

ANIMA LUNAE.

*Written partly under the great rock Sigiri, in Ceylon,
partly in Arabia, near Aden.*

ZOHRA the king by feathered fans
Slept lightly through the mid-day heat.
Swart giants with drawn yataghans
Guard, standing at his head and feet,
Zohra, the mightiest of the khans !

Each slave Circassian like a moon
Sits smiling, burning with young bloom
Of dawn, and weaves an airy tune
Like a white bird's song bright and bold
That dips a fiery plume.
So the song lulled, lazily rolled
In tubes of silver, lutes of gold ;
And all that palace drowsed away
The hours that fanned with silken fold
The progress of the Lord of Day.
Yet, as he slept, a grey
Shadow of dream drew near, and stooped
And glided through the ranks of slaves,
Leaving no shadow where they drooped,
No echo in the architraves
As silent as the grave's.
That shape vibrated to the tune
Of thought lulled low ; the stirless swoon
Half felt its fellow gather close,
Yet stirred not : now the intruder moves,
Turns the tune slower to grave rows
Of palm trees, losing life in loves
Less turbid than the mildest dream

That ever stirred the stream
Whereon night floats, a shallop faint,
Ivory and silver bow and beam,
Dim-figured with the images
Divinely quaint
Of gold engraved, forth shadowing sorceries.
So the king dreamed of love : and passing on
The shape moved quicker, winnowing with faint fans
The soundless air of thought : the noonday sun
Seemed to the mightiest of a thousand khans
Like to a man's
Brief life—a thousand such dream spans!—
And so he dreamed of life : and failing plumes
Wrought through ancestral looms
In the man's brain : and so he dreamed of death.
And slower still the grey God wrought
Dividing consciousness from breath,
And life and death from thought.
So the king dreamed of Nought.

Yet subtly-shapen was this Nothingness,
Not mere negation, as before that dream
Drew back the veil of sleep ;
But strange : the king turned idly, sought to press
The bosom where love lately burnt supreme,
And found no ivory deep.
He turned and sought out life ; and nothing lived :

Death, and nought died. The king's brow fell. Sore
grieved
He rose, not knowing : and before his will
Swan's throat, dove's eyes, moon's breast, and woman's
mouth,
And form desirable
Of all the clustered love drew back : grew still
"O turn, my lover, turn thee to the South!"
The girl's warm song of the Siesta's hour.
Heedless of all that flower,
Eager to feel the strong brown fingers close

On the unshrinking rose
And pluck it to his breast to perish there ;
With neither thought nor care
Nor knowledge he went forth : none stay, none dare
Proffer a pavid prayer.

There was a pavement bright with emerald
Glittering on malachite
Clear to the Sun : low battlements enwalled
With gold the ground enthralled,
Sheer to the sight
Of sun and city : thither in his trance
The king's slow steps advance.
There stood he, and with eyes unfolded far
(Clouds shadowing a star
Or moonlight seen through trees—so came the lashes
Over—and strong sight flashes !)
Travelled in thought to life, and in its gleam
Saw but a doubtful dream.

His was a city crescent-shaped whose wall
Was brass and iron : in the thrall
Of the superb concave
Lay orb'd a waveless wave.
Four moons of liquid light revolved and threw
Their silvery fountains forth, whose fruitful dew
Turned all the plain to one enamelled vale
Green as the serpent's glory, and—how still !
—To where the distant hill
Shaped like an Oread's breast arose beyond,
Across the starless pond
Silent and sleeping—O the waters wan
That seem the soul of man !—
Suddenly darkness strikes the horizon round
With an abyss profound
That blots the half-moon ere the sun be set.
A mountain of pure jet
Rears its sheer bulk to heaven ; and no snows
Tinge evening with rose.

No blaze of noon invades those rocks of night,
Nor moon's benignant might.
And looking downward he beheld his folk
Bound in no tyrant's yoke ;
Knowing no God, nor fearing any man ;
Life's enviable span
Free from disease and vice, sorrow and age.
Only death's joys assuage
A gathering gladness at the thought of sleep.
Never in all the archives, scroll on scroll,
Reaching from aeons wrote they "Women weep,
Men hate, the children suffer." In the place
Where men most walked a table of fine brass
Was set on marble, with an iron style
That all might carve within that golden space
If one grief came—and still the people pass,
And since the city first began
None wrote one word thereon till one—a man
Witty in spite of happiness—wrote there :
"I grieve because the tablet is so fair
And still stands bare,
There being none to beautify the same
With the moon-curved Arabian character."
Whereat the king, "Thy grief itself removes
In its own cry its cause." And thence there came
Soft laughter that may hardly stir
The flowers that shake not in the City of Loves.
(For so men called the city's name
Because the people were more mild than doves,
More beautiful than Gods of wood or river ;
And so the city should endure for ever.)

