CHAPTER SIX

The "dark, not dry" of the Sonnets of 1886

Hopkins's chain of "terrible" sonnets written in 1886 belong to "what is well known as the season of dry and dark faith, a season during which most good people are deprived of all the old sensible delights they formally enjoyed when thinking of God". These sonnets suggest that a complex of emotional pressures that played over Hopkins's frail physique to produce what the devotional manuals term 'spiritual dryness'
or 'desolation', state in which, in the words of St. John of Cross: "The soul is conscious of a profound emptiness and destitution of the three kinds of goods, natural, temporal and spiritual which are ordained for its comfort; it sees itself in the midst of the opposite evils, miserable imperfections and aridities, emptiness of the understanding and abandonment of the spirit in darkness". Thus, to be spiritually dry and infertile, "as if separated from his Greater and Lord", as St. Ignatius Loyola puts it, is for the devout man, the worst that can happen to him. Having given up all, as Hopkins did, for his faith, he is left without any compensating inner peace or assurance, and perhaps even begins, as Hopkins did, to compare himself with those who never began on a spiritual quest, and who have simply taken what they wanted from the world.

From 1882 to 1884 Hopkins taught Latin and Greek at Stonyhurst College, Blackburn, and the final appointment of his life was to the Chair of Classics at University College, Dublin, which was the managed and partly staffed by the Society of Jesus. In Ireland Hopkins was most unhappy, feeling that he was at a
"third remove", being separated from his Irish colleagues by national and political allegiances, as he was now severed from his family and English friends by distance and religion. In spite of frequent holidays, his physical weakness troubled him, and he complained that he always felt "jaded". By the time he had carried out his normal academic and social duties, he had no surplus energy with which to write the books that he believed he could and should write, such as a Treatise on Sacrifice and a study of Greek metres. The number of fragments and unfinished poems which he left is partly due to the necessary limitations of his experience and partly to the flagging of his physical and imaginative powers. Nowhere has the frustration of the creative spirit been more poignantly expressed than in these sonnets of desolation, which were in some measure due to an entanglement of personal and professional problems; in one set of Retreat Notes he is worried about the part played by some of the Irish clergy in support of Irish nationalism, and these qualms of an English patriot are immediately followed by doubts about his own fitness for the position he held and his personal responsibility for the right use of his talents.
Hopkins' deepest work was done at this time, and it was done through his despair. In the Dublin sonnets he treats of loneliness, frustration, self-loathing and despair, and yet manages to articulate them in complete freedom from inflated rhetoric or emotional indulgence. The one note never struck in these poems is self-pity or self-love, for Hopkins's indomitable courage refused to countenance any such comforting evasions at the same time as it refused to be crushed.

The chain of sonnets is a deliberate attempt to tell the whole truth, to see the situation in its true perspective rather than inflate it by any unthinking analogy. Despite the weariness conveyed, these sonnets indicate a determination not to either gloat in or yield to fatigue, anxiety and world-weariness. Although one cannot easily identify the sources of strength on which he draws to avoid defeat, it is not too difficult to locate its main strands. The boy who had gone without water for days on end, the Jesuit who had given himself completely to the rigid discipline of the Order, the Christian who had felt directly the love and terror of his God, all these persons must have been present in him as he struggled to overcome physical and spiritual prostration. Through them he was able to
come through and even to envisage ways forward from his impasse, and thus counsel the soul to end its torment by showing mere forbearance and compassion towards itself. He was finally able to discover, at the bottom of the suffering he went through, the warmth and charity of the incarnate God.

