



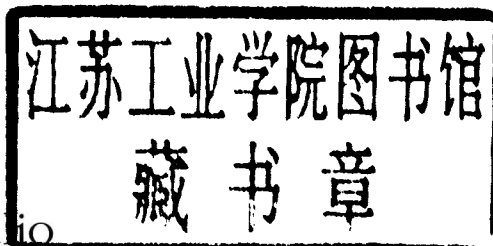
NATURAL VARIATIONS:
PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLONEL STUART WORTLEY

by Katherine DiGiulio

EXHIBITION AT THE HENRY E. HUNTINGTON LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY • MAY 3 THROUGH JULY 31, 1994

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLONEL STUART WORTLEY

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Huntington Library
San Marino, California

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FOREWORD

Colonel Stuart Wortley (1832-1890) played a pivotal role in the early history of British photography. He was an innovator as well as a promoter and practitioner of the medium. Although he produced a varied body of work, the present exhibition focuses on his startlingly beautiful and dramatically expressive images of sea and sky, pictures that made his reputation in the late 1860s and early 1870s. The artist has not been the subject of a retrospective since 1898, several years after his death, when a group of his photographs were shown in London. With the passage of time, his work gradually disappeared from view. It is only recently, as interest in the history of photography has grown, that a few of his images have become known to a handful of specialists and collectors. Given the innovative character of his work, Stuart Wortley's contribution to the field deserves greater recognition.

This exhibition was made possible only by the full cooperation of the J. Paul Getty Museum. Together the Huntington and the Getty own perhaps the finest assemblage of Stuart Wortley photographs to be found anywhere in the world. The 27 works at the Huntington are part of an extensive collection of photographic images amassed by Lady Brassey (1839-1887), an acquaintance of the artist and an amateur photographer herself. For the most part, Lady Brassey's collection, housed in 70 bound volumes, documents her travels around the world and reflects her interest in exotic places; the photographs by Stuart Wortley are an exception. It is not known when or how these volumes were obtained by the Library,

but they were probably bought by Henry E. Huntington in the second or third decade of this century. The Getty owns 35 images; the great majority of them (31) came in 1984 as part of the outstanding collection of Sam Wagstaff. The exhibition is drawn entirely from the combined holdings of the two institutions. In acknowledging the Getty's generous loans, I particularly want to thank John Walsh, director, and Weston Naef, curator of photography, for their support.

The Huntington was fortunate to secure the services of Katherine DiGiulio as guest curator for the exhibition. A scholar of the period with a specialty in the history of British photography of the mid-nineteenth century, Ms. DiGiulio was especially well qualified to take on the task of placing Stuart Wortley's accomplishments in a broad context. In the course of her research, she unearthed much information on this seminal figure. This catalogue presents her findings and observations; it also lays the foundation for further study of this important artist.

"Natural Variations" is the first photography show to be mounted in the Huntington Art Gallery. I am confident that others will follow. The exhibition and catalogue were made possible, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Additional funding for research in England was provided through an exchange between the British Academy and the Huntington.

Edward J. Nygren
Director, Huntington Art Collections

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I wish to thank Weston Naef, curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum, for his enthusiasm about this exhibition. Additionally, Gordon Baldwin, associate curator of photographs, and Joan Gallant Dooley, curatorial assistant, at the J. Paul Getty Museum, were very helpful.

Several descendants of Colonel Stuart Wortley provided invaluable assistance. I am most appreciative of their generosity and hospitality: Richard Alan Montagu Stuart Wortley, 5th Earl of Wharncliffe; Sir Bruno Welby; Lady Barbara Ricardo; and Robert Cecil.

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I would also like to thank Virginia Dodier for generously sharing with me the information she compiled on Stuart Wortley while researching the life of Lady Clementina Hawarden; Robert Sobiescek, curator of photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Charles Isaacs; Michael Wilson; Stephen White; and finally, for emotional and technical support, Paula Lee Haller and Susie McArthur.

Katherine DiGiulio

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NATURAL VARIATIONS: PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLONEL STUART WORTLEY

*Photography gives us the means of a nearer imitation of nature than any other art, yet has sufficient elasticity to show the directing mind, and therefore is the most perfect art of all.*¹

Throughout his photographic career, Colonel Henry Stuart Wortley pursued a single goal: to show a controlling mind and a guiding artistic sensibility at work through the medium of photography. The epigraph above, quoted from Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901), a colleague and rival, might be said to exemplify Stuart Wortley's beliefs about his medium: in giving us fact or truth, and also providing indications of a controlling consciousness, photography combines the real and the ideal in a way that no other art form can. Stuart Wortley's large, dramatically lit seascapes of the 1860s and 1870s, the emphasis of this exhibition, are examples of his attempts to unify the real and the ideal.

