

Walter Turnbull, the shrewd Scot who founded the family fortune, should be well pleased with the return on his son Alec's investment in this Library.

But we should be mistaken and very badly misled if we view this simply as the story of a successful businessman who bought his own memorial. Alexander Turnbull had no conscious desire for a memorial; he was a modest man with the selfless aim of building a New Zealand national collection to, as he put it, 'assist future Searchers after truth'. While we may honour him with eulogies and a biography we honour his memory in a more fitting manner by respecting his intention, the creation of a national collection. Turnbull was perceptive enough to discern a need in his society well before it was officially recognised and he lavished his leisure and gold in meeting that need. This function tonight is further evidence, if that is now needed, that his judgment was right, that New Zealand was in need of a national research collection to assist it to discover the truth about itself.

By collecting books above all, Turnbull made certain that his intentions would be fulfilled. Man is by nature a collector, and the collecting instinct reaches its apotheosis in books. No other product of man is so much man himself, and so capable of inspiring other men. Turnbull's collection has served to inspire almost three generations of scholars, librarians, collectors, members of the public, and even Governments, from time to time.

Unfortunately in 1918 when Turnbull left his collection to the nation the government was not inspired. They accepted the gift, purchased Turnbull's home on Bowen Street to house it, appointed Johannes Andersen as librarian, instructed him to care for it, and thought their job well done.

The climate of opinion which had impelled Alexander Turnbull to build his collection had changed. That extraordinary but premature outburst of personal, political and national self-confidence that marked the coming of age of the first New Zealand born generation at the end of the nineteenth century, reflected in the literature, the social legislation, the labour laws, the reaching out towards a New Zealand destiny in the Pacific, had passed. It was not until the approach of the 1940 Centennial that the challenge implied in Turnbull's legacy began to be recognized officially.

Government awareness of the importance of research collections has increased as New Zealand society has matured. The National Library Act of 1965, the commitment to the construction of a National Library building on Molesworth Street, the willingness to provide special funds to build the Turnbull collections, all are indications of the growing support of Governments.