

THE BALLOON.

Written (at the age of fifteen, and still unsurpassed) while in bed with measles at Tonbridge in Kent.

FLOATING in the summer air,
What is that for men to see?
Anywhere and everywhere,
Now a bullet, now a tree—
Till we all begin to swear:
What the devil can it be?

See its disproportioned head,
Tiny trunk and limbs lopped bare,
Hydrocephalus the dread
With a surgeon chopping there;
Chopping legs and arms all red
With the sticky lumps of hair.

Like a man in this complaint
Floats this creature in the sky,
Till the gaping rustics faint
And the smirking milkmaids cry,
As the chord and silk and paint,
Wood and iron drifteth by.

Floating in the summer sky
Like a model of the moon:—
How supreme to be so high
In a treacherous balloon,
Like the Kings of Destiny,
All the earth for their spittoon.

Toads are gnawing at my feet.
Take them off me quick, I pray!
Worms my juicy liver eat.
Take the awful beasts away!
Vipers make my bowels their meat.
Fetch a cunning knife and slay!

Kill the tadpoles in my lung,
And the woodlice in my spine,
And the beast that gnaws my tongue,
And the weasel at my chine,
And the horde of adders young
That around mine entrails twine!

Come, dissect me! Rip the skin!
Tear the bleeding flesh apart!
See ye all my hellish grin
While the straining vitals smart.
Never mind! Go in and win,
Till you reach my gory heart!

While my heart's soft pulse did go,
Devils had it in their bands.
Doctors keep it in a row,
Now, on varnished wooden stands:
And I really do not know
If it is in different hands.