Born in Wortley, Yorkshire,² to Charles Stuart Wortley, son of the Baron of Wharnccliffe, and to Lady Emmeline Manners, the daughter of the Duke of Rutland, Archibald Henry Plantagenet Stuart Stuart Wortley spent part of what must have been a privileged youth serving as page of honor to Queen Victoria.³ The few known details of Stuart Wortley's

life are provided in a chronology following this essay (Appendix I). Because there is little information on his life or education before he entered military service at the age of sixteen, it is difficult to explain his development as one of the leading British photographers of the nineteenth century.

Photography was still a relatively new medium when Stuart Wortley took up the art in the mid 1850s. Introduced to the public in 1839, photography in England at first was restricted to a few professionals because of patents on photographic processes. With the expiration of these patents in the following decade, upper-middle-class and aristocratic amateurs, who had the time and money to use and buy the expensive, cumbersome equipment involved, began to practice photography.

Stuart Wortley began making photographs in 1853⁴ while he was serving with the Cape Mounted Riflemen.⁵ However, he does not seem to have exhibited any prints until after his retirement with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in 1862. During the 1860s the commercial production of photographs greatly expanded. Stuart Wortley and some of his

1. Henry Peach Robinson, "Paradoxes of Art, Science and Photography," reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 84.
2. According to the 1881 Census, Public Record Office, London. SW did not hyphenate his name.
3. Mrs. Henry [Nina] Cust, *Wanderers: Episodes from the Travels of Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley and her daughter Victoria, 1849-1855* (London: Jonathan Cape, [1928]), p. 16.
4. "Proceedings of Societies: Photographic Society of London," *The Photographic News*, 17, no. 750 (January 17, 1873), p. 36.
5. Letter from Mrs. Marion Harding, Department of Archives, Photographs, Film & Sound, National Army Museum, Chelsea, London, January 22, 1993. Frequently, during idle hours, officers in the military experimented with photography, as their predecessors had with sketching.

fellow amateurs, such as the now better known Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) and Lady Clementina Hawarden (1822-1865), achieved prominence by making works which were meant to be seen primarily as artistic productions.⁶ They distinguished themselves from commercial photographers by their treatment of light, which, in Stuart Wortley's case, enabled him to create romantic and powerful seascapes.

The images he exhibited in 1862 and 1863 included Mt. Vesuvius and the vicinity around the Bay of Naples.⁷ What the reviewers of the exhibitions noticed was his ability to create "instantaneous" images that registered both sky and water on the same relatively large plate—up to ten inches by twelve inches. The term "instantaneous" was applied far more loosely than today; usually, it designated photographs made with exposures of less than one second, or those in which motion was at least partially arrested.

Stuart Wortley's seascapes answered the growing demand in the 1850s and early 1860s for instantaneous photographs. Photographers and critics recognized that the future of photography, both technical and artistic, lay in its ability to represent movement.⁸ The slowness of early photographic technology, including chemicals and lenses, resulted in blurred foliage, flat sheets of water, and stilted facial expressions. Stuart Wortley, however, manipulated the technical elements under his control to produce seascapes in which both cloud formations and the surface texture of water were captured.

An image that attracted critical attention in 1863 was *A Wave Rolling In* (figure 2), a vignetted scene that at least one reviewer referred to as the

"gem of the exhibition" at the Société Française de Photographie.⁹ Such high praise for what today looks like an unassuming image that could be easily photographed by anyone may at first seem puzzling. At that time, however, this particular photograph demonstrated that Stuart Wortley had overcome some of the technical difficulties that plagued his colleagues. A major obstacle in photographing clouds was the over-sensitivity to blue light of the material used to coat early glass-plate negatives, which caused skies in landscapes to appear smudged or blotchy. To compensate for this problem, photographers sometimes manipulated the printing of the sky to render this area more even, though cloudless. Through a process called combination printing, they also made separate negatives for the sky and landscape and combined them; or, they painted clouds onto the negative with watercolor or India ink.

In photographing seascapes, however, these procedures were not altogether necessary because the light reflected by the water more or less balanced that reflected by the sky; thus, clouds and water could be captured equally in one quick exposure.¹⁰ This exposure usually could be made only with small lenses that yielded tiny pictures, such as stereographs. An image such as *A Wave Rolling In*, in which the action was stopped on a large undotored negative, thus seemed like a technical marvel to Stuart Wortley's contemporaries.

