

II. *The impact on the Turnbull Collection*

In July 1892 Alexander Turnbull wrote to the London antiquarian bookseller, Bernard Quaritch, asking him to obtain copies of the 1645 and 1673 editions of the *Poems* of John Milton. The two volumes were to form part of a Milton collection which Turnbull intended eventually to make as complete as possible. He insisted at the outset that he be sent genuine copies ('not *made up* at all'), leaving the price to Quaritch's discretion. The new project was no idle extravagance. Turnbull, at 23, knew precisely what he wanted.

The collection was not limited to early editions or to works by Milton. Turnbull sought to build a research collection including works of criticism and interpretation and Miltoniana of every kind. It was an ambitious design which required not only heavy dependence on overseas dealers but also judicious selection on the part of the collector. Although not the only bookseller on whom Turnbull relied, the firm of Quaritch appears to have provided many of the rarer items including a copy of *Iusta Edovardo King naufrago* (1638) offered for £111 in July 1896 and of the first edition of *Comus* sold for £600 in April 1913. At his death, in the space of 26 years, Turnbull had succeeded in assembling a collection of international standing.

In the years that followed the Library attempted to build on the foundation Turnbull had established. But with the range of Turnbull's original collections and the modest funds at its disposal it could, until recently, do little more than add modern material and an occasional older edition, mainly those published in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. The quality of the collection remained but its international stature declined with the growth of comparable collections in the United States. When an independent census of world holdings of seventeenth-century Milton editions was published in 1968, the Turnbull collection ranked eleventh equal behind those of six American and four English libraries. In the absence of complete records it is difficult to determine the exact size of Turnbull's contribution but it is likely that of the 72 seventeenth-century editions held by the Library in November 1974, 66 were acquired by Turnbull himself.

The neglect of the collection in the 56 years following Turnbull's death is redeemed by the acquisition of the G. William Stuart Collection. The purchase includes obvious highlights such as the copy of the sixth title-page of *Paradise lost* (1669) which completes the Turnbull set of the six issues of the first edition. But it is in its breadth and depth that the collection is most remarkable. It will increase the Library's total holdings of editions of Milton's works from 523 to 611, adding nine new seventeenth-century editions and 44 published in the eighteenth century. On the basis of the 1968 census such an improvement would place the collec-