

# TAMERLANE

[Poe's original footnotes appear at the conclusion of the poem.]

## I.

I have sent for thee, holy friar;<sup>(1)</sup>  
But 'twas not with the drunken hope,  
Which is but agony of desire  
To shun the fate, with which to cope  
Is more than crime may dare to dream,  
That I have call'd thee at this hour:  
Such father is not my theme—  
Nor am I mad, to deem that power  
Of earth may shrive me of the sin  
Unearthly pride hath revell'd in—  
I would not call thee fool, old man,  
But hope is not a gift of thine;  
If I *can* hope (O God! I can)  
It falls from an eternal shrine.

## II.

The gay wall of this gaudy tower  
Grows dim around me—death is near.  
I had not thought, until this hour  
When passing from the earth, that ear  
Of any, were it not the shade  
Of one whom in life I made  
All mystery but a simple name,  
Might know the secret of a spirit  
Bow'd down in sorrow, and in shame.—  
Shame said'st thou?

Aye I did inherit  
That hated portion, with the fame,  
The worldly glory, which has shown  
A demon-light around my throne,  
Scorching my sear'd heart with a pain  
Not Hell shall make me fear again.

## III.

I have not always been as now—  
 The fever'd diadem on my brow  
 I claim'd and won usurpingly—  
 Aye—the same heritage hath giv'n  
 Rome to the Caesar—this to me;  
 The heirdom of a kingly mind—  
 And a proud spirit, which hath striv'n  
 Triumphantly with human kind.

In mountain air I first drew life;  
 The mists of the Taglay have shed<sup>(2)</sup>  
 Nightly their dews on my young head;  
 And my brain drank their venom then,  
 When after day of perilous strife  
 With chamois, I would seize his den  
 And slumber, in my pride of power,  
 The infant monarch of the hour—  
 For, with the mountain dew by night,  
 My soul imbib'd unhallow'd feeling;  
 And I would feel its essence stealing  
 In dreams upon me—while the light  
 Flashing from cloud that hover'd o'er,  
 Would seem to my half closing eye  
 The pageantry of monarchy!  
 And the deep thunder's echoing roar  
 Came hurriedly upon me, telling  
 Of war, and tumult, where my voice  
 My *own* voice, silly child! was swelling  
 (O how would my wild heart rejoice  
 And leap within me at the cry)  
 The battle-cry of victory!

## IV.

The rain came down upon my head  
 But barely shelter'd—and the wind  
 Pass'd quickly o'er me—but my mind  
 Was mad'ning—for 'twas man that shed  
 Laurels upon me—and the rush,

The torrent of the chilly air  
Gurgled in my pleas'd ear the crush  
Of empires, with the captive's prayer,  
The hum of suitors, the mix'd tone  
Of flatt'ry round a sov'reign's throne.

The storm had ceas'd—and I awoke—  
Its spirit cradled me to sleep,  
And as it pass'd me by, there broke  
Strange light upon me, tho' it were  
My soul in mystery to steep:  
For I was not as I had been;  
The child of Nature, without care,  
Or thought, save of the passing scene.—

V.

My passions, from that hapless hour,  
Usurp'd a tyranny, which men  
Have deem'd, since I have reach'd to power  
My innate nature—be it so:  
But, father, there liv'd one who, then—  
Then, in my boyhood, when their fire  
Burn'd with a still intenser glow;  
(For passion must with youth expire)  
Ev'n *then*, who deem'd this iron heart  
In woman's weakness had a part.

I have no words, alas! to tell  
The loveliness of loving well!  
Nor would I dare attempt to trace  
The breathing beauty of a face,  
Which ev'n to *my* impassion'd mind,  
Leaves not its memory behind.  
In spring of life have ye ne'er dwelt  
Some object of delight upon,  
With steadfast eye, till ye have felt  
The earth reel—and the vision gone?  
And I have held to mem'ry's eye  
One object—and but one—until  
Its very form hath pass'd me by,  
But left its influence with me still.

## VI.

'Tis not to thee that I should name—  
 Thou can'st not—would'st not dare to think  
 The magic empire of a flame  
 Which ev'n upon this perilous brink  
 Hath fix'd my soul, tho' unforgiv'n  
 By what it lost for passion—Heav'n.  
 I lov'd—and O, how tenderly!  
 Yes! she [was] worthy of all love!  
 Such as in infancy was mine  
 Tho' then its *passion* could not be:  
 'Twas such as angel minds above  
 Might envy—her young heart the shrine  
 On which my ev'ry hope and thought  
 Were incense—then a goodly gift—  
 For they were childish, without sin,  
 Pure as her young examples taught;  
 Why did I leave it and adrift,  
 Trust to the fickle star within?

