THE RALPH WALDO EMERSON COLLECTION
(1822-1903)

A Brief Introduction
to the
Microfilm Edition of the
Ralph Waldo Emerson Collection

By

Dr. Brian Harding

From the Alexander Ireland Collection in
The Manchester Central Library
Manchester  England

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Further Information about the complete collection held at the Library can be obtained from the Publishers or by contacting the Manchester Central Library direct.

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Introduction to the Ralph Waldo Emerson Collection by
Dr. Brian Harding, Birmingham University

When the young Alexander Ireland first met Ralph Waldo Emerson, in 1833, it was to act as his guide to Edinburgh, the city in which Ireland had been born and still lived. Ireland, then in his early twenties, was captivated by Emerson’s conversation—by his talk of literature and of literary men—and deeply impressed by a sermon the American preached in the Unitarian Chapel, Young Street. In fact, it is clear that Ireland became a disciple; an enthusiast for Emerson’s moral and spiritual message for, in the words of the writer of his own obituary, Ireland was “essentially a hero-worshipper.” His heroes were men of letters. In the course of his life, he cultivated the acquaintance of several eminent literary contemporaries. In addition to Thomas Carlyle, these included Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and William Hazlitt. Ireland made substantial collections relating to their works, and to the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. All were presented to the Manchester Free Reference Library after his death.

Ireland was passionately interested in literature before he met Emerson. He had been obliged to leave the Old High School, Edinburgh at the age of fifteen, in order to devote his youth to business, yet he obviously yearned for the literary life. Just as obviously—however—he also had the potential to become a successful and shrewd man of business. His appointment to be managing partner of the Manchester Examiner (founded in 1845) would testify to his business ability. The Ireland-Emerson relationship is interesting precisely because of the combination of astute business sense and moral idealism that found expression in the former’s sustained effort to bring Emerson’s ideas to the attention of the British public in general and—in particular—to young men searching for a spiritual purpose in their lives. Emerson’s response to his very warm welcome in England, as expressed in his speech on the British, delivered in Manchester in November 1847, also deserves attention.

Manchester was Alexander Ireland’s home at the time of the lecture tour. Welcomed to that city, Emerson lectured to the members of the Athenaeum, of which his host was a director, and to the Mechanics’ Institute. While there, he also made his most generous public statement about British character. He did this in his address to the members of the Athenaeum who filled the Free Trade Hall on 18 November 1847, when the honoured guests included Richard Cobden, John Bright, Robert Blackwell, the publisher, and John Cruikshank, the cartoonist. In his speech, Emerson seems to have been swept away by
the mood of the occasion and to have given himself up to a sort of moral boosterism. His celebration of the "moral peculiarity of the Saxon race" may well have been intended to help cheer a city partly demoralised by economic reverses, but it is hardly consistent with Emerson's Transcendental beliefs. In fact, it could be taken as a retreat from the idealism he had expressed in "The Transcendentalist": one of the essays in his 1841 collection.

The first course of lectures Emerson delivered in Manchester was for the Athenaeum. Its subject was "Representative Men." The next course was given to the Mechanics' Institute. The topics included: "Eloquence," "Domestic Life," "Reading," "The Superlative in Manners and Literature," "The Humanity of Science." According to Ireland, the addresses "excited great interest and attracted crowded audiences." During November 1847, Emerson was lecturing in Liverpool as well as Manchester and was proving a great success even before he moved on to London. In Liverpool his audiences averaged 750 persons. In fact not only was he extremely busy, as a public speaker on his 1847 visit, but also he was a lively and acute observer of the condition of England.

The Manchester address expressed only part of Emerson's response to English technological and industrial power. His journals and letters written during his lecture tour of England reveal a profoundly ambivalent attitude. While in England, in 1847 and 1848 Emerson was both impressed and disturbed by the obvious power of English technological excellence, but his admiration for English enterprise grew markedly stronger during his stay. The fruit of the change—and the evidence of his continuing ambivalence—would be seen in some of the lectures he gave on his tour and in the book Emerson produced in response to his experiences in 1847 and 1848: English Traits (1856).

