

# MUSA THE DESPOT.

(CONFESSIONS OF A LITERARY MAN.)

By JESSIE MACKAY.

I HAVE been the slave of Musa so long that it surprises me when the normal Philistine persists in condemning me for what he deems the sins of my volition. Furthermore, when the said Philistine confidently assumes that I am master of my own ink-pot, I tingle with the irritation of a henpecked husband receiving airy bits of outsiders' advice on home management while the sour arbiter of his domestic destinies sits back and sniffs. No sour arbiter is my wilful April lady, Musa; and yet she is as absolute a despot as ever wielded the sceptre; and there isn't a happier or more helpless serf in the universe than I—happier, that is to say, when my April lady condescends to occupy her rightful throne on my writing-table and smile on me through the Delphic fumes of Barrie's own divine Arcadia mixture. For often, alas! the throne is spread, and for long days and nights the ringed Arcadian incense mutely implores her favour, and yet she will not come. Why she withdraws herself, where she loiters, I cannot tell. Her causeless wanderings, her airy returns, often remind me of a story of Sam Slick's, wherein a dour and unemotional youth, being chidden for bringing in a back-log somewhat slighter than himself, walked out of the house and ran away to sea for seven years. Returning unannounced about the eighth year, the young man espied the segment of a mighty tree-trunk lying at the wood-heap, and upending it on his

shoulder, walked in with the calm remark, "Here's the back-log, father." I am unable, however, to carry out the analogy and greet Musa with the cool parental answer, "Well, you've been a precious long time getting it."

Instead of such a phlegmatic welcome, I fawn upon her; I hold a Sun Feast in her honour, and survey my own beatified boots on the mantelshelf through a celestial haze you could slice with a knife. I repeat proudly to myself:

"Yesterday I walked down the street alone, and saw nothing but mud, mortgages, and mutton. Today, Musa shall walk at my right hand, and my clarified vision shall detect molecules of infinity in the mud, divine retribution in the mortgages, and Parnassian rays glinting on the mutton. Walk, did I say? No, i'faith; I do not walk in Musa's company; we travel the way of the frigate-bird, she and I."

My first raptures over, I fall into a sort of cheapjack monologue regarding the dry bones I want her to vivify. I show her, one by one, the barren skeletons that during her absence have hung on my study walls in the weird style of house decoration affected by her Venus when he "floated his powerful mind in tea" with Silas Wegg, and wept over the hyper-sensitiveness of Pleasant Riderhood on osseous subjects.

My cheapjack patter runs something like this:

"Here's a critique on Soapleigh's last novel. The spine is bristling with stinging rays; here