

It was on my fifteenth birthday that I first met the name of Ernest Currie, for my brother gave me a copy of *New Zealand verse collected by W. F. Alexander and A. E. Currie*. The volume (I have it still, with its fraternal inscription) gave me an awareness of the country I lived in beyond any other experience I had known. David McKee Wright, Will Lawson, Blanche Baughan, Thomas Bracken, Pember Reeves, became more than names, and I remember marvelling (with no inkling of the bibliographer's art) how these two compilers could have found out about all these poets and their poems. I couldn't guess that the one young compiler was a mere twenty-two years, or that he would one day be a good friend, still less could I foresee that some of these writers themselves would also be friends – Alan Mulgan, Arnold Wall, James Cowan, Johannes Andersen, the last even more: colleague, guide and friend.

It was not till the mid-1930s that I met Ernest Currie. He was a frequent user of the Library, and as a devoted bookman he came across useful information that we found worth noting somewhere. Sometimes it would be a problem, more usually a bibliographical one. His lawyer's mind showed itself in a fastidiousness about precise thinking and expression; he had a whimsical, sardonic, even tortuous sense of humour, an intolerance of careless work, especially in recording, and above all, a profound knowledge of literature, printing and the 'lore' of books. He did not hesitate to criticise, usefully, upon occasion, and he was generous in his appreciation of any service he was given. I regard as one of my best testimonials, his remark upon my spot identification of an illustration from a lost book: 'You're a bloody marvel'.

So when in 1939 I thought to launch an organization of 'Friends of the Turnbull Library', I went to three people: P. A. Lawlor, J. M. A. Ilott (now Sir John), and A. E. Currie. I couldn't have found better people: all were enthusiastic, as was the inaugural meeting that followed. Ilott became the first President, Lawlor the Secretary and Currie the committee-man charged with the erection of a constitution, and the legal processes of incorporation as a society. Both the latter became subsequent presidents and have remained good friends over the years. As everyone knows, even in death, Currie remembered the Turnbull Library.

He was President of the 'Friends' from 1952 to 1955, and it was commonly his way to take the initiative in meetings at the Library. I remember one that taxed me considerably when he varied the conventional talk or lecture by staging an 'interview', wherein he posed a series of searching questions on the binding of books. Of necessity, his own knowledge of the surprising range of the subject became manifest