

THE MILTON COLLECTION

The span of Alexander Turnbull's active collecting life was relatively short, for only after the death of his father were adequate funds at his disposal. Thus the years from 1900-1918 saw the greatest development of his library, though the four war years impeded his programme considerably. Nevertheless, his collection grew to such size that cataloguing became a formidable task even in the nineties, for he had been buying steadily since at least 1887.

It was early in the century that he decided to make a special collection of Milton, and not only did he ask Bernard Quaritch to offer him anything to this end, but he also bought freely from catalogues of the antiquarian book trade. He soon realised that such a project led into other and wider fields.

He aimed first at securing the original and all subsequent significant editions of Milton's writings. Even fifty years ago, first editions of Milton were not common, and it is not altogether remarkable that he was unable to secure several of the minor pamphlets—a lack that has been partly remedied since.

But surprisingly voluminous as are the published works of Milton, they are dwarfed by the number of edited versions of the individual or gathered works. These are less difficult, and a full range of the many texts, climaxed by the great "Columbia Milton", are in the shelves, followed by the critical assessments, the analyses, the tracing of origins, the studies of style, the seeking of parallels and the hosts of other exercises of literary devotees.

So too with the biographical material, from the earliest "Lives" to the mighty seven-volume work of David Masson, and on to the many that have drawn upon it since.

As one contemplates the collection as a whole, its natural division into three parts becomes apparent, reflecting the periods of Milton's life. Until 1640 he was the poet and scholar publishing "Comus" and "Lycidas", but the fever of the next ten years that so disrupted all English life could not but infect so active a mind. In 1640 and 1641 he published pamphlets on Church administration, but his personal problems supervened, evoking "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" (1643), from which he sped on to the cause of freedom of the press, with "Areopagitica" (1644).