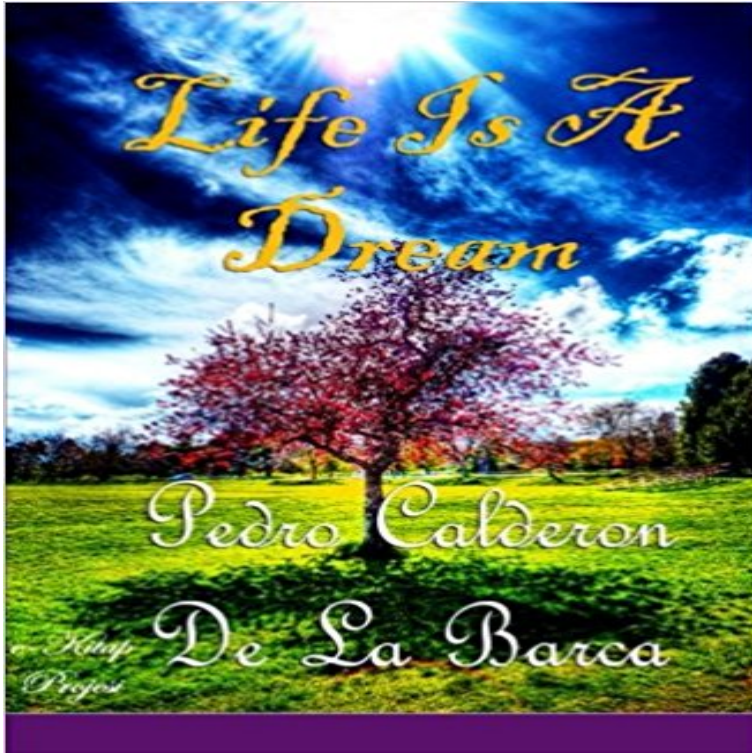


Life Is A Dream



The dominant motives in Calderons dramas are characteristically national: fervid loyalty to Church and King, and a sense of honor heightened almost to the point of the fantastic. Though his plays are laid in a great variety of scenes and ages, the sentiment and the characters remain essentially Spanish; and this intensely local quality has probably lessened the vogue of Calderon in other countries. In the construction and conduct of his plots he showed great skill, yet the ingenuity expended in the management of the story did not restrain the fiery emotion and opulent imagination which mark his finest speeches and give them a lyric quality which some critics regard as his greatest distinction. Of all Calderons works, *Life is a Dream* may be regarded as the most universal in its theme. It seeks to teach a lesson that may be learned from the philosophers and religious thinkers of many ages that the world of our senses is a mere shadow, and that the only reality is to be found in the invisible and eternal. The story which forms its basis is Oriental in origin, and in the form of the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat was familiar in all the literatures of the Middle Ages. Combined with this in the plot is the tale of Abou Hassan from the Arabian Nights, the main situations in which are turned to farcical purposes in the Induction to the Shakespearean *Taming of the Shrew*. But with Calderon the theme is lifted altogether out of the atmosphere of comedy, and is worked up with poetic sentiment and a touch of mysticism into a symbolic drama of profound and universal philosophical significance. LIFE IS A DREAM DRAMATIS PERSONAE Basilio King of Poland. Segismund his Son. Astolfo his Nephew. Estrella his Niece. Clotaldo a General in Basilius Service. Rosaura a Muscovite Lady. Fife her Attendant. Chamberlain, Lords in Waiting, Officers, Soldiers, etc., in Basilius Service. The

Scene of the first and third Acts lies on the Polish frontier: of the second Act, in Warsaw. As this version of Calderons drama is not for acting, a higher and wider mountain-scene than practicable may be imagined for Rosauras descent in the first Act and the soldiers ascent in the last. The bad watch kept by the sentinels who guarded their state-prisoner, together with much else (not all!) that defies sober sense in this wild drama, I must leave Calderon to answer for; whose audience were not critical of detail and probability, so long as a good story, with strong, rapid, and picturesque action and situation, was set before them.

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