The most notable large instantaneous seascapes prior to those exhibited by Stuart Wortley were the marine views of the French photographer Gustave Le Gray (1820-1882). Executed between 1855 and 1860, Le Gray's seascapes measured about

6. See Grace Seiberling, *Amateur Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 106.

7. See Chronology, Appendix I, for a list of exhibitions entered and medals won.

8. For a representative opinion, see Samuel Fry, "Photography: Its Retrospects and Prospects," *The British Journal of Photography*, 10, no. 182 (January 15, 1863), p. 28. See also Appendix II.

9. "Talk in the Studio. English Photography in France," *The Photographic News*, 7, no. 245 (May 15, 1863), p. 239.

10. Helmut Gernsheim, *The Rise of Photography 1850-1880: The Age of Collodion* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1988), p. 79.

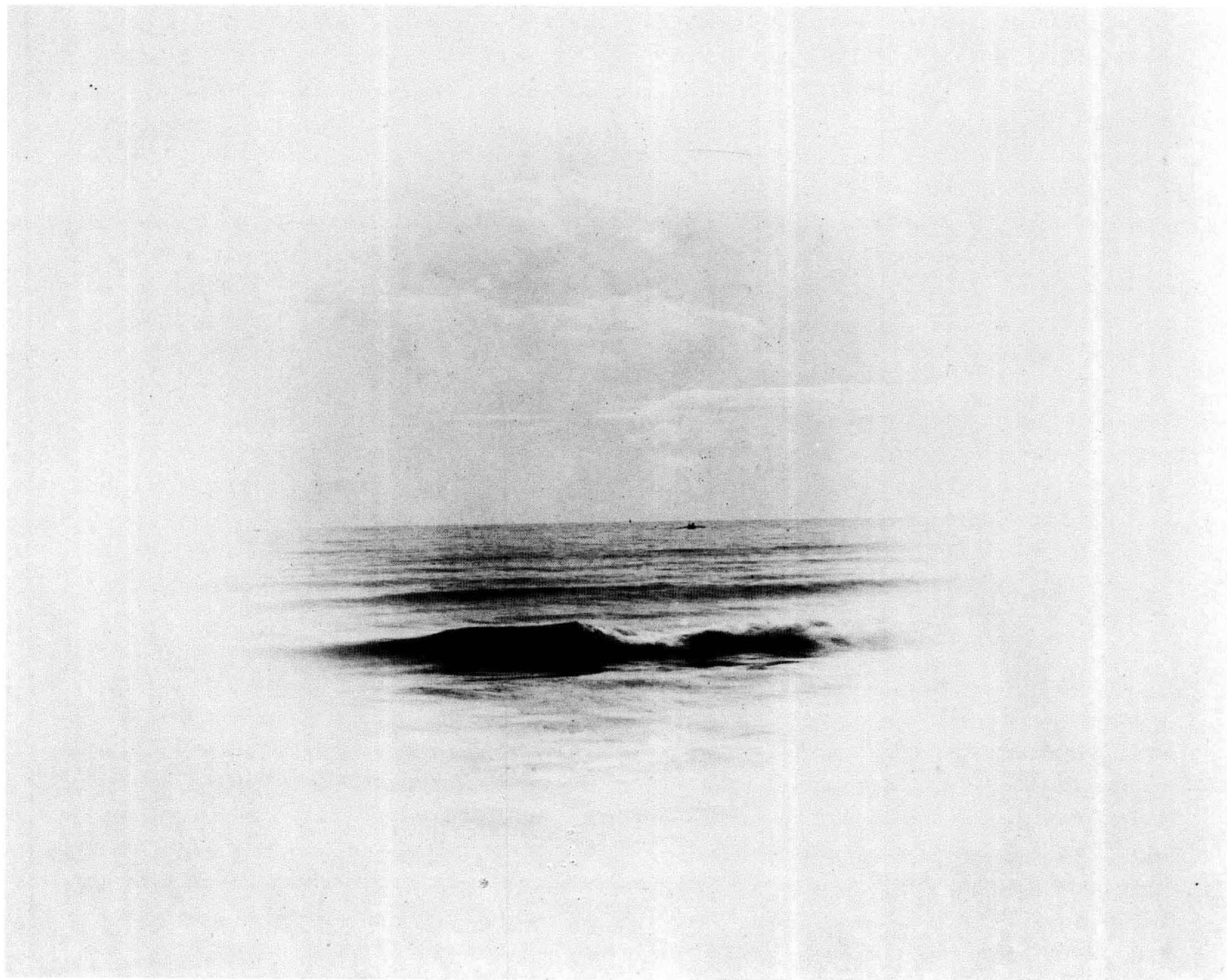


Figure 2
A Wave Rolling In
c. 1861
(cat. no. 6)



Figure 3
Gustave Le Gray
Brig On the Water
1856
The J. Paul Getty Museum

12³/₄ inches x 16¹/₂ inches. Recent scholarship has revealed that he probably enlarged these from negatives less than half that size.¹¹ He thus employed the widely known technique of using a small, fast lens to capture motion in his subjects.¹² Through enlargement, he obtained powerful, imposing images that were critically esteemed on both sides of the Channel. There are no smaller versions of Stuart Wortley's prints to indicate that he employed a similar practice. He remarked in 1863, however, that he had used lenses intended to cover plates smaller than the size of his images.¹³ Therefore, he may indeed have enlarged his photographs of this period.