Emerson came to England at a time when his own ideas were in transition. In the words of a recent assessment of this phase of his development, the lecture tour of England "spurred" "the pragmatic reorientation of Emerson's philosophy," for the visit "accelerated the shift from 'vision' to 'power' as the locus of Emerson's concern." In fact, some of the entries Emerson made in his journals and the impressions he recorded in his letters home during his visit indicate that he was affected psychologically by the "power" of which he was acutely conscious in England. At times, he seems oppressed and overwhelmed by the sense of the vigour and force of British life. In contrast to the strength and vitality of the Englishmen he meets, Emerson feels his own frailty and lack of energy. Put more positively, his early idealism—which can be understood as part of opened by comparing his awe at the splendour wealth of the British cities with that of Amerindians (Sauks and Foxes) when received at Boston by the Governor of Massachusetts.

the Transcendental revolt against materialism—was beginning to be coloured by the belief that material progress could be interpreted as a symbol of spiritual development.  

On his 1847-1848 visit, there can be no doubt that the good sense, the energy, the vigour and the practicality of the English impressed Emerson. London particularly impressed him; it seemed to be the centre of the world. There he came into contact with eminent social figures. His lectures were attended by the Duchess of Sutherland, the Duke of Argyle, and Lady Byron as well as men of literary eminence such as Monckton Milnes and Thomas Carlyle. Yet in Manchester and other industrial cities he met successful, powerful men of business and captains of industry who became friends and admirers because they were liberal men with high cultural ideals. As he wrote to his wife from Manchester, on December 12, 1847: "I see the best of the people, (hitherto never the proper aristocracy...)—the merchants, the manufacturers, the scholars, the thinkers—men and women." In Manchester, particularly, it was the liberal consensus that provided a receptive milieu for the visiting lecturer. Ireland, himself a successful businessman and a friend of John Bright, was active in promoting night school classes and libraries as well as lectures, for he obviously believed in the spiritual benefits of education for the working classes. In his Manchester address Emerson assured Cobden, and the listeners in general, that the arguments of the Free Trade League were respected throughout the world, and "certainly by all the friends of free-trade in America."  

Yet, for all his admiration of the successes of British industry and commerce, Emerson was aware, as were other visiting American literary figures (Margaret Fuller, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne) of the social crisis that England was experiencing in the late 1840s. He was acutely conscious of the social and economic problems then coming to a head and, in his letters home, made severe comments on the human destructiveness of the factory system. Some of these were repeated in his English Traits. Significantly, his lecture tour took place at the time of the climax of the Chartist movement. As Robert D. Richardson Jr. has recently reminded us, in his Emerson. The Mind on Fire, Emerson heard Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist leader, speak, and formed a low opinion of him, as he did of all the Chartist leaders. Also, when on his bold visit to Paris in 1848, he attended the clubs of the most radical political sects, fully expecting a revolution to break out. Emerson respected the sincerity and passion of the radicals, but was not sympathetic with their revolutionary aims, and clearly stated his preference for
"the shopkeepers." He also expressed his conviction that the aspirations of the English mechanics were limited to membership of a Mechanics' Institute and an income on which they could afford to marry. As he wrote in his journals: "People expect a revolution. There will be no revolution.... There may be a scramble for money.... as all the people we see want the same things we now have." This comment clearly suggests his disbelief in the potentiality of the common man for genuinely radical thought. One of his journal entries on socialism makes it plain that Emerson could himself conceive no serious alternative to a competitive and individualistic economic system: "You shall not so arrange property as to remove the incentive to industry. If you refuse rent & interest, you make all men idle and immoral." Both comments may also reflect his response to the decent, liberal and distinctly unradical men of business whom he had met and liked as a result of his contact with Ireland.

