

oceans travelled, drinks consumed, nights passed in sleepless discomfort. And they disclose two more facts bearing on his younger son's future. In the earlier series, written in 1876, Walter describes a day ashore at the coaling port of Saint Vincent. 'When wandering up and down the Town', he writes, 'we entered a Wine Shop to get a drink, and when there I bought a few Portugese and Russian Coins for Alick's Collection, and I will try to pick up a goodly quantity before I return.' At the age of eight Alexander had already begun his career as a collector. The second series is written four years later on notepaper headed with the printed address, 'Mount Henley, Sydenham Hill, S.E.'. 'Mount Henley' was within easy walking distance of Dulwich College, the only one of Alexander's schools that can be positively identified. He entered it in April 1881 while his father was absent in New Zealand.

Dulwich is not one of the great public schools. A. E. W. Mason, Turnbull's older contemporary, described it in one of his novels as 'a brand-new day-school of excessive size, which gathered its pupils into its class-rooms at nine o'clock in the morning and dispersed them to their homes at four.' Nevertheless, it could boast cultural amenities unknown in more famous institutions. It possessed a unique collection of manuscripts, inherited from the founder, Edward Alleyn, and it owned a gallery hung with works by the masters – Poussin, Veronese, Gainsborough. Moreover, Dulwich and the surrounding district fairly bristled with literary associations: both Shakespeare and Donne were remotely linked to the village through Alleyn; Byron had lived there as a boy; Dickens had chosen it as Mr Pickwick's place of retirement; and Browning had often walked to the gallery from his native Camberwell, two miles away. But perhaps the most powerful of these unseen presences in the eighties was Ruskin, once a resident of nearby Denmark Hill but now withdrawn to Coniston in the Lake District. It might be assumed that the young Turnbull, already a collector by instinct and now exposed to these influences, would have transferred his attention from coins to manuscripts, books, and pictures, thus creating the nucleus of his future library. If only things were so simple! There is no evidence that either he or his articulate contemporaries were aware of the great Dulwich collections – at least during their schooldays. And if Turnbull shared his parents' literary interests at this time the fact has left no trace in the records. He spent only three years at the school and, except for winning a prize for mathematics in his first term, achieved no academic distinction. He took the compulsory subjects – Latin, French, mathematics – with special classes at various times in German and geography, and so far as rather meagre information shows, was a good average pupil. He shone only in outdoor activities, winning a place in the school's shooting team and, true son of his native land, playing for the first fifteen in his final year. Altogether his school career