Most photographers held that the perfection of instantaneous photography lay not so much in the

area of lenses as in that of chemistry. Stuart Wortley must have agreed, because he experimented widely throughout his career with chemical formulas, as he reported in numerous articles. In 1863, he asserted that through the use of a particular chemical mixture, "I can obtain my pictures with as great rapidity as the quality of the light will allow; and where the light is good and clear, I am unable to open and close the lens with sufficient rapidity."¹⁴

In much of his work Stuart Wortley was apparently able to avoid combination printing, a procedure Le Gray employed frequently. According to a critic for *The Photographic News*, even the very large (about 12 x 16 inches) photographs Stuart Wortley exhibited in 1869 were "really produced each from

11. Eugenia Parry Janis, *The Photography of Gustave Le Gray* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 159.

12. Ibid. Le Gray obtained a small print, which he then photographed onto a larger negative.

13. Lieut.-Col. Stuart Wortley, "On the Production of Instantaneous Pictures on Large Plates," *The Photographic Journal*, 7, no. 130 (February 16, 1863), p. 224.

14. See Appendix II, p. 34. Wortley was referring to the practice of making an exposure by manually uncovering and covering the lens. Photographers used their hands or hats or whatever was convenient. Manual shutters remained in use until the perfection of mechanical shutters in the 1880s.



Figure 4
Untitled
c. 1861
(cat. no. 1)



Figure 5
Pensive
 c. 1870
 Courtesy of Charles Isaacs

one untouched negative, and are literal transcripts of the scene before the camera."¹⁵ No two skies are alike in his photographs, indicating that he did not compile a stock of sky negatives to be used with different images. While no surviving negatives have been discovered, no obvious joins or seams are visible in his prints. It is clear, however, that like many photographers he retouched his prints and negatives to increase contrast, supply halftones, and distribute tonality evenly across the surface of large plates. Along the skyline on the right side of figure 16, for instance, the indelible india ink which he used to outline the horizon remains while the photograph itself has faded.

Stuart Wortley was undoubtedly inspired by the examples of Le Gray and of stereographers such as G. W. Wilson (1823-1893) to aim his camera lens directly or nearly directly into the sun while it was

partially hidden by clouds. He thereby secured the bright reflections necessary for instantaneous exposures and at the same time avoided glare. Reflections obtained while the sun was partly obscured were concentrated onto a single area of the foreground, which made for bolder, more striking compositions. By simultaneously shooting into the sun and underexposing the negative, Stuart Wortley achieved even stronger dramatic contrasts, as well as the facsimile of moonlight (e.g., figure 14). Le Gray, Wilson, and other stereographers had also exploited the mystery and poetry inherent in moonlit scenes, as seen in Le Gray's *Brig on the Water* (figure 3) of 1856. In his early works Stuart Wortley began to underexpose his negatives slightly (e.g., figure 4). He aimed the lens just under the sun and made a very fast exposure, which resulted in sharp contrasts between the brightness of the sky and water and the darkness of



Figure 6
"How calm, how beautiful comes on / The stilly hour when storms are gone"
c. 1869
(cat. no. 7)



Figure 7
"As shines the moon in clouded skies"
 c. 1869
 (cat. no. 8)

the boat and the wedge of land on the right side of the picture. Stuart Wortley expanded his use of this technique later in the decade. The moonlit scenes he produced about 1869 are the images that established him as one of the most romantic seascape photographers in the history of the medium.

Stuart Wortley's large instantaneous seascapes of 1862 and 1863 caused a sensation. The reviewer for *The Photographic News* rhapsodized that his "instantaneous pictures of sea, and cloud, and foreground, and atmospheric effect, are sublimely grand. Le Gray has produced magnificent pictures of similar effects, but none like these."¹⁶ A critic for the same journal described his photographs as "unsurpassed for beauty, and unequalled for size . . .," and possessing "clouds of most wondrous beauty, in combination with sea and foreground."¹⁷

With this stunning debut Stuart Wortley began a very active photographic career. From the outset

he was recognized by critics and by his peers as one of Britain's leading photographers. He was elected a member of the Photographic Society of London, Britain's preeminent organization in the field, in 1862, and became a vice president in 1863. He served on the council and as vice president of this body off and on until three years before his death. In addition, he continued to experiment with various photographic processes and to exhibit instantaneous seascapes that displayed increasing power and drama.

