

ASTRAY IN HER PATHS.¹

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.