## VII.

We grew in age, and love together,  
 Roaming the forest and the wild;  
 My breast her shield in wintry weather,  
 And when the friendly sunshine smil'd  
 And she would mark the op'ning skies,  
 I saw no Heav'n, but in her eyes—  
 Ev'n childhood knows the human heart;  
 For when, in sunshine and in smiles,  
 From all our little cares apart,  
 Laughing at her half silly wiles,  
 I'd throw me on her throbbing breast,  
 And pour my spirit out in tears,  
 She'd look up in my wilder'd eye—  
 There was not need to speak the rest—  
 No need to quiet her kind fears—  
 She did not ask the reason why.

The hallow'd mem'ry of those years  
Comes o'er me in these lonely hours,  
And, with sweet lovliness, appears  
As perfume of strange summer flow'rs;  
Of flow'rs which we have known before  
In infancy, which seen, recall  
To mind—not flow'rs alone—but more  
Our earthly love—and all.

VIII.

Yes! she was worthy of all love!  
Ev'n such as from th' accursed time  
My spirit with tempest strove,  
When on the mountain peak alone,  
Ambition lent it a new tone,  
And bade it first to dream of crime,  
My phrenzy to her bosom taught:  
We still were young: no purer thought  
Dwelt in a seraph's breast than *thine*;<sup>(3)</sup>  
For passionate love is still divine:  
*I* lov'd her as an angel might  
With ray of the all living light  
Which blazes upon Edis' shrine.<sup>(4)</sup>  
It is not surely sin to name,  
With such as mine—that mystic flame,  
I had no being but in thee!  
The world with all its train of bright  
And happy beauty (for to me  
All was an undefin'd delight)  
The world—its joy—its share of pain  
Which I felt not—its bodied forms  
Of varied being, which contain  
The bodiless spirits of the storms,  
The sunshine, and the calm—the ideal  
And fleeting vanities of dreams,  
Fearfully beautiful! the real  
Nothings of mid-day waking life—  
Of an enchanted life, which seems,  
Now as I look back, the strife

Of some ill demon, with a power  
 Which left me in an evil hour,  
 All that I felt, or saw, or thought,  
 Crowding, confused became  
 (With thine unearthly beauty fraught)  
 Thou—and the nothing of a name.

## IX.

The passionate spirit which hath known,  
 And deeply felt the silent tone  
 Of its own self supremacy,—  
 (I speak thus openly to thee,  
 'Twere folly *now* to veil a thought  
 With which this aching breast is fraught)  
 The soul which feels its innate right—  
 The mystic empire and high power  
 Giv'n by the energetic might  
 Of Genius, at its natal hour;  
 Which knows (believe me at this time,  
 When falsehood were a ten-fold crime,  
 There *is* a power in the high spirit  
 To *know* the fate it will inherit)  
 The soul, which knows such power, will still  
 Find *Pride* the ruler of its will.

Yes! I was proud—and ye who know  
 The magic of that meaning word,  
 So oft perverted, will bestow  
 Your scorn, perhaps, when ye have heard  
 That the proud spirit had been broken,  
 The proud heart burst in agony  
 At one upbraiding word or token  
 Of her that heart's idolatry—  
 I was ambitious—have ye known  
 Its fiery passion?—ye have not—  
 A cottager, I mark'd a throne  
 Of half the world, as all my own,  
 And murmur'd at such lowly lot!

But it had pass'd me as a dream  
Which, of light step, flies with the dew,  
That kindling thought—did not the beam  
Of Beauty, which did guide it through  
The livelong summer day, oppress  
My mind with double loveliness—

X.

We walk'd together on the crown  
Of a high mountain, which look'd down  
Afar from its proud natural towers  
Of rock and forest, on the hills—  
The dwindled hills, whence amid bowers  
Her own fair hand had rear'd around,  
Gush'd shoutingly a thousand rills,  
Which as it were, in fairy bound  
Embrac'd two hamlets—those our own—  
Peacefully happy—yet alone—

I spoke to her of power and pride—  
But mystically, in such guise,  
That she might deem it naught beside  
The moment's converse, in her eyes  
I read (perhaps too carelessly)  
A mingled feeling with my own;  
The flush on her bright cheek, to me,  
Seem'd to become a queenly throne  
Too well, that I should let it be  
A light in the dark wild, alone.

XI.