In the mid 1860s, Stuart Wortley became preoccupied with one of the two sizable commercial enterprises he founded, the United Association of Photography (UAP). The other endeavor was the Uranium Dry Plate Company. The UAP was established in 1864 "to develop any of the many branches

16. "The Photographic Exhibition," *The Photographic News*, 7, no. 228 (January 16, 1863), p. 25.

17. "Photographic Exhibition. Final Notice," *The Photographic News*, 7, no. 235 (March 6, 1863), p. 110.



Figure 8
Moonlight struggling through the clouds
c. 1869
(cat. no. 9)

of photography calculated to yield a fair return for skill and capital.”¹⁸ The organization was conceived on a grand scale to monopolize the practice of commercial portrait photography “of a very high class.” According to the prospectus, accomplished portrait photographers would be hired out to private clients, and studios would be franchised at “principal Watering Places and Commercial Centres.”¹⁹

Another of the Association’s goals was to corner the market for reproductions of art works by using the latest techniques of photo-lithography, photographic engraving, and photo-zincography. Other ambitious plans included the manufacturing and leasing of photographic apparatus and the acquiring of patents or discoveries connected with photography.²⁰ Once described in the photographic press as a “gigantic commercial undertaking,”²¹ the UAP was liquidated in 1867. There are several possible reasons for the failure of the company. Stuart Wortley and his associates may simply have been too ambitious; expensively produced and packaged portraits could not compete with low-cost mass-produced images. Moreover, the unsuccessful attempt to promote a photographic printing process called the Wothlytype may have undermined the confidence of photographers in the Association.

Named after its German inventor Jacob Wothly, the Wothlytype tantalized photographers with its promise to replace the unstable silver salts, which were basic to photographic printing processes but thought to be responsible for fading, with the salts of uranium. When it was discovered that silver salts

still formed the basis of the image and that Wothlytypes were therefore not permanent, some photographers felt they were victims of a hoax. The attempt to levy steep patent fees on amateurs who used the process also caused hard feelings. After initially arousing a great deal of interest, the Wothlytype process was soon ignored. By 1867, the Association was itself producing photographs by the genuinely permanent carbon method.²² Before that happened, however, Wothlytype prints, primarily portraits, were exhibited by the UAP and generally well received by critics. Stuart Wortley also reissued his Neapolitan views as Wothlytypes.

Stuart Wortley was not able to rely solely on photography for his livelihood. He also took various positions in the civil service, perhaps, as his letters to his family suggest, because he was perpetually short of money.²³ In 1866, a year prior to the liquidation of the UAP, he quit his position as managing director (he remained a director) and accepted a post as secretary to his uncle Lord John Manners at the Board of Works.²⁴

In 1871, attempting to become a successful entrepreneur with his second commercial enterprise, Stuart Wortley began to market dry-plate negatives from Rosslyn House, his home in the fashionably bohemian St. John’s Wood area of London.²⁵ For some time he had been experimenting with various “dry-plate” processes and no doubt wished to take advantage of an eager market for these alternatives to the bulky, inconvenient wet-plate technique used by most photographers. Because wet-plate negatives

18. Leader, *The Photographic Journal*, 9, no. 147 (July 15, 1864), p. 69.

19. “The United Association of Photography (Limited)” (advertisement), *The Photographic News*, 8, no. 305 (July 8, 1864), p. xv.

20. “Memorandum of Association of the United Association of Photography Limited,” Public Record Office, Kew, London, BT 31/997/1537C.

21. “United Association of Photography,” *The Photographic News*, 8, no. 306 (July 15, 1864), p. 348.

22. “Exhibition of Photographs,” *The British Journal of Photography*, 14, no. 373 (June 28, 1867), p. 310.

23. Wharnccliffe Muniments (Wh.M. 418/9), Sheffield Archives, Sheffield, England.

24. “Talk in the Studio: The United Association of Photography,” *The Photographic News*, 10, no. 411 (July 20, 1866), p. 348.

25. “Colonel Stuart Wortley’s Sensitive Plates,” *The British Journal of Photography*, 18, no. 584 (July 14, 1871), p. 324.



Figure 9
"All the air was white with moonlight / All the water black with shadow"
c. 1869
(cat. no. 24)