Life Is A Dream

LIFE IS A DREAM

[ILLUSTRATED]

BY

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ILLUSTRATED &

PUBLISHED BY

E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com

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Istanbul

ISBN:

978-625-6014-56-5

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Pedro Calderon de la Barca was born in Madrid, January 17, 1600, of good family. He was educated at the Jesuit College in Madrid and at the University of Salamanca; and a doubtful tradition says that he began to write plays at the age of thirteen. His literary activity was interrupted for ten years, 1625-1635, by military service in Italy and the Low Countries, and again for a year or more in Catalonia. In 1637 he became a Knight of the Order of Santiago, and in 1651 he entered the priesthood, rising to the dignity of Superior of the Brotherhood of San Pedro in Madrid. He held various offices in the court of Philip IV, who rewarded his services with pensions, and had his plays produced with great splendor. He died May 5, 1681.

At the time when Calderon began to compose for the stage, the Spanish drama was at its height. Lope de Vega, the most prolific and, with Calderon, the greatest, of Spanish dramatists, was still alive; and by his applause gave encouragement to the beginner whose fame was to rival his own. The national type of drama which Lope had established was maintained in its essential characteristics by Calderon, and he produced abundant specimens of all its varieties. Of regular plays he has left a hundred and twenty; of "Autos Sacramentales," the peculiar Spanish allegorical

development of the medieval mystery, we have seventy-three; besides a considerable number of farces.

The dominant motives in Calderon's 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 Calderon's 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 Basilio's Service.

Rosaura a Muscovite Lady.

Fife her Attendant.

Chamberlain, Lords in Waiting, Officers,

Soldiers, etc., in Basilio's Service.

The Scene of the first and third Acts lies on the Polish frontier: of the second Act, in Warsaw.

As this version of Calderon's drama is not for acting, a higher and wider mountain-scene than practicable may be imagined for Rosaura's 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.

ACT I

SCENE I



—A PASS OF ROCKS, OVER WHİCH A STORM İS ROLLİNG AWAY, AND THE SUN SETTİNG: İN THE FOREGROUND, HALF-WAY DOWN, A FORTRESS.

(Enter first from the topmost rock Rosaura, as from horseback, in man's attire; and, after her, Fife.)

ROSAURA.

There, four-footed Fury, blast

Engender'd brute, without the wit

Of brute, or mouth to match the bit

Of man—art satisfied at last?

Who, when thunder roll'd aloof,
Tow'rd the spheres of fire your ears
Pricking, and the granite kicking
Into lightning with your hoof,
Among the tempest-shatter'd crags
Shattering your luckless rider
Back into the tempest pass'd?
There then lie to starve and die,
Or find another Phaeton
Mad-mettled as yourself; for I,
Wearied, worried, and for-done,
Alone will down the mountain try,
That knits his brows against the sun.

FIFE (as to his mule).
There, thou mis-begotten thing,
Long-ear'd lightning, tail'd tornado,
Griffin-hoof-in hurricano,
(I might swear till I were almost
Hoarse with roaring Asonante)

Who forsooth because our betters
Would begin to kick and fling
You forthwith your noble mind
Must prove, and kick me off behind,
Tow'rd the very centre whither
Gravity was most inclined.
There where you have made your bed
In it lie; for, wet or dry,
Let what will for me betide you,
Burning, blowing, freezing, hailing;
Famine waste you: devil ride you:
Tempest baste you black and blue:
(To Rosaura.)
There! I think in downright railing
I can hold my own with you.

ROS.
Ah, my good Fife, whose merry loyal pipe,
Come weal, come woe, is never out of tune
What, you in the same plight too?

FIFE.

Ay; And madam—sir—hereby desire,
When you your own adventures sing
Another time in lofty rhyme,
You don't forget the trusty squire
Who went with you Don-quixoting.

ROS.

Well, my good fellow—to leave Pegasus
Who scarce can serve us than our horses worse—
They say no one should rob another of
The single satisfaction he has left
Of singing his own sorrows; one so great,
So says some great philosopher, that trouble
Were worth encount'ring only for the sake
Of weeping over—what perhaps you know
Some poet calls the 'luxury of woe.'

FIFE.

Had I the poet or philosopher

In the place of her that kick'd me off to ride,

I'd test his theory upon his hide.

But no bones broken, madam—sir, I mean?—

ROS.

A scratch here that a handkerchief will heal—

And you?—

FIFE.

A scratch in *quiddity*, or kind:

But not in '*quo*'—my wounds are all behind.

But, as you say, to stop this strain,

Which, somehow, once one's in the vein,

Comes clattering after—there again!—

What are we twain—deuce take't!—we two,

I mean, to do—drench'd through and through—

Oh, I shall choke of rhymes, which I believe

Are all that we shall have to live on here.

ROS.

What, is our victual gone too?—

FIFE.

Ay, that brute

Has carried all we had away with her,

Clothing, and cate, and all.

ROS.

And now the sun,

Our only friend and guide, about to sink

Under the stage of earth.

FIFE.

And enter Night,

With Capa y Espada—and—pray heaven!

With but her lanthorn also.

ROS.

Ah, I doubt

To-night, if any, with a dark one—or

Almost burnt out after a month's consumption.

Well! well or ill, on horseback or afoot,

This is the gate that lets me into Poland;

And, sorry welcome as she gives a guest

Who writes his own arrival on her rocks

In his own blood—

Yet better on her stony threshold die,

Than live on unrevenged in Muscovy.

FIFE.

Oh, what a soul some women have—I mean

Some men—

ROS.

Oh, Fife, Fife, as you love me, Fife,

Make yourself perfect in that little part,

Or all will go to ruin!

FIFE.

Oh, I will,

Please God we find some one to try it on.

But, truly, would not any one believe

Some fairy had exchanged us as we lay

Two tiny foster-children in one cradle?

ROS.

Well, be that as it may, Fife, it reminds me

Of what perhaps I should have thought before,

But better late than never—You know I love you,

As you, I know, love me, and loyally

Have follow'd me thus far in my wild venture.

Well! now then—having seen me safe thus far

Safe if not wholly sound—over the rocks

Into the country where my business lies

Why should not you return the way we came,

The storm all clear'd away, and, leaving me

(Who now shall want you, though not thank you, less,

Now that our horses gone) this side the ridge,