Inventory

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Lewes – Ferrier Correspondence, 1841-1846
Seven letters, 1841-1846, between George Henry Lewes (1817-1878), English Philosopher and Critic of English Literature and Theatre, and James Frederick Ferrier (1808-1864), Scottish Metaphysical Philosopher, instigated by the appearance in October 1841 of an article by Ferrier in Blackwood’s Magazine entitled ‘The Crisis of Modern Speculation’.

Bought 2010

1. George H. Lewes to James F. Ferrier, c. 1841, in direct response to Ferrier’s article ‘The Crisis of Modern Speculation’ published in Blackwood’s Magazine. Lewes writes particularly on Ferrier’s comments on the Philosophy of Causation and, although he clearly takes issues with Ferrier’s position on the subject, he remains scrupulously polite and offers sincere thanks to Ferrier for having ‘delightfully awakened’ his own ‘slumbering metaphysical speculations’.

2. Draft or retained copy of James F. Ferrier’s first response to George H. Lewes, 28 December 1841, headed ‘Answer to G.H. Lewes’, in which Ferrier reciprocates his correspondent’s compliments whilst also promising his ‘endeavour to let you see wherein our disagreement consists’. There follows a point-by-point disputation of Lewes’ argument which is notable for its civility and charm even when in disagreement.

3. George H. Lewes’ response to James F. Ferrier, 1 January 1842, this time attempting to express his understanding of the disputation on his own (rather than Ferrier’s) terms. The letter concludes with a plea for Ferrier’s assistance in obtaining an answer from Blackwood’s Magazine to an article Lewes had submitted titled ‘New Studies of the Latin Poets’, which the author fears either mislaid or lost.

4. Draft or retained copy of James F. Ferrier’s response to George H. Lewes, 22 May 1842, in which he apologises for the delay in response and directs him to the cause – a shortly to be published paper (June 1842) titled ‘Berkeley and Idealism’. He then proceeds to ‘jot down one or two hints on the subject more succinctly than has perhaps been done’ in the printed paper.

5. George H. Lewes’ letter to James F. Ferrier, 10 June 1842, in which he says he has read Ferrier’s article on Berkeley but regrets that he believes his arguments as expressed in his previous letter remain as yet unanswered. He repeats his objection to Ferrier’s position and states: ‘This is the chasm which must be bridged over before we can fairly meet and when that is done we shall soon satisfactorily agree or disagree. Until that be settled I have no further remarks to make’. From this and other
casual statements elsewhere in this text it is clear that Lewes is here distancing himself from the Metaphysical School of Philosophy.

6. Final draft of an unsent letter from James F. Ferrier to George H. Lewes in response to Lewes' ‘Biographical History of Philosophy’, 20 March 1846. Ferrier extends his congratulations to Lewes before offering a couple of constructive criticisms of what he believes to be ‘cardinal’ points of philosophical enquiry. This is the first and last of Ferrier’s letters to Lewes that he deigns to sign in his own name rather than just as ‘the author of the Crisis of Modern Speculation’.

7. Notes and a rough draft of an unsent letter from James F. Ferrier to George H. Lewes, March 1846.