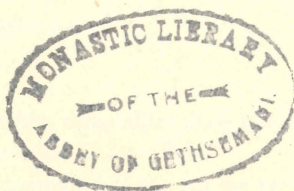


A HOPKINS READER



SELECTED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JOHN PICK



1953

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

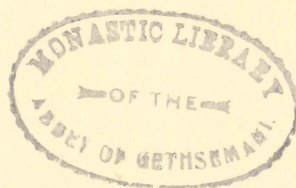
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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To Tom.

from Bob-

3 June 1953



A Hopkins Reader



Selected and with an Introduction

by JOHN PICK

'The publication of the poetry of Hopkins in 1918 was one of the principal literary events of our time. Though by the dates of his birth and death (1844-89) he falls within the Victorian period, he has been acclaimed by our own generation as more modern than the moderns. In the midst of all the fluctuations of taste, his position in the rank of permanent poets has become established. The list of articles and books dedicated to him is ever increasing, and some of the best critical talent of our time has devoted itself to defining his significance.'*

Now at last the best of Gerard Manley Hopkins's writing in all forms — poetry, essays, letters, sermons, and the most memorable sections of his notebooks and journals — has been made available in a single volume. It is particularly necessary in Hopkins's case that such a collection be made, for, as Professor Pick points out in his Introduction, Hopkins's personal writings illuminate his poems to an unusual degree.

His journals, for instance, with their striking and meticulous descriptions of nature, illustrate the theory of 'inscape,' Hopkins's feeling that every object in the natural world differs from all the others, having

A HOPKINS READER

an intense, specialized life of its own. The importance of this concept to Hopkins's poetry appears when we see many of these descriptive phrases suddenly bursting into life in poems written years later, 'like shining from shook foil.' The letters to his friends Bridges, Dixon, and Baillie explain his radical use of 'sprung rhythm' and contain much acute and often humorous literary criticism. Both journals and letters are filled with testimonies of the conflict he felt between poetry and religion, a conflict which perhaps reduced his poetic output, but which invested what he did write with a spiritual incandescence rarely equaled in English poetry. The book ends with a selection of thirty-three of his finest poems.

Anyone wishing a thorough understanding of this great and frequently difficult poet can do no better than to approach him through this highly representative selection from all his work, chosen by one of the world's leading Hopkins scholars. An Associate Professor of English at Marquette University, John Pick is editor of *Renascence* and author of *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet*, published by Oxford University Press.

* from the INTRODUCTION

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were to be heaped upon him; after a detailed and enthusiastic description of a walk and a sunset he adds:

But we hurried too fast and it knocked me up. . . . In fact being unwell I was quite downcast: nature in all her parcels and faculties gaped and fell apart, *fatiscebat*, like a clod cleaving and holding only by strings of root. But this must often be.

In Dublin not only did his previous difficulties converge upon him and become intensified, but new and additional problems put him on the rack. The responsibilities of his new position he found congenial but onerous; his scrupulous attention to them—'It is killing work to examine a nation', he remarked—made them a constant anxiety, and even vacations in Wales ('always to me the mother of Muses') were little relief; more than ever he felt it his duty to produce research articles, and his letters are filled with numerous projects, almost all unfinished and uncompleted. At the same time he turned more and more to music in which he tried to make headway.

But his last years also brought their moments of exultation, and such a poem as 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' is a prelude to his deathbed cry, thrice repeated, 'I am so happy', as he saw immediately before him 'the heaven-haven of the Reward'.

Such, then, is the bare outline of his life, an outline which one may fill in with the important nuances by examining his letters and correspondence. It is, however, especially in the Journal which he kept during his years of poetic silence that one will find the raw material of his mature poetry. The spirit of the Journal is indicated in a letter to Baillie:

I think I have told you that I have particular periods of admiration for particular things in Nature; for a certain time I am astonished at the beauty of a tree, shape, effect, etc then when the passion, so to speak, has subsided, it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty, and acknowledged with admiration and interest ever after, while something new takes its place in my enthusiasm.

