

ASTRAY IN HER PATHS.<sup>1</sup>

COPENHAGEN, *January*, '97.

I FEEL thee shudder, clinging to my arm,  
Before the battlements of the salt sea,  
Black billows tipped with phosphorescent light,  
Towering from where we stand to yonder shore  
That is no earthly shore, but guards the coast  
Of that which is from that which is to be;  
Wherefore it kindles no evasive fire  
Nor blazes through the night, but lies forgotten  
Gray in the twilight; never a star is out  
To light the broad horizon; only here  
Behind us cluster lamps, and busy sounds  
Of men proclaim a city; but to us  
They are not here; for we, because we love,  
Are not of earth, but, as the immortals, stand  
With eyes immutable; our souls are fed  
On a strange new nepenthe from the cup  
Of the vast firmament. Nor do we dream,  
Nor think we aught of the transient world,  
But are absorbed in our own deity:  
And our clear eyes reflect — (who dares to gaze  
Shall see an diel!) — the changeless empyrean  
Eternity, the concentrated void  
Of space, for being the centre of all things,  
Time is to us the Now, and Space the Here;  
From us all Matter radiates, is a part  
Of our own thoughts and souls; because we love.  
Thou shudderest, clinging to me; though the night  
Jewels her empire with the frosty crown  
Of thousand-twinkling stars, whose hoary crests  
Burn where light touches them, with diamond points  
Of infinite far fire, save where the sea  
Is ebony with sleep, and though the wind

1. This satirical title is from Proverbs vii. 25. A poet's nature is to refine to purest gold even the sordidest of dross.

Pierces the marrow, since it is the word  
Of the Almighty, and cuts through the air  
That may not stay its fury, with a cold  
Nipping and chill, it is not in the wind;  
Nor though the thunder broke, or flashed the fire  
From all the circle of eternity,  
Were that the reason; for thou shudderest  
To hear the Voice of Love; it is no voice  
That men may hear, but an intensest rich  
Silence, that silence when man waits to hear  
Some faint vibration in the smitten air,  
And, if he hear not, die; but we who love  
Are beyond death, and therefore may commune  
In that still tongue; it is the only speech  
And song of stars and sun; nor is it marred  
By one dissentient tremor of the air  
That girds the earth, but in lone aether spreads  
Its song. But now I turn to thee, whose eyes  
Blaze on me with such look as flesh and blood  
May never see and live; for so it burns  
Into the inmost being of the spirit  
And stains its vital essence with a brand  
Of fire that shall not change; and shuddering I  
Gaze back, spirit to spirit, with the like  
Insatiable desire, that never quenched,  
Nor lessened by sublime satiety,  
But rather crescent, hotter with the flame  
Of its own burning, that consumes it not,  
Because it is the pure white flame of God.  
I shudder, holding thee to me; thy gaze  
Is still on me; a thousand years have passed,  
And yet a thousand thousand; years they are  
As men count years, and yet we stand and gaze  
With touching hands and lips immutable  
As mortals stand a moment; . . .  
The universe is One: One Soul, One Spirit,  
One Flame, One infinite God, One infinite Love.