Critics have drawn a parallel between St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, and the Jesuit priest Hopkins, as both went through intense periods of dejection and disconsolation which became crucial tests of their spirits. Both saw their crises as being essentially religious, and both tried to confront them with actions and dispositions which might be called religious exercises. Both left records of their experiences - the Spiritual Exercises and the "Terrible" sonnets. Ignatius admits that at a certain period he was on the brink of desperation and even suicide. One day he threw himself on his knees, and with all the fervour of his soul, he cried:

"Lord, help me, for I find no succour among men. Ah, if only I could find help, no price would be too dear. Do you, yourself, Lord, show me the proper remedy; even though I should have to go to a little dog, I would go, if only he would lead me
to the remedy. Hopkins suffered a similar desolation of spirit during his last years, and his poetical reflections of these experiences show forth his attempt to discern the spirit of Christ from the spirit of darkness. A basic sorrow forms the key-note of this phase of writing. One has only to read though some of the extracts of his diaries in which these moments of darkness appear again and again. There is an important passage recorded on September 6, 1874: "Looking all around but most in looking far up the valley I felt an instress and charm of Wales. Indeed in coming here I began to feel a desire to do something for the conversion of Wales. I began to learn Welsh too, but not with very pure intentions perhaps. However, on consulting the Rector on this, the first day of the Retreat, he discouraged it unless it were purely for the sake of labouring among the Welsh. Now it was not so, and so I saw I must give it up. At the same time my music seemed to come to an end. Yet rather strangely, I had no sooner given up these two things (which disappointed me and took an interest away - and at the same time I was bitterly feeling the weariness of life and shed many tears, perhaps not wholly into the breast of God but with some unwmanliness in them too, sighed and panted to Him),
I had no sooner given up Welsh than my desire seemed to be for the conversion of Wales and I had it in mind to give everything else for that; nevertheless weighing this by St. Ignatius's rules of election, I decided not to do so.\(^4\)

The passage quoted above is significant because it reveals a number of important things about Hopkins which bear heavily on the last years of his life, the despair of which is so movingly recorded in the sonnets:

(i) the indication of his constant intellectual vigour which continued despite the strife within.

(ii) the curbing of his insatiable curiosity because of a higher motive.

(iii) such a restraint was probably due to the causes of weariness and enervation. This negation creeps into his priestly life as well as into his artistic endeavour. W.H. Gardner puts it succinctly: "As a hard-working priest he was probably more successful than he claimed to be; but as a potential mystic and dreamer, as an artist passionately devoted (with Christian reservations) to aesthetic ideals, and always eager (despite his
conscience,) to write poetry and music, he could not maintain that degree of concentration which is so necessary for the practical, professional man suffering throughout his life from a certain nervous debility, he was dogged by a sense of failure; he was also extremely sensitive to his environment, and was horrified and indignant when he saw the squalor of our great industrial towns. In Liverpool and Chesterfield, he tells us, his muse turned "sullen". . . . "5. And Hopkins himself speaks of the war within:

"When a man has given himself to God's service, when he has denied himself and followed Christ, he has fitted himself to receive, and does receive from God a spiritual guidance, a more particular providence. This guidance is conveyed partly by the action of other men, as his appointed superiors, and partly by direct lights and inspirations. If I wait for such guidance through whatever channel conveyed about anything about my poetry for instance, I do more wisely in every way than if I try to serve my own seeming interests in the matter. Now if you value what I write, if I do myself, much more does our Lord, and if he chooses to avail himself
of what I leave at his disposal, he can do so with a felicity and with a success which I could never command, and if he does not, then two things follow: one, that the reward I shall nevertheless receive from him will be all the greater; the other that I shall know how much of a thing contrary to his will and even to my own best interests I should have done if I had taken things into my own hands and forced on publication. This is my principle, and this in the main has been my practice; leading the sort of life I do here seems easy, but when one mixes with the world and meets on every side its secret solicitations, to live by faith is harder; it is very hard; nevertheless by God's help I shall always do so.

One is aware here, of the crisis which makes the domination of the glory of God irksome, painful and at times seemingly unbearable. Perhaps under these tensions Hopkins wrote some of his most sublime religious verses.

Hopkins's correspondence with friends is revealing in so far as it conveys the circumstances, attitude and needs that led to the writing of the "terrible" sonnets. In a letter to Bailie, he
explicitly reviews the melancholic disposition that ran in him throughout his lifetime.