Ireland's name appears in biographies of Ralph Waldo Emerson mainly because he was the instigator of the lecture tour of England in 1847. When Ireland broached the matter, in a letter carried by William Lloyd Garrison, Emerson was reluctant. His own letter shows clearly that he lacked any great enthusiasm for the prospect of "literary propagandism," as he called it, for that, apparently, is how a projected overseas lecture tour appeared to him. But Ireland's position as editor of an important newspaper and as a director of the Manchester Athenaeum enabled him to arrange such a tour effectively and to take care of all the practical matters that were involved, on the speaker's behalf, with the result that Emerson's consent was soon obtained. Once the tour had begun, Ireland's efficiency and goodwill were remarkable. In a letter to his wife, written in Birmingham on December 16, 1847, Emerson referred to Ireland as the "king of friends and helpful agents." What particularly impressed Emerson was the "sweetness and bonhomnie" of a man who was the editor of "a polemic and rather powerful newspaper" (the Manchester Examiner). When Emerson's English Traits was published in 1856, the chapter called "Personal" contained a reference to his "Manchester correspondent" whose "solid virtues" had proved themselves to the visitor from the United States and who, as "the man of sense and letters" would have been recognisable to many of Emerson's English readers as Alexander Ireland.

Emerson's 1847 lecture tour of England and Scotland has been thoroughly researched and assessed by Townsend Scudder, who drew extensively on the Ireland Collection in his study of Emerson's visits to the United Kingdom. Acknowledging his debt to the collection, in articles published in American Literature in 1936, and in a subsequent

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13 See Larry J. Reynolds, European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance, Ch. 2, "Emerson and 'The Movement'."  
15 Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks, X, p. 312.  
17 Letters, IV, 452.  
book-length account of Emerson's travels in Europe in 1847 and 1848, Scudder also attributed a key role to Ireland in the success of the visit and gave him credit for a genuine devotion to the cause of public education through lectures such as those Emerson gave. Courses of lectures on topics of general moral and intellectual concern were possible because the lecture circuit in England, as in New England and the North-Eastern United States, was well established by the mid eighteen-forties. In fact, Ireland mentioned his contacts in English cities when proposing the tour to Emerson.¹⁹

In his later memoir, Ireland gave the impression that Emerson's reputation was already so great, largely because of the impact of his Essays: First Series (1841) and Essays: Second Series (1845), that he had merely to announce Emerson's intentions in order to receive torrents of applications from every part of the country.²⁰ However, in an article he published in the Athenaeum Gazette just before the visit, Ireland also asserted that few Englishmen understood Emerson's ideas in spite of the numerous articles on his works that had already appeared in British periodicals. Consequently, Ireland attempted to remedy the confusion by expressing his own conception of Emerson's significance.²¹ He began by insisting that Emerson was not merely an "elegant essayist" in "the belles-lettres sense of the phrase." Rather, Emerson's words "gush fresh from the fountains of thought" and are "abrupt, swift, and sudden." The essential Emersonian message, as Ireland's article presents it, is drawn from the essay "Self-Reliance." To respond to Emerson's call, "It is absolutely essential that you be true to yourself, and under no master than [sic] the voice of your own soul." Calling on his readers to rise above "custom, authority, pleasure and money" to live with "the immeasurable mind," Ireland's version of Emerson pleads for "what your soul, in its best moments, recognises as good and divine."²² Dismissing the tributes to Emerson with which the British newspapers and magazines were "tiresomely rife," Ireland claimed that there were "quiet, earnest, silently-working" men in out-of-the-way places who reverenced the American thinker for his influence on their souls. Since Ireland seldom ventured to express his own opinions of his hero, preferring to quote from other authorities, this brief declaration of faith is

