

BOOKS.

BY ALEXANDER McLACHLAN.

"My library was dukedom large enough."
—*Shakespeare.*

WE once heard an enthusiastic hunter, after an exciting day's sport, exclaim, "Surely the man who does not love hunting can have no soul!" The hunting spirit never having got hold of us, we therefore could hardly join in the sentiment. But we have sometimes thought that the man who does not love books must be sadly deficient somewhere in the upper story. We have even wondered if he could have any upper story at all, when he preferred to live away down among the grubs and the gossips, to associating with the great immortals. But be that as it may, some men never read any thing but the "prices current," catalogues and almanacs. Others read merely for amusement, or to help to pass an idle hour, or put in a rainy day, and could do well enough without it. But with us books are an every day necessity, and have been so ever since that long delightful summer of our boyhood when we lived on the Island of Juan Fernandez in company with Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday. That was our first acquaintance with books—it was indeed an era in our existence, for it shaped and coloured our life-long journey. After leaving the island we set out on our travels with Mungo Park through the centre of Africa; and after "doing that region," we started on a voyage of discovery with Captain Cook, and after circumnavigating the world, returned only to set out again for "fresh fields and pastures new"—to range through the kingdoms of science, literature and art. We are likely to continue our journey to the end of life's chapter, for the more we travel the farther

the fields extend, and are all the time growing more wonderful and incomprehensible,

"And realms of which we nothing know,
Keep multiplying as we go."

"Books," says Milton, "are not absolutely dead things, but do convey a potency of life in them to be as active as the soul was, whose progeny they were: nay, they do preserve as in a phial, the purest efficacy and extraction of the living intellect that bred them." To us they are veritable beings, living souls, dear companions! to whom we go in joy or in sorrow. Our experiences, good or bad, are not new to them, for they have felt exactly as we feel, and can therefore sympathize with us, and in the deepest and the darkest hour we hear their voices whispering "courage."

Books are the mirrors of humanity; yea, the stage on which the dead appear to re-enact "life's tragedy again." Most people do not believe in ghosts. But look there! what is that? Lo! it is the "melancholy Dane," still soliloquizing, and exclaiming,

"To be or not to be!"

And here comes something far more wonderful than any ghost, even Falstaff himself, lacking not an ounce of flesh, and hale and hearty as when he fought the "men in buckram." There also comes the knight of La Mancha, still prancing on his Rosinante and exclaiming, "There is still sunshine on the wall." Lift a volume, open the leaves, and lo! as if by magic, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Babylon and Assyria appear, and pass like panoramic pictures before us, with Britain and America in the distance, and many more following each other like the progeny