"... I think this is from the literary point of view (not the moral) the worst letter I ever wrote to you, and it shall not run much longer. You will wonder why I have been so long over it. This is part of my disease, so to call it. The melancholy I have suffered all my life has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits, but rather more disturbed, constant and crippling ... It is useless to write more on this: when I am at my worst, though my judgement is never affected, my state is much like madness. I see no ground for thinking I shall get over it or succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me to do of any consequence."7

In a letter to Bridges, dated September 1, 1883, he says:

"I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will. And in the life I lead now, which is one of a continually jaded and harassed mind, if in any leisure, I try to do anything, I make
In yet another letter to Bridges dated January 12, 1888, Hopkins writes:

"... It is now years that I have had no inspiration of longer jet than makes a sonnet, except only that fortnight in Wales: it is what, far more than direct want of time, I find most against poetry and produced in the life I lead. Unhappily I cannot produce anything at all, not only the luxuries like poetry, but duties almost of my position, its neutral outcome ... All impulse fails me: I can give myself no sufficient reason for going on; nothing comes; I am a eunuch but it is for the kingdom of heaven's sake".

Father G.F. Lahey, in his "Life" of Hopkins, discerns a "triple sorrow" which descended on Hopkins and which eclipsed his inner peace and happiness.

"The first sorrow" is the inconvenience that arose from the semi-annual examination of the candidates at University College, Dublin. "Hopkins was never a man of practical affiaris, ... and when the board were crying for the returns, they found poor Gerard at three a.m., his head swathed in wet towels, harrassed with scruples at the award or non-award of half-marks!"
"The second sorrow" is the political atmosphere of Ireland, when Hopkins was in Dublin. The Catholic support given to the Irish cause worried him a great deal. Hopkins wrote to Cardinal Newman: "Politics, at the times, are most troubled. I live, I may say, in an air most painful to breathe and this comes home to me more, not less, with time".

The third sorrow, Kahey says, "sprang from causes which have their origin in true mysticism. Hopkins, smiling and joyful with his friends, was at the same time on the bleak heights of spiritual night with his God".

Hopkins had always found solace from a life dedicated to the service of God through his vocation to the Jesuit priesthood. All tribulations could thus be endured for the greater glory and honour of God. But in the last four years, a spiritual dryness crept in, when he could no longer turn to the solace of his priesthood. In the Spiritual Exercises, in the section entitled "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" (Rule IV), St. Ignatius defines spiritual desolation as "darkness and disquiet of soul, an attraction towards low and earthly objects, the disquiet of various agitations and temptations, which move it to difference, without hope, and without love, when
the soul finds itself slothful, tepid, sad and as it were separated from its Creator and Lord" (p. iii) Rmle II warns of the battle that may take place in those wanting to advance their spiritual lives: "In those who earnestly go on rooting out their sins, and advancing daily from good to better in the service of God our Lord . . . it belongs to the evil spirit to cause anxiety and sadness, and to place obstacles in the way, disquieting the soul by false reasons, so that it can make no further progress" (p. 106).

The causes of the strife are further explained:

"There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves in desolation: the first is because we are tepid, slothful or negligent in our spiritual exercises . . . . . . The second reason is that God may try how much we are worth, and how much we progress in His service and praise when deprived of such a bountiful pay as it were, of consolations and special graces. The third reason is that He may give us a true knowledge whereby we may intimately feel that it is not in our power to equize or retain great devotion, ardent love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is a gift and favour of "God our Lord". (pp. 108-109)
Whatever the reason which caused the desolation and inner conflict of Hopkins's last years, out of the gloom of those final years, Hopkins created six intensely introspective sonnets, the outcries of a man to his tortured consciousness. In the words of Downes, 'It is not surprising ....... that Hopkins with his scrupulous turn of mind .... gave expression to his feeling of terrible nothingness of self and the overwhelming all of God'.