¹⁹ Letters, III, 379. As Ireland wrote: "We have a circle of Literary Institutions in Yorkshire & Lancashire, & many of these will eagerly have Lectures from you."
²¹ Alexander Ireland, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," The Athenaeum Gazette, Manchester, 10 November 1847 (item III: 3 of the Ireland Collection). The story of Emerson’s reputation and influence in England and Scotland has been told in detail in William J. Sowder’s Emerson’s Impact on the British Isles and Canada (1966). In that work, the critical response to Emerson’s writings, and the quotations from his works, in the British press has been thoroughly analysed. Sowder traces the development from largely disparaging and hostile reviews in the 1840s and 1850s to gradual acceptance of the American as a major thinker and moral influence. Yet Sowder’s otherwise excellent account of the visit does not indicate the extent of the publicity achieved by the lectures through their coverage in regional newspapers. Though Emerson complained, in letters home, that the local press coverage was inconveniently thorough, in that his lectures were printed verbatim and therefore could not effectively be re-used in different places, his ideas were widely diffused by this procedure. Commentary in the newspapers was seldom broad or deep, being limited mainly to a few sentences on the lecturer’s modest, undemonstrative but impressive manner and his strange accent, but the general impression of the performance was commonly favourable, apart from the religious journals, which frequently accused Emerson of infidelity
²² Ibid., p. 7.
striking. It leaves no doubt that Ireland’s was a missionary zeal; Emerson was presented to potential audiences as the prophet who would awaken the spiritual life of the nation.

Most of the assessments of Emerson’s ideas in Ireland’s In Memoriam, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1882) are borrowed from other critics, but he does trust his own words on occasion and includes one or two quite forceful—and intensely felt—justifications of his enthusiasm for his hero. In the memoir, Ireland asserts that Emerson did more than any other man in Europe or America “to make the life of the scholar beautiful, and the career of the man of letters a reproof to all low aims, and an inspiration to high ones.”

According to Ireland, Emerson’s greatest “service” was “the inculcation of intellectual self-reliance, and absolute sincerity of thought.” Earlier in the book, while discussing Emerson’s lecture course in London in 1847, Ireland insists on the independence of mind the lecturer showed—his refusal to tone down his message out of deference to an aristocratic audience. The lectures, so Ireland claims, were mankind’s “Bill of Rights, the royal proclamation of Intellect...announcing its good pleasure, that...this world shall be governed by common sense, and law of morals, or shall go to ruin.” From this it is clear that Emerson was important to Ireland not just because of the glamour of literary life to one who was on the fringes of literature as a businessman and a newspaper man but also because in this American scholar Ireland believed he could recognise a religious conception of literature. To Emerson, as Ireland saw, the poet, the scholar, the man of letters was a prophet, or “bard.” It is significant that, in his summation in the concluding paragraph of his memoir, Ireland selected Emerson’s 1838 Dartmouth College oration on the life of the scholar—“Literary Ethics”—to represent his message.

The Collection.

The Collection was presented to the Manchester Free Reference Library by Thomas Reed Wilkinson. One section of it comprises books by, on and about Emerson, while others consist of works by or relating to Charles and Mary Lamb, Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt. A catalogue of the entire collection was created by John Hibbert Swann and published by the Reference Library in 1898. Among the works in the Emerson section are early biographies and memoirs, including Amos Bronson Alcott’s, George Willis Cooke’s, Alexander Ireland’s (all published in 1882). Among the less famous works are George Searle Phillips’ (“January Searle”) Emerson, His Life and Writings (London, 1855) and James Bradley Thayer’s A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson (Boston, 1884).

In addition to the published works, the Emerson Collection includes five boxes of material from which the present selection has been made. (The original Finding List, compiled by Kathleen Lapsley, formerly of the Manchester Library, divides the material...
into six “boxes,” though physically there are only five, since two boxes have been combined in one).

Box 1 contains reviews of Emerson’s writings in the British press, from 1841, with notices of Emerson’s first volume of Essays, to 1884, when his Miscellanies (containing Nature; Addresses, and Lectures; not the Miscellanies of the later collected edition) was published in London by Macmillan, with an introduction by John Morley. Ireland clipped reviews of Representative Men, English Traits, and The Conduct of Life from The Spectator. A literary periodical that gave more consistent attention to Emerson’s writings than did The Spectator was the Athenaeum, and this journal regularly provided Ireland with material for his collection. All these reviews, up to the year 1876, have been reprinted in Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews, edited by Joel Myerson (Cambridge University Press, 1992), but Ireland also clipped reviews from the Literary Examiner (of Emerson’s poems), and the London Literary Journal and British Quarterly Review (of Representative Men) not reprinted in Myerson’s volume, and he collected items until his death in 1894. The interest of the Ireland collection lies in the evidence it provides of the variety of periodicals that gave attention to Emerson’s writings.