There—in that hour—a thought came o'er  
My mind, it had not known before—  
To leave her while we both were young,—  
To follow my high fate among  
The strife of nations, and redeem  
The idle words, which, as a dream  
Now sounded to her heedless ear—  
I held no doubt—I knew no fear  
Of peril in my wild career;

To gain an empire, and throw down  
 As nuptial dowry—a queen's crown,  
 The only feeling which possest,  
 With her own image, my fond breast—  
 Who, that had known the secret thought  
 Of a young peasant's bosom then,  
 Had deem'd him, in compassion, aught  
 But one, whom phantasy had led  
 Astray from reason—Among men  
 Ambition is chain'd down—nor fed  
 (As in the desert, where the grand,  
 The wild, the beautiful, conspire  
 With their own breath to fan its fire)  
 With thoughts such feeling can command;  
 Uncheck'd by sarcasm, and scorn  
 Of those, who hardly will conceive  
 Than any should become "great," born<sup>(5)</sup>  
 In their own sphere—will not believe  
 That they shall stoop in life to one  
 Whom daily they are wont to see  
 Familiarly—whom Fortune's sun  
 Hath ne'er shone dazzlingly upon  
 Lowly—and of their own degree—

## XII.

I pictur'd to my fancy's eye  
 Her silent, deep astonishment,  
 When, a few fleeting years gone by,  
 (For short the time my high hope lent  
 To its most desperate intent,)  
 She might recall in him, whom Fame  
 Had gilded with a conquerer's name,  
 (With glory—such as might inspire  
 Perforce, a passing thought of one,  
 Whom she had deem'd in his own fire  
 Wither'd and blasted; who had gone  
 A traitor, violator of the truth  
 So plighted in his early youth,)

Her own Alexis, who should plight<sup>(6)</sup>  
The love he plighted *then*—again,  
And raise his infancy's delight,  
The bride and queen of Tamerlane—

XIII.

One noon of a bright summer's day  
I pass'd from out the matted bow'r  
Where in a deep, still slumber lay  
My Ada. In that peaceful hour,  
A silent gaze was my farewell.  
I had no other solace—then  
T' awake her, and a falsehood tell  
Of a feign'd journey, were again  
To trust the weakness of my heart  
To her soft thrilling voice: To part  
Thus, haply, while in sleep she dream'd  
Of long delight, nor yet had deem'd  
Awake, that I had held a thought  
Of parting, were with madness fraught;  
I knew not woman's heart, alas!  
Tho' lov'd, and loving—let it pass.—

XIV.

I went from out the matted bow'r,  
And hurried madly on my way:  
And felt, with ev'ry flying hour,  
That bore me from my home, more gay;  
There is of earth an agony  
Which, ideal, still may be  
The worst ill of mortality,  
'Tis bliss, in its own reality,  
Too real, to *his* breast who lives  
Not within himself but gives  
A portion of his willing soul  
To God, and to the great whole—  
To him, whose loving spirit will dwell  
With Nature, in her wild paths; tell  
Of her wond'rous ways, and telling bless

Her overpow'ring loveliness!  
 A more than agony to him  
 Whose failing sight will grow dim  
 With its own living gaze upon  
 That loveliness around: the sun—  
 The blue sky—the misty light  
 Of the pale cloud therein, whose hue  
 Is grace to its heav'nly bed of blue;  
 Dim! tho' looking on all bright!  
 O God! when the thoughts that may not pass  
 Will burst upon him, and alas!  
 For the flight on Earth to Fancy giv'n,  
 There are no words—unless of Heav'n.

## XV.

Look 'round thee now on Samarcand,<sup>(7)</sup>  
 Is she not queen of earth? her pride  
 Above all cities? in her hand  
 Their destinies? with all beside  
 Of glory, which the world hath known?  
 Stands she not proudly and alone?  
 And who her sov'reign? Timur he<sup>(8)</sup>  
 Whom th' astonish'd earth hath seen,  
 With victory, on victory,  
 Redoubling age! and more, I ween,  
 The Zinghis' yet re-echoing fame<sup>(9)</sup>  
 And now what has he? what! a name.  
 The sound of revelry by night  
 Comes o'er me, with the mingled voice  
 Of many with a breast as light,  
 As if 'twere not the dying hour  
 Of one, in whom they did rejoice—  
 As in a leader, haply—Power  
 Its venom secretly imparts;  
 Nothing have I with human hearts.