But the king's mood was otherwise this day.
Along time's river, fifty years away,
There was a young man once
Ruddier than autumn suns
With gold hair curling like the spring sun's gold,
And blue eyes where stars lurked for happiness,
And lithe with all a young fawn's loveliness.

Such are the dwellers of the fire that fold
Fine wings in wanton ecstasy, and sleep
Where the thin tongues of glory leap
Up from the brazen hold
And far majestic keep
Of Djinn, the Lord of elemental light.
But he beheld some sight
Beyond that city's joy: his gentle word
The old king gently heard.
(This king was Zohra's father) "Lord and king
Of love's own city, give me leave to wing
A fervid flight to yonder hills of night.
Not that my soul is weary of the light
And lordship of thy presence; but in tender dream
I saw myself on the still stream
Where the lake goes toward the mountain wall.
These little lives and loves ephemeral
Seemed in that dream still sweet; yet even now
I turned the shallop's prow
With gathering joy toward the lampless mountains.
I heard the four bright fountains
Gathering joy of music—verily
I cannot understand
How this can be,
Yet—I would travel to that land."
So all they kissed him—and the boy was gone.
But when the full moon shone
A child cried out that he had seen that face
Limned with incomparable grace
Even in the shape of splendour as she passed.
The king's thought turned at last
To that forgotten story: and desire
Filled all his heart with aureate fire
Whose texture was a woman's hair; so fine
Bloomed the fair flower of pleasure:
Not the wild solar treasure
Of gleaming light, but the moon's shadowy pearl,
The love of a young girl
Before she knows that love: so mused the king;

“I am not weary of the soul of spring,”
He said, “none happier in this causeless chain
Of life that bears no fruit of pain,
No seed of sorrow,” yet his heart was stirred,
And, wasting no weak word
On the invulnerable air, that had
No soul of memories sad,
He passed through all the palace: in his bowers
He stooped and kissed the flowers;
And in his hall of audience stayed awhile,
And with a glad strange smile
Bade a farewell to all those lords of his;
And greeted with a kiss
The virgins clustered in his halls of bliss.
Next, passing through the city, gave his hand
To many a joyous band
Flower-decked that wandered through the wanton ways
Through summer’s idle days.
Last, passing through the city wall, he came
Out to the living flame
Of lambent water and the carven quay,
Stone, like embroidery!
All the dear beauty of art’s soul sublime
He looked on the last time,
And trod the figured steps, and found the ledge
At the white water’s edge
Where the king’s pinnacle lodged; but he put by
That shell of ivory,
And chose a pearl-inwoven canoe, whose prow
Bore the moon’s own bright brow
In grace of silver sculptured; and therein
He stepped; and all the water thin
Laughed to receive him; now the city faded
Little by little into many-shaded
Clusters of colour. So his boat was drawn
Subtly toward the dawn
With little labour; and the lake dropped down
From the orb’s utter crown
O’er the horizon; and the narrowing sides

Showed him the moving tides
And pearling waters of a tinier stream
Than in a maiden's dream
She laves her silken limbs in, and is glad.
Then did indeed the fountains change their tune,
Sliding from gold sun-clad
to silver filigree wherethrough the moon
Shines—for the subtle soul
Of music takes on shape, and we compare
The cedar's branching hair,
The comet's glory, and the woman's smile,
To strange devices otherwise not heard
Without the lute's own word.

So on the soul of Zohra grew
A fashioned orb of fiery dew;
Yet (as cool water on a leaf)
It touched his spirit not with grief,
Although its name was sorrow.
“O for a name to borrow”
(He mused) “some semblance for this subtle sense
Of new experience!
For on my heart, untouched, my mind not used
To any metre mused,
Save the one tranquil and continuous rhyme
Of joy exceeding time,
Here the joy changes, but abides for ever,
Here on the shining river
Where the dusk gathers, and tall trees begin
To wrap the shallop in,
Sweet shade not cast of sun or moon or star,
But of some light afar
Softer and sweeter than all these—what light
Burns past the wondrous night
Of yonder crags?—what riven chasm hides
In those mysterious sides?
Somewhere this stream must leap
Down vales divinely steep
Into some vain unprofitable deep!”