Box 2 is devoted to clippings from a wide range of periodicals and newspapers on The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872. Since Ireland admired both writers and knew both of them, he collected reviews of the correspondence from sources as diverse as the Daily News, the Saturday Review, The Scotsman, the Pall Mall Gazette and the Athenaeum. Also included in this box are numerous reviews of Ireland’s own book on Emerson, published in 1882, the year of Emerson’s death, with the title In Memoriam. It was received sufficiently well for its author to follow it with an enlarged edition in the same year: Ralph Waldo Emerson. His life, genius, and writings. A biographical sketch. To which are added personal recollections of his visits to England, extracts from unpublished letters and miscellaneous characteristic records. (London, 1882). Ireland’s clippings of reviews—generally favourable, though inclined to rate it as “charming” rather than profound—constitute a substantial section of this box. Not unnaturally, Ireland wanted to collect as many as possible of the regional press reviews of his book. The sheer quantity of the reviews collected, and the number of city newspapers in which they appeared, testifies to Ireland’s energy and resourcefulness in publicising his work. However, since the reviews repeat each other, and are generally brief and polite rather than searching, only a representative selection has been filmed.

Box 3 is a heterogeneous collection of articles about—or connected with—Emerson, culled from British and American periodicals and newspapers from 1847 to 1893. The variety of items testifies to the enduring nature of Ireland’s interest and admiration, but a rigorous selection was appropriate, since much of the material is of modest intrinsic value. For example, no less than twenty-four items (III, 11 i-xxiv in the original finding list) are clipped from the same issue of the Literary World; none is of outstanding interest.
Box 4 consists mainly of material connected with Emerson’s 1847-1848 lecture tour. (Some random biographical notes drawn from American newspapers have been omitted in this selection, together with a copy of an article by Townsend Scudder on the tour, published in American Literature in 1935 and presumably added to the collection by the author). With its clippings from press reports of the lectures in Worcester, Preston, Halifax, Sheffield, as well as Manchester and London, this is the most useful and valuable part of the Collection since it shows how widely diffused Emerson’s ideas were while he was in England. The newspaper reports commonly gave the text of the lecture, with brief introductory comments, with the result that readers would have come into unmediated contact with the lectures. Also included in Box 4 (items 24-26) is material connected with Emerson’s candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University in 1874. In the event, Emerson got 500 votes, Disraeli 700. The interesting feature of the incident is the enthusiasm expressed in the University Independent for the “heterodox” but nevertheless “religious” thought of the “father of American thought and literature.”

Box 5 consists of obituaries of Emerson drawn from the American and British press. Ireland collected clippings from daily newspapers as well as periodicals in both countries. Boston, Philadelphia, as well as New York papers are represented, while The Scotsman and the Manchester Guardian as well as the Times and the Telegraph provided material.

Box 6 is a heterogeneous collection of correspondence connected with Emerson, some clipped from American periodicals. The collection includes a facsimile of Emerson’s famous letter to Walt Whitman on receipt of the first edition of Leaves of Grass as well as copies of letters from Emerson to Ireland (VI: 4 and VI: 12, i). These letters have, of course, been collected and published. Less well known is a letter from Lord Lytton to Alexander Ireland, thanking him for a copy of his In Memoriam, and containing comments both on Emerson’s poems and on the differences between Emerson and Carlyle.
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1: 3 i Emerson, R.W. The mountain and the squirrel, and The Concord Hymn reprinted from The Detroit Free Press taken from a Blackburn newspaper, unknown.
1: 3 ii Emerson, R.W. “The Snow Storm. newspaper cutting, date unknown
1: 3 iii Extract from Emerson, R.W. Ah! Well I mind the Calendar. n.d.
1: 4 i Emerson, R.W. Literary Ethics’; extract ms copy, date unknown
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1: 6 Emerson, R.W. Speech on Robert Burns at the Burns centenary in 1859, celebrated by the Burns Club of Boston at Parker House; reprinted from The Manchester City News: Notes and queries,, 28 December 1878 and 4 January 1879, with comments by Alexander Ireland.
1: 7 Emerson, R.W. The Rule of Life: Parker Fraternity lecture; copied from The Boston Commonwealth 18 May 1867.
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1: 9 i Emerson, R.W. Conversation : extract from essay.; n.d.
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1: 26 Review of: Emerson, R.W. *English Traits* [London, Knight and son, 1856]; reprinted from *The Manchester Examiner and Times*. [1856]


1: 28 Review of same *The Athenaeum* 6 September, 1856
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II: 14 Extract from Mead, Edwin D., Philosophy of Carlyle. [Boston, 1881].

