

the glorious constellation of the literature of the sixteenth century.

Luis de Camoëns was, as we have seen, the son of Simon Vaz de Camoëns, a commander of one of the first ships, sent out after the glorious discovery of Portuguese India by Vasco de Gama, to subjugate the new country; he was shipwrecked at Goa, and lost his life and fortune, leaving this child, Luis, the only legacy he could bequeath his widow. She was of a noble family of Maceio, ambitious and high-spirited; very early perceiving the germ of genius in the young Luis, she determined it should be developed by careful instruction, and he was at an early age placed at the University of Coimbra, which then bore the palm over all the other Portuguese literary institutions. The rapid improvement he made was astonishing, and soon won him the love of his preceptors; the classics became his passion, and he studied them with an enthusiasm which soon enabled him to appreciate their beauties, and their influence upon his mind can be traced throughout his writings, for they are strongly tinged with the spirit of the Greek writers.

Soon after he left the university he was presented at court, and there his fascinating manners, polished mind, and great beauty of person won him an enviable distinction, which proved, however, a dangerous one, for it excited the jealousy of the nobles of Emmanuel's court. Having aspired above his rank, and defied the express commands of the king, he was banished from Lisbon. He returned to his mother's birth-place, Maceio, and here renewed his studies and commenced his celebrated poem, the *Lusiad*, which has won for him undying fame. His father's death had made a great impression on his young mind, and thrown a hue of deep interest around every thing relating to Portuguese India, and he dwelt upon it, till the shadowy visions, floating before his mind's eye, shaped themselves into distinct and life-like forms, and he conceived the idea of his grand epic, which was to immortalize the discovery which lost him a parent, but gained his country a new kingdom, which is now, alas! lost to that country, living only in the immortal verse of its poet.

Soon after Camoëns left the court, Emmanuel died, and was succeeded by John the Third, who immediately after his accession, fitted out an armament against Africa. Weary of his quiet and inactive life, the poet obtained permission to join this expedition, and he soon greatly distinguished himself by his daring bravery. In a naval engagement with the Moors, in the straits of Gibraltar, where he was foremost in boarding one of their vessels, he was wounded in the right eye, the sight of which he never recovered, and a

grievous loss it was to him, whose speaking orbs had been the glory of his countenance; but fortunately, by great care he was enabled to preserve the other. He was now for a long time engaged in actual service, under the scorching suns of Africa; but neither the hurry of his warlike duties, nor the wild dissipation of a lawless camp life, could blunt his genius, or stifle his poetic taste; it welled forth, sparkling, bubbling like a pure spring in the sandy desert; and many of the most exquisite passages of the *Lusiad*, and several of his most beautiful sonnets, were written while, as he expresses it:

*"One hand the pen, and one the sword employed."*

The African expedition was at last over, and the fame of his warlike achievements having reached the court at Lisbon, and many years having passed since his unfortunate success, an effort was made by some of his friends to obtain permission for him to return to Lisbon. It was successful, and he once more appeared at court; but how changed from the smooth cheeked, brilliant youth, who had dazzled the beauties of the capital; his fine complexion was scorched and withered by the burning sun, and arid airs of Africa; his hair half bleached, his face scarred, and one eye gone, he looked the warlike veteran, rather than the ladies' bard; but though so altered, his presence gave uneasiness to some gentlemen of rank, whose jealousy had formerly been excited, and as the resentment of a jealous Portuguese knows no bounds, Camoëns found it most prudent to banish himself once more from his native country. He therefore determined to leave for India, wishing to visit the scenes he was drawing with so masterly a hand; it gives added interest to his poem to know that he himself saw all he so beautifully describes; that it was not from others, but his own observation, that he gathered those paintings in verse of the "fair kingdoms of the rising day."

In 1553, he sailed with a numerous fleet for India, a disappointed man, forced by a mean spirit of revenge, for the imprudencies of his youth, to leave the country which should have cherished him as an idol; he has indeed heaped coals of fire upon its head, for what would now be known of the brief splendor of the Kingdom of Portugal, but for Camoëns? A few lines in a dry page of history would cursorily mention, as one of the many events of the sixteenth century, that a certain Vasco de Gama discovered the passage to India round the Cape of Good Hope, that the discovery was followed by the conquest of the country by the Portuguese, who, however, had not the power long to retain their dominion, and they were soon superseded by other nations.