## XVI.

When Fortune mark'd me for her own,  
 And my proud hopes had reach'd a throne

(It boots me not, good friar, to tell  
 A tale the world but knows too well,  
 How by what hidden deeds of might,  
 I clamber'd to the tottering height,)  
 I still was young; and well I ween  
 My spirit what it e'er had been.  
 My eyes were still on pomp and power,  
 My wilder'd heart was far away,  
 In vallies of the wild Taglay,  
 In mine own Ada's matted bow'r.  
 I dwelt not long in Samarcand  
 Ere, in a peasant's lowly guise,  
 I sought my long-abandon'd land,  
 By sunset did its mountains rise  
 In dusky grandeur to my eyes:  
 But as I wander'd on the way  
 My heart sunk with the sun's ray.  
 To him, who still would gaze upon  
 The glory of the summer sun,  
 There comes, when that sun will from him part,  
 A sullen hopelessness of heart.  
 That soul will hate the ev'ning mist  
 So often lovely, and will list  
 To the sound of the coming darkness (known  
 To those whose spirits hark'n)<sup>(10)</sup> as one  
 Who in a dream of night *would* fly  
 But cannot from a danger nigh.  
 What though the moon—the silvery moon  
 Shine on his path, in her high noon;  
*Her* smile is chilly, and *her* beam  
 In that time of dreariness will seem  
 As the portrait of one after death;  
 A likeness taken when the breath  
 Of young life, and the fire o' the eye  
*Had* lately been but had passed by.  
 'Tis thus when the lovely summer sun  
 Of our boyhood, his course hath run:  
 For all we live to know—is known;  
 And all we seek to keep—hath flown;

With the noon-day beauty, which is all.  
 Let life, then, as the day-flow'r, fall—  
 The transient, passionate day-flow'r,<sup>(11)</sup>  
 Withering at the ev'ning hour.

## XVII.

I reach'd my home—my home no more—  
 For all was flown that made it so—  
 I pass'd from out its mossy door,  
 In vacant idleness of woe.  
 There met me on its threshold stone  
 A mountain hunter, I had known  
 In childhood but he knew me not.  
 Something he spoke of the old cot:  
 It had seen better days, he said;  
*There* rose a fountain once, and *there*  
 Full many a fair flow'r raised its head:  
 But she who rear'd them was long dead,  
 And in such follies had no part,  
 What was there left me *now*? despair—  
 A kingdom for a broken—heart.

[1827]

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(1) Of the history of Tamerlane little is known; and with that little, I have taken the full liberty of a poet.—That he was descended from the family of Zinghis Khan is more than probable—but he is vulgarly supposed to have been the son of a shepherd, and to have raised himself to the throne by his own address. He died in the year 1405, in the time of Pope Innocent VII.

How I shall account for giving him "a friar," as a death-bed confessor—I cannot exactly determine. He wanted some one to listen to his tale—and why not a friar? It does not pass the bounds of possibility—quite sufficient for my purposes—and I have at least good authority on my side for such innovations.

(2) The mountains of Belur Taglay are a branch of the Immaus, in the southern part of Independent Tartary. They are celebrated for the singular wildness, and beauty of their vallies.

(3) I must beg the reader's pardon for making Tamerlane, a Tartar of the fourteenth century, speak in the same language as a Boston gentleman of the nineteenth: but of the Tartar mythology we have little information.

(4) A deity presiding over virtuous love, upon whose imaginary altar, a sacred fire was continually blazing.

(5) Although Tamerlane speaks this, it is not the less true. It is a matter of the greatest difficulty to make the generality of mankind believe that one, with whom they are upon terms of intimacy, shall be called, in the world, a *(continued)*

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"great man." The reason is evident. There are few great men. Their actions are consequently viewed by the mass of people thro' the medium of distance.—The prominent parts of their character are alone noted; and those properties, which are minute and common to every one, not being observed, seem to have no connection with a great character.

Who ever read the private memorials, correspondence, &c., which have become so common in our time, without wondering that "great men" should act and think "so abominably"?

(6) That Tamerlane acquir'd his renown under a feigned name is not entirely a fiction.

(7) I believe it was after the battle of Angoria that Tamerlane made Samarcand his residence. It became for a time the seat of learning and the arts.

(8) He was called Timur Bek as well as Tamerlane.

(9) The conquests of Tamerlane far exceeded those of Zinghis Khan. He boasted to have two thirds of the world at his command. (continued)

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(10) I have often fancied that I could distinctly hear the sound of the darkness, as it steals over the horizon—a foolish fancy perhaps, but not more unintelligible than to see music—

“The mind the music breathing from her face.”

(11) There is a flow’r, (I have never known its botanic name,) vulgarly called the day flower. It blooms beautifully in the day-light, but withers towards evening, and by night its leaves appear totally shrivelled and dead. I have forgotten, however, to mention in the text, that it lives again in the morning. If it will not flourish in Tarty, I must be forgiven for carrying it thither.