So mused the king. Mark you, the full moon shone!
Nay, but a little past the full, she rose
An hour past sunset: as some laughter gone,
After the bride's night, lost in subtler snows
Rosy with wifehood. Now the shallop glides
On gloomier shadier tides,
While the long hair of willows bent and kissed
The stream, and drew its mist
Up through their silent atmosphere.
Some sorrow drawing near
That slow, dark river would for sympathy
Have found its home and never wandered out
Into the sunlight any more. A sigh
Stirred the pale waters where the moonlight stood
Upon the sleepy flood
In certain bough-wrought shapes of mystic meaning,
As if the moon were weaning
The king her babe from milk of life and love
To milk new-dropped above
From her sweet breast in vaporous light
Into the willowy night
That lay upon the river. So the king
Heard a strange chant—the woods began to sing;
The river took the tune; the willows kept
Time; and the black skies wept
Those tears, those blossoms, those pearl drops of milk
That the moon shed: and looking up he saw
As if the willows were but robes of silk,
The moon's face stoop and draw
Close to his forehead; at the tears she shed
He knew that he was dead!
Thus he feared not, nor wondered, as the stream
Grew darker, as a dream
Fades to the utter deep
Of dreamless sleep.
The stream grew darker, and the willows cover
(As lover from a lover
Even for love's sake all the wealth of love)
The whole light of the skies: there came to him

Sense of some being dim
Bent over him, one colour and one form
With the dark leaves; but warm
And capable of some diviner air.
Her limbs were bare, her face supremely fair,
Her soul one shapely splendour,
Her voice indeed as tender
As very silence: so he would not speak,
But let his being fade: that all the past
Grew shadowy and weak,
And lost its life at last,
Being mere dream to this that was indeed
Life: and some utter need
Of this one's love grew up in him: he knew
The spirit of that dew
In his own soul; and this indeed was love.
The faint girl bent above
With fixed eyes close upon him; oh! her face
Burned in the rapturous grace
Feeding on his; and subtly, without touch,
Grew as a flower that opens at the dawn
Their kiss: for touch of lips is death to love.
Even as the gentle plant one finger presses,
However soft the tress is
Of even the air's profane caresses,
It closes, all its joy of light withdrawn;
The sun feels sadness in his skies above,
Because one flower is folded. Thus they floated
Most deathlessly devoted
Beyond the trees, and where the hills divide
To take the nighted tide
Into a darker, deeper, greener breast,
Maybe to find—what rest?
Now to those girdling mountains moon-exalted
Came through the hills deep-vaulted
That pearly shallop: there the rocks were rent,
And the pale element
Flowed idly in their gorges: there the night
Admits no beam of light;

Nor can the poet's eye
One ray espy.
Therefore I saw not how the voyage ended,
Only wherethrough those cliffs were rended
I saw them pass: and ever closer bent
The lady and the lover; ever slower
Moved the light craft, and lower
Murmured the waters and the wind complained;
And ever the moon waned;
Not wheeling round the world,
But subtly curved an curled
In shapes not seen of men, abiding ever
Above the lonely river
Aloft: no more I saw than this,
The shadowy bending to the first sweet kiss
That surely could not end, though earth should end.
Therefore my shut eyes blend
With sleep's own secret eyes and eyelashes,
Long and deep ecstasies,
Knowing as now I know—at last—how this
Foreshadows my own bliss
Of falling into death when life is tired.
For all things desired
Not one as death is so desirable,
Seeing all sorrows pass, all joys endure,
All lessons last. Not heaven and not hell
(My spirit is grown sure)
Await the lover
But death's veil draws, life's mother to discover,
Nature; no longer mother, but a bride!
Ay! there is none beside.

O brothers mightier than my mightiest word
In the least sob that stirred
Your lyres, bring me, me also to the end!
Be near to me, befriend
Me in the moonlit, moonless deeps of death,
And with exalted breath
Breathe some few flames into the embers dull
Of these poor rhymes and leave them beautiful.