enthusiastically*). They do!

Lut. Why Love's the germ
Of every sin that stalks upon the earth:
The brawler fights for love—the drunkard drinks
To toast the girl who loves him, or to drown
Remembrance of the girl who loves him not!
The miser hoards his gold to purchase love.
The liar lies to gain, or wealth, or love;
And if for wealth, it is to purchase love.
The very footpad nerves his coward arm
To stealthy deeds of shame by pondering on
The tipsy kisses of some tavern wench!
Be not deceived—this love is but the seed;

The branching tree that springs from it is Hate!

Dar. (to ETH.) Nay, heed him not. There is a legend here—

An idle tale, that man is infamous,
And he believes it. So, indeed, did we,
Till we beheld you, gallant gentlemen!

Lut. Why, they are raving! Let me go at once
And join my brothers at our monarch's court;
While they are here this is no place for me.

Zay. (eagerly to SEL.) Let him depart; then we can
summon here

His mortal counterpart. (*Fairies delighted; SELENE
expresses indignant surprise, ZAYDA changes her
manner*), a poor frail man

No doubt, who stands in very sorest need
Of such good counsel as we can afford.

Sel. Thou speakest wisely. Lutin, get thee gone.

Eth. Be off at once.

Phy. Begone, thou scurvy knave!
Thy wife shall hear of this—*she'll* punish thee.

Lut. Oh, moral plague! oh, walking pestilence!
Oh, incarnation of uncleanness!
You call me knave! Why, hark ye men of sin.
You've kings and queens upon that world of yours,
To whom you crawl in apt humility;