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II: 16 i Postscript to a letter from Carlyle to Emerson, 8 February, 1839, reprinted from The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, n.d.

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IV : 10 Report on Emerson’s lecture[‘The Uses of Great Men’] at the Athenaeum, Manchester, first in the series ‘Representative Men’. [1847]

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V : 5 Obituary, New York Semi-Weekly Tribune, 28 April 1882.

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V : 20 and 21 Obituary. n.d.


V : 23 Obituary *The Nation* 4 May 1882.

V : 24 i Preparations for Emerson’s burial. n.d.
   ii Emerson’s funeral: some of those expected to be present. 28 April 1882.

V : 25 Emerson at rest: the last tributes at Concord to the memory of the poet and philosopher. 1 May 1882.

V : 26 Emerson’s funeral. *Boston Evening Transcript* 1 May 1882.

V : 27 Emerson’s funeral, 1 May 1882.


V : 29 The burial of Emerson. 2 May 1882.

V : 30 i Emerson’s funeral. 30 April 1882.
   ii Tribute to Emerson by Reverend John W. Chadwick in the Second Unitarian Church, Brooklyn. n.d.
   iii Emerson’s will. [26 May 1882].

V : 31 The funeral of Emerson. n.d.


V : 33 Review of articles in religious journals on Emerson’s death and influence as an intellectual leader. n.d.

V : 34 Assessment of Emerson’s work. *The Scotsman* n.d.


V : 36 Incomplete article on the effects of Emerson’s death. n.d.


**CORRESPONDENCE**

VI : 1 Letters from Emerson to a Harvard classmate, Boston 27 April 1822; Boston, 27 July 1822; Boston, 21 November 1822; Boston, 29 January, 1823. *The Century*, July 1883.

VI: 3 ii Letter from Emerson to the Second Unitarian Church of Boston, March 1829. n.d.

VI: 4 Ms copy of letter from Emerson to Alexander Ireland, Liverpool 30 August 1833.

VI: 5 Typewritten copy of above.

VI: 6 Copy of letter from Emerson, Concord, 1 November 1845; recipient unknown.

VI: 7 Extract from a letter from Emerson to Miss Sarah Clark[e], Concord, 6 October 1871.

VI: 8 Ms copies of the two above letters.

VI: 9 Facsimile of a letter from Emerson to Walt Whitman, Concord, 21 July 1855.

VI: 10 Ms letter from S.H. Emerson, Junior, to James Hutchison Stirling LL.D., Concord 1 May 1882.

VI: 11 Letter from Annie S. Emerson to Mrs Conway, Concord 28 May 1882.

VI: 14 Letter from J.N.V. Bennett, Brown St., Salford 23 September 18-- to [Alexander Ireland

VI: 15 Autographed copy of letter from 'Carr'[,] to Alexander Ireland, 28 April 1888, on an ms sheet from George Crawhay, 27 April 1888, concerning Emerson’s interest in oriental thought.

VI: 16 Copy of letter from Lord Lytton to Alexander Ireland, Carlsbad, Austria 18 July 1882, responding to gift copy of Ireland’s *In Memoriam* and including comments on Emerson’s poems.


VI: 18 Letter from ‘M.D.C.’ to the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*. n.d.

VI: 19 Letter from R.C. Hall, Liverpool, 16 June 1885, to *The Inquirer*, concerning review of O. W. Holmes’ book on Emerson,

VI: 20 Letter from Max Muller to *The Hartford Courant*. n.d.

VI: 22 Letter to Christopher [North?] sender unknown.

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