He bears witness to his 'admiration for particular things' throughout his Journal. When he jots down 'All the world is full of inscape' he introduces a term so frequently used in his Journal and his criticism and one so central to his poetry that once it is grasped much of the difficulty of Hopkins disappears.

Instead of viewing the world as a scientist who classifies and categorizes or as a philosopher who seeks universals, Hopkins sees each thing as highly individualized and different from all other things, so much so that each object is to him almost a separate species and the world becomes an endless catalogue of sharply

individuated selves. In his *Journal* he sets down the particularity of each unique thing he observes—and to him all things are unique. He remarks, 'I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it', or he expresses his sorrow at the felling of a favourite ash-tree: 'I wished to die and not see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more.'

Eventually he applied the term to works of art as well. Inscapè is 'the very soul of art'. He examines the work of one poet and finds it 'full of feeling, high thoughts, flow of verse, point, often fine imagery and other virtues, but the essential and only lasting thing left out—what I call inscapè'. The most famous passage is one in which he says of his own poetry:

As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design
in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling
'inscapè' is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of
design, pattern, or inscapè to be distinctive.

With these introductory remarks in mind one may examine his *Journal* and see there his attempts to inscapè the world of nature and of art. It became his preliminary sketch-pad, his field-book, in which the rudimentary and embryonic images of his later poetry are to be found. Often the very same images in the *Journal* recur in poems written six, eight, or even twenty years later. Even more significant is the way in which the raw material is finally transmuted into poetry. For example, his numerous references to the brindled and brindled clouds, his delight in fishing, his joy over 'chestnuts as bright as coals or spots of vermilion' become in 'Pied Beauty':

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut falls.

A study of the two sets of images is an important approach to understanding the creative process, no matter how many mysteries of that alchemy may remain unsolved.

But for Hopkins a mere catalogue of images does not make a poem, and there is a difference between prose and poetry. The latter requires a further inscapè of sound pattern; and in such an essay as 'Poetry and Verse' he insists on the necessity of 'an inscapè of speech'.

Poetry for Hopkins was still more than this, for he held that: 'Works of art of course like words utter the idea.' The rudimentary images themselves are to be found in the *Journal*, and so also

are the centralizing ideas which fuse the images into organic and living poems.

It is obvious, for instance, that the controlling idea, giving direction and significance to the scattered images of 'Hurrahing in Harvest' is parallel to such an entry as 'I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.' So, too, 'Pied Beauty' with its opening 'Glory be to God for dappled things' is paralleled by the prose note in the Journal, 'Laus Deo—the river today and yesterday.' Such passages take their orientation from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. This becomes clear if one compares the opening lines of 'God's Grandeur':

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

and his prose commentary on *The Exercises*: 'All things therefore are charged with God, and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of Him.' It is very especially in Hopkins's 'Address on the "Principle and Foundation"' that one can see how inscapes became for him a theophany and a *laudate Dominum*.

Hopkins also held that it is in activity, in characteristic action, that the individual reveals his inscape, and he delights in dynamism:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells;
Crying *What I dó is me: for that I came.*

He was further confirmed in his delight in inscapes by a medieval philosopher who also saw in them a revelation of the hand of their Creator, and therefore he found Duns Scotus, 'of realty the rarest-veined unraveller', so congenial that he entered into his Journal:

At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus . . . and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus.

The kinds of inscapes in which he was interested determined in large part the development of his poetry. From nature sacrament-

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
+ of the gulf's sides

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More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,
Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,
Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's throng's
Lord.

[1876]

God's Grandeur

THE world is charged with the grandeur of God.
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

[1877]

The Sea and the Skylark

ON ear and ear two noises too old to end
 Trench—right, the tide that ramps against the shore;
 With a flood or a fall, low lull-off or all roar,
 Frequenting there while moon shall wear and wend.

Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
 His rash-fresh re-winded new skeinèd score
 In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
 And pelt music, till none's to spill nor spend.

How these two shame this shallow and frail town!
 How ring right out our sordid turbid time,
 Being pure! We, life's pride and cared-for crown,

Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:
 Our make and making break, are breaking, down
 To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime.

[1877]