

Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl'd headlong flaming from the Ethereal Sky  
With hideous ruin and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In adamant chains, and penal fire,  
Who durst defy th' omnipotent to arms.

*Paradise Lost* I. 44-49

Milton was a great polemicist in prose as well as a great poet; and in turning now from the poetry to thinking of the works as a whole it is fitting that we direct our thoughts to Alexander Turnbull, who set about collecting them.

He seems to have started his Milton collection almost casually. As Dr McCormick records, Turnbull wrote to Quaritch on 14 July 1892: 'I intend forming a Milton collection and making it as complete as possible if I can see my way to do so. . . . The price, I shall have to leave to you and trust that you will do your best for me.'

Later that year (in November 1892) Turnbull was too busy buying a yacht for the arrival of the first Milton item (at £28) to be noticed by name. Not so when, in 1896, Quaritch advised that he held 'Milton (John) *Lycidas* . . . First edition, a remarkably fine copy, almost uncut, old marbled paper wrapper' and Turnbull's reply assuring him that 'I shall be overjoyed to receive this little rarity'.

In 1912, Quaritch reported 'Milton's *Comus* First Edition Good Copy Six Hundred Pounds'. It was a lot for those days, and it's indicative of the quality of many of the items which Turnbull secured. In June of this year, Christie's of London sold a copy of *Paradise Lost* (1667—first title page—Coleridge, plate 39) for £38,000; a *Comus* (1637—plate 35) for £30,000; a *Lycidas* (1638—plate 34) for £9,500; and an *Areopagitica* (1644—plate 5) for £14,500. Those four items alone—and only four of 224 editions and translations of Milton's works printed before 1801 included in the Bibliography—have a value of well over \$200,000.

It is not of course my intention to justify to this audience the value of the collection in terms of money. What Miss Coleridge's *Descriptive Catalogue* now makes almost self-evident is that the collecting urge of Alexander Turnbull, in many ways a naive and simple pleasure, has assumed its sophisticated intellectual fulfilment in the scholarly service of its subject, John Milton. Given the prices I have just cited—and the values our society pursues—it would be impossible now to build a collection of such scale, splendour and utility. It is for that reason that I record our thanks to the spirit of Alexander Turnbull.

When in 1630 the young John Milton had to turn a verse for the