

“ At the period when Spanish comedy had attained its fullest development,” says my friend Ludwig Tieck, one of the profoundest critics of dramatic literature, “ we often find, in the romanesque and lyrical meter of Calderon and his cotemporaries, dazzlingly beautiful descriptions of the sea, of mountains, gardens, and sylvan valleys; but these are always so interwoven with allegorical allusions, and adorned with so much artificial brilliancy, that we feel we are reading harmoniously rhythmical descriptions, recurring continually with only slight variations, rather than as if we could breathe the free air of nature, or feel the reality of the mountain breath and the valley’s shade.” In the play of *Life is a Dream* (*la vida es sueño*), Calderon makes the Prince Sigismund lament the misery of his captivity in a number of gracefully-drawn contrasts with the freedom of all organic nature. He depicts birds “ which flit with rapid wings across the wide expanse of heaven ;” fishes, “ which but just emerged from the mud and sand, seek the wide ocean, whose boundlessness seems scarcely sufficient for their bold course. Even the stream which winds its tortuous way among flowers finds a free passage across the meadow ; and I,” cries Sigismund, in despair, “ I, who have more life than these, and a freer spirit, must content myself with less freedom !” In the same manner Don Fernando speaks to the King of Fez, in *The Steadfast Prince*, although the style is often disfigured by antitheses, witty comparisons, and artificially-turned phrases from the school of Gongora.* I have referred to these individual examples because they show, in dramatic poetry, which treats chiefly of events, passions, and characters, that descriptions become merely the reflections, as it were, of the disposition and tone of feeling of the principal personages. Shakspeare, who, in the hurry of his animated action, has hardly ever time or opportunity for entering deliberately into the descriptions of natural scenery, yet paints them by accidental reference, and in allusion to the feelings of the principal characters, in such a manner that we seem to see them and live in them. Thus, in the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, we live in the wood ; and in the closing scenes of the *Merchant of Venice*, we see the moonshine which brightens the warm summer’s night, without there being actually any direct description of either. “ A true description of nature occurs, howev-

* Calderon, in *The Steadfast Prince*, on the approach of the fleet, Act i., scene 1; and on the sovereignty of the wild beasts in the forests, Act iii., scene 2.