Hopkins had also referred to himself as "me, the culprit the lost sheep, the redeemed". In a very real sense, this quotation characterises the changing nature of his relationship to God as it is described in the sonnets of 1865. The poet is at first "the culprit", fighting a power he refuses to acknowledge, and acknowledging too late that the opponent with whom he wrestles is his God. Having lost contact with the Divine, he sinks into Desolation. As "the lost sheep", he gropes for the patch back to the fold, but he must contend with and overcome his own weakness before he can re-establish communion with his God. From this analysis, it is apparent that some questions need to be answered before we can fully comprehend the meaning. Why, for instance, is the
poet in conflict with his God? What is the nature of the conflict? Finally, how is it overcome? In these sonnets, traits of character, incompatible and antagonistic to each other, are preserved alongside haunting, insistent ideas, irrational impulses, morbid tendencies, scruples, dreads, and inhibitions. The higher and lower feelings bring a chaos within the soul, and if the individual, as Hopkins was, be of tender conscience, the unhappiness will take the form of moral remorse, and a feeling of standing in false relations to the Author of one's being and the Appointer of one's spiritual fate. As St. Paul said "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do."  

William James cites the case of St. Augustine as a classic example of the discordant personality, in the form of self-condemnation and sense of sin. Distracted by the struggle of the two souls within him, and ashamed of his own weakness of will, when so many others whom he knew had thrown off the shackles of sensuality and rededicated themselves to chastity and the higher life, he heard a voice in the garden say, "Sumo, Leges;" (Take and read), and opening the Bible at random, he read a passage which seemed to be sent to him directly from God and laid the inner storm to rest forever. St. Augustine records:
"The new will which I began to have was not yet strong enough to overcome that other will strengthened by long indulgence. So these two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, the other spiritual, contended with each other and disturbed my soul. I understand by my own experience when I had read 'Flesh lusteth against spirit, and spirit against flesh'. It was myself indeed in both the wills, yet more myself in that which I approved in myself than in that which I disapproved in myself. Yet it was through myself that the habit had attained so fierce a mastery over me, because I had willingly come whither I willed not. Still bound to earth, I refused, O God, to fight on thy side, as much afraid to be freed from all bonds as I ought to have feared being trammelled by them ......... I was afraid thou wouldst hear me too soon and heal me at once of my disease of lust, which I wished to satiate rather than to see extinguished. With what lashes of words did I not scourge my own soul. Yet it shrank back; it refused, though it had no excuse to offer ......... I made another effort and almost succeeded, yet I did not reach it, and did not grasp it, hesitating to die, to death live to life; and the evil by which I was so haunted held me more than the better life I had not tried".
In the Sonnets of 1883, we get a picture of Hopkins enclosed, as Pascal would say "within the four walls of his soul". Each poem is an intensely interior experience, felt in the inner-most depths of his being, guiding us into the hidden recesses of Hopkins's personality, and revealing the springs of his intellectual (non?) activity during this period. During this harrowing time, the only two beings whose existence were immediately evident to him were God and himself. So exceptional a degree of religious introversion, fortified with the passage of years has necessarily a tendency to isolate the religious man from the world. It was characteristic of Hopkins's piety that despite the intellectual and spiritual aridity he went through, his greatest concern was to prepare himself for the judgement by a rigorous obedience and a continual moral purification.

In these Sonnets, the poet lays aside every trace of egoism and pride, and this takes place in an atmosphere when he seems to grope for the presence of God, but is unable to reach it. The conjunction of high religious inspiration (however seemingly futile) and acute psychological penetration gives unique beauty and elevates the sonnets. In the whole history of spirituality, they form one of the most striking
documents of self-knowledge in the sight of God. The sonnets remain intensely personal in their anguish and read. Six of the seven poems were written in one critical year 1885, and four came "like inspirations unbidden". Hopkins is "exceedingly troubled", in the words St. Mark uses to describe Jesus in the Garden. So the poet himself depicts his Master: "However much he understood all this, he found it an intolerable grief to submit to it. He left the examples: it is very strengthening, but except in that sense it is not consoling".16

However much Hopkins understood, the grief was real, for faith is not an antidote for suffering, and the "desolation sonnets" frame a profound and moving response to man's agonizing problems.

Significantly, the first of the sonnets Carnion Comfort opens with a bold refusal to despair:

"Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee.
Not untwist - slack they may be - these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry, I can no more, I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose
not to be". 
In this, the first stage of the spiritual crisis, Hopkins battles with an enemy whose identity is progressively revealed. Refusing to indulge in despair, the comfort of the decaying flesh, the poet chooses to assert himself. He "can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be". But ironically, in not choosing not to be, he is pitting himself against the Almighty. Taking pride in the invincible human spirit, Hopkins comes dangerously close to denying man's essential dependence on God, for from the point of view of religion man is made to serve, not to govern. A passage from one of the priest's spiritual diaries will help to clarify this point: in it, Hopkins explains what man can and should do:

"But man can know God, can mean to give him glory. This then was why he was made, to give God glory and to mean to give it; to praise God freely, willingly to reverence him, gladly to serve him". 17

By contrast, not choosing not to be is an irreligious answer, because it is rooted in human pride rather than in Christ-like humility. Because the poet suggests this as a possible means of asserting himself, he encounters a Divine Enemy.
Significantly, God the Son is the combatant described in images of violent mastery. He is a "lion-limb" with "devouring eyes" who menacingly scans the poet's "bruised bones":

"But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou
rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lion-limb
against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones?
and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic
to avoid thee and flee?"

To discover why the poet is "frantic" to "avoid thee and flee" Him, one must understand what Christ means to Hopkins. Over and over again in his spiritual notebooks, the priest praises Christ's selflessness:

"Consider our Lord's attachment to God's will at all times and this attachment ended in the very nailing of his body to the Cross. Try to attach yourself more to God's will and detach yourself from your own by prayer at beginning things."
The piercing of Christ's side. The sacred body and the sacred heart seemed waiting for an opportunity of discharging themselves and testifying their total devotion of themselves to the cause of men. 

In *Carrion Comfort*, therefore, Hopkins is battling an enemy who compels him to face his own inadequacy; and Christ, perfect in his selflessness, is trying to overpower the poet by force of divine example.

But the question remains: why does Christ want to vanquish the poet? In the sestet, Hopkins recognizes his enemy's truly unselfish motivation:

"What? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear".

If one sees Christ to be the poet's adversary, it becomes clear that the motive and result of the conflict is the divine gift of grace; for, as Hopkins puts it:

"Grace is any action, activity on God's part by which ... he carries the creature to or towards the end of his being, which is its self-sacrifice to God, and its salvation. It is ... divine stress, holy spirit ... and all is done through Christ, Christ's spirit." Hopkins has sensed the divine stress throughout the conflict, for:
"... my heart to! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.

Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven handling flung me, foot trod.

Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each? That night, that year.

Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God!"

Should the poet praise himself for daring to fight an overwhelmingly powerful force; or should he cheer the hero who in subjugating also elevates? Full of awe, the poet receives the whole truth at the end of the sonnet. Paradoxically, he discovers that his dreaded Adversary is also his beloved Master. Utterly exhausted at the end, Hopkins experiences a sense of profound guilt, when he says:

"... That night, that year

Of now done darkness I, wretch, lay wrestling

with (my God) my God!"

In this conclusion, the poet puts in the past tense what was present in the octave. He has received a stress from Christ - "a purifying and a mortifying grace, bringing the victim to the altar and sacrific. it."
Hopkins shows how unthinkable it now seems that he should have battled against God, for like Jacob, Hopkins knew himself to be a new man, set on an honourable path, living the truth of "the knowledge of the glory of God, shining on the face of Christ Jesus."\(^2^1\)

The emotional climate of the sonnet _No worst, there is none_ is a reminder of the agony which Christ endured before his supreme sacrifice. In effect, Hopkins in suggesting to his readers, "My soul is sad, even unto death, Wait here and watch."\(^2^2\)

To clarify the cryptic opening statement, one has only to take a look at the spiritual diary for the meaning to be revealed fully:

"All my undertaking miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all."\(^2^3\)

The poet is confronted with an enormous spiritual ordeal:

"Nor worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief, More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring. Comforter, where, where is your comforting? Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?"
Hopkins realizes that he must become master of himself in life, for if he achieves selflessness merely through death, he has not participated willingly and actively in Christ's sacrifice. He knows that he must pattern his life after his Saviour, but wonders if he is strong enough to do it. To the poet, then, there is no worse ordeal than seeing the right, trying to follow it, and being hindered by human weakness. It is the fear that he will not live up to Christ's example which leads him into the painfully emotional state of mind. Hopkins laments that he is "pitched past pitch of grief". The term "pitch" seems to imply an exceptional degree of intensity as the following comment from his devotional writings suggests:

"I find myself both as man and as myself something most determined and distinctive, at pitch, more distinctive and higher than anything else I see ..."24

Hence we are given to understand that he is turned to a high degree of sensitivity, that he has known pain before but that he is now placed on a higher level of suffering than his previously experienced grief. Christ's grace has pitched the poet into a new sphere of spiritual activity, for
"God . . . . . can shift the self that his in one to a higher, that is/better, pitch of itself; that is/to a pitch or determination of itself on the side of good"²⁵.

Finding that while enduring his own spiritual agony, he loses his sense of communication with God, the poet cries out "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" In one of his sermons, Hopkins translates Paraclete as "Comforter", and "both Christ and the Holy Ghost are Paracletes"²⁶.

Continuing his plea for help, the poet prays "Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?" Hopkins asks for the blessed Virgin's intercession "because it was her more than all other creatures that Christ meant to win from nothingness and it was her that he meant to raise the highest".²⁷

Moreover, in attempting to imitate Christ's selflessness, the poet feels a kinship with Mary who "died . . . . . of vehement love and long for God"²⁸.

But neither God nor Mary answers the poet's appeals and no relief present itself to his tormented soul. Hopkins proceeds to categorize, his agony:
"My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a main,

a chief

Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and

sing -

Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked

No ling -

ereng! Let me be felt; force I must be brief".

Since the agony is both personal and universal, it
must refer to an experience which all men have in
common. In his *Metaphor in Hopkins* Boyle equates this
world-sorrow with sin:

"His cries, like sheep in a storm, huddle
in that one great woe which is, I think, sin, 'the
blight man was born for', with its horror of crucifixion
and havoc in the poor racked heart of redeemed but
sinful man. As in stanza 10 of Deutschland God forges
His will on his rebel, bending the rebellious to him,
so here Hopkins's cries are the nerve-grinding wince
and sing of the sharp grinding of iron on iron -
most of those pains which accompany severe nervous
headaches. The "Then lull, then leave off" suggests
at least to me, the quiet period between such pains
with the tense waiting of the next pang to wring
and twist. And in the poem the shriek of Fury and
the tension poetically achieved by splitting and
lengthening the centre of "lingering" suggest the
advent of the next pang. Fury must be brief because
the victim cannot stand prolonged torture of such intensity.\textsuperscript{29}

In the sestet, the poet reflects on the vast complexity of the human mind:

"O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed";

expresses the two-fold nature of man's consciousness. It enables him to reach great heights, yet at the same time humbles him through an awareness of his own inadequacy. It harkens back to its pre-existent union with the mind of God, yet also clings to its present status as a fragmentary but seemingly independent human being. The poet's own high-pitched consciousness has brought about his present desolation; for "the keener the consciousness, the greater the pain" and "both these show that the higher the nature, the greater the penalty.\textsuperscript{30}"

Contempuously, the poet says,

". . . . Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep."

We cannot long face our inner conflict; the ordinary sufferer whose "small durance" cannot long "deal with that steep or deep". All that is left for the unheroic,
among whom the poet classes himself, is a shelter apparently away from the main action and passion of redeeming pain.

Hopkins implies that if he must imitate Christ and surrender his mortal selfhood, let it be as an ordinary man does, through an acceptance of physical rather than psychological oblivion. Hoping for a magnanimous response to his trials, Hopkins has to settle for less in himself. He believes that the trivial too is charged with Christ’s presence, as he had observed twenty years earlier:

"It is one adorable point of the incredible mystery of the Incarnation (the greatness of which no man can have ever hoped to realize) that our Lord suffered not only the pains of life, the fasting, scourging, crucifixion, etc. or the insults, as the mocking, blindfolding, spitting, etc. but also to the mean and trivial accidents of humanity"31.

The Sonnets of Desolation are an honest admission of failure, and in this the greatness of their humanity lies. The poem ends in dejection as Hopkins rushes to escape through sleep or death.

To seem the stranger, the next sonnet, is less fervent than the emotionally turbulent No worst
there is none. It is the most personal yet calm statement of grief and it constitutes Hopkins's last attempt to assert his earthly identity. In the first quatrain, the poet indulges in

"3 degrees of selfishness - love of our goods, which are wholly outside ourselves; love of our good name . . . , which is ourself indeed, but in others' mind, love of our own excellence, of our very selves, pride."

So in the sonnet we have:

"To seem the stranger his my lot, my life
   Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
   Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
   And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife".

Hopkins laments his alienation from family and country; but, if we look at one of his statements in his spiritual writings, he knows that these "goods", family and country, are merely superficial trappings of human nature, masking the essential self. As he points out:

"Even those things with which I in some sort identify myself, as my country or family, . . . . all presuppose the stricter sense of self and me and mine, and are from that derivative".
Yet, even knowing this, he goes on to lament his lack of reputation in England:

"England, whose honour 0 all my heart woos, wife To my creating thought, would neither hear Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear—y of idle a being but by where wars are rife".

His affliction, the poet tells us, is his continued inability to create, and lamenting his ineffectuality as priest, artist and man, Hopkins seems to fear the loss of all his human potency. Though he asserts that in Ireland he can "Kind love both give and get", this is not enough, for his creativity has failed him. His depression leads him to the question whether it is

"... . . . dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwart".

which hinders his creativity. All efforts to express

"... . . . . . what word
Wisest my heart breeds".

either in prayer or in the writing projects he felt to be part of his vocation, end in aridity. Concentrating on the "3 degrees of selfishness", Hopkins seems to
forget for a moment that man's claim to divinity can only be established through Christ-like selflessness. In the last two lines of the sonnet, however, the poet realizes his mistake. When he states:

"... This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began",

he is admitting the futility of his endeavours without God's grace to make them productive. Nothing he attempts can ever come to fruition unless God, through His Divine Will, wills it. Hopkins has advanced towards the Divine Essence; pride in human potency is no longer possible for him.

Upto this point, Hopkins has passed through three stages in his spiritual crisis. He has recognized the nature of the conflict he is undergoing, and has admitted the futility of his own worldly efforts. He is now ready to go through the tortuous suffering which, when finally completed, will have prepared him for his proper place in the divine scheme of things.

In the next sonnet, I wake and feel the fall of dark, not day, waking from nightmarish sleep, to dark hours of lying awake in conscious self-loathing,
Hopkins experiences the night within, the edge of break-down and the absence of any awareness of God's presence. The modern association of personal guilt with mental illness parallels the older superstition of physical suffering as a consequence of sin. No moral evil as the Old Testament prophet Job protested of himself, need be involved in Hopkins's anguished isolation and melancholia. St. Therese of Lisieux, for example, achieved holiness in and through her neuroses. Whatever the nature of the "nervous prostration" and near madness that the priest complained of in his later years, the sense of being utterly forsaken by God is a spiritual experience witnessed to by the Old Testament writers and by Christ himself on the Cross. The founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius Loyola, had been brought to the brink of suicide at Manresa and had written discerningly of desolation in his 

*Exercises.*

Profoundly personal as this sonnet remains, it dramatizes the depravity and heartache of man's sinful state inherited from Adam. The poet awakens to the surrounding darkness, a darkness which covers his sensitive soul. "With Witness", i.e. having experienced this torment, he can describe the
ordeal, but it is not simply the ordeal of a few hours; it is the ordeal of a lifetime.

"I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.

What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! What sights, you, heart, saw;
ways you went
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.
With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours, I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away".

Th poet must wait until the fulfilment of his sacrifice to achieve happiness "with God.

Hopkins acknowledges the true nature of man when he comments:

"I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse."

Hopkins's own flesh is a vessel in which the curse brims over; he becomes "gall" a poisonous herb of the Bible, fulfilling the curse: "You shall eat the
herbs of the earth\textsuperscript{(6\textsuperscript{n},3\textsuperscript{sl8t})}\) In the sestet he pictures his bitter-sour interior, "bearing the lonely curse of God on sinful man, without the honey-sweet presence of Christ and the sweet odour of His ointments, without the yeast which is the life of Christ, the Spirit of the Kingdom. He does not taste gall, or feel heartburn - he is those. And it is God's most deep decree that orders his poisonous draught. Yet God brings nothing in from the outside for this. He simply leaves Hopkins to himself. The bitterness he tastes is not brought in from outside or inflicted on him by God. It is simply his sinful self alone with himself. He himself is the curse, built up with bones, filled out with flesh, brimmed to the full with cursed blood. . . .\textsuperscript{34}

The last three lines of the sonnet give full outlet to his Job-like distress, and at the same time manage to fuse both personal and universal meanings in one bold, direct statement:

"Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be

As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse". 

This is Hopkins's adaptation of Christ's image of the yeast, the hidden working of the spirit which gives
health, life and sweetness to the whole man of dough:"

"He told them yet another parable. 'The Kingdom of heaven reminds one of a handful of yeast which a housewife mixes with three measures of flour to work there till the whole mass is risen'\textsuperscript{35}.

The spirit is toward God, but when this action is toward self and not toward God, then there is no rising, no working through the mass, and the yeast which should be the principle of life and sweetness rots and becomes the principle of sourness and corruption. The struggle between selflessness and selfishness takes place in the souls of all men, and Hopkins admits the universality of his own spiritual conflict when he writes:

" . . . . . . . . . . . . I see

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse".

"The wicked and the lost are like half-creations and have but a half-being"\textsuperscript{36}. They will remain for an eternity desolate and incomplete, whereas those redeemed indicate "a correspondence with grace" and a "seconding of God's designs", it is as
if they are "taking part in their own creation, the creation of their best selves"\textsuperscript{37}. In these Sonnets of Desolation Hopkins answers pride with his own emptiness, despairing with his own groping toward the Lord who he knows "lives" and who yet remains "alas! away!" In this confession he believes he is not among the lost for whom the strain or tendency toward God through Christ and the great sacrifice had by their own act been broken, refracted and turned aside, and it is only through Christ and the great sacrifice that God had meant any being to come to him at all\textsuperscript{38}.

In his spiritual writings, Hopkins wrote:

"Let him who is in desolation strive to remain in patience, which is the virtue contrary to the troubles which harass him\textsuperscript{39}.

Hence, in the sonnet \textit{Patience, hard thing}, the poet arrives at a philosophy of endurance and recovery, achieving supreme insight into his conflict. He discovers that his spiritual crisis is necessary, that without "war" and "wounds", he could never attain the ultimate virtue—patience
"Patience, hard thing! The hard thing but to pray,
But bid for. Patience is! Patience who asks
Wants war, wants wounds, weary his times his tasks;
To do without, take tosses and obey".

Patience is not something which a man passively receives: he must actively "pray" and "bid" for it. But it is "rare" virtue, for in seeking patience man seeks conflicts and "Nowhere" can be find what he was searching for:

"Rare patience roots in these, and these away,
Nowhere, Natural heart's ivy, Patience masks
Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks
