

as it seems to have done with Napoleon, or if for any reason the field proved unprofitable, he simply ceased collecting. But when he was deeply engaged there was no limit to the effort and resources he was prepared to expend – in such circumstances he was a perfectionist. The most notable instance of this sort was his New Zealand collection where he proclaimed as early as 1893 that his aims were comprehensive. Here, too, one can see, as with the Dulwich catalogues, how one thing led to another. By the late nineties he had widened his range to include the Australian colonies and Pacific islands; but how thoroughly he collected in this area, vast in both the geographic and the bibliographic senses, I cannot say. To this broad thesis, I should add, certain qualifications must be made. For the origin of some special collections I can find no clue in the facts of Turnbull's life. Why, for example, did he decide to gather all he could by or about Milton? The decision, made soon after his return to New Zealand in 1892, simply came from the blue, as far as I can see. Then again outside the special collections there are in a library of the Turnbull's dimensions numerous books that cannot be worked into any biographical thesis unless of the vaguest kind. Many are there, I suppose, because they fitted into Turnbull's conception of a gentleman's library – the complete range of English classics, for instance, or those of Greece and Rome.

I am in danger of repeating my earlier error – that is of considering the bibliophile in isolation and ignoring other aspects of the man. And recollecting Virginia Woolf's catechism, I realize how imperfectly I have discharged my functions. Where and when did he live? she asks. That information at least has been supplied. Next, how did he look? To be brief, handsome in an Edwardian fashion, well-groomed, well-tailored, tall. *Question*: Did he wear laced boots or elastic-sided? *Questioner* is referred to a vast correspondence on the subject, often illustrated by sketches. *Question*: Who were his aunts and friends? *Answer*: Of aunts he had only one by marriage and of her nothing is known. Friends few, of acquaintances and correspondents a multitude. Then the absorbing modern question: Whom did he love and how? His father, the biographer replies evasively, his brother and his sister, but his mother less certainly. For the rest nothing but hints, gossip, legend – perhaps the answer may be found in his library. Finally, did he die in his bed like a Christian, or . . . ? A complex question, summoning up spectres from the past and the rumoured frailties of his later years – too complex for summary discussion. And since this is after all a commemorative occasion, I must assert my view that despite human frailties – of which his biographer has more than a share – there was in Alexander Turnbull a kind of greatness. The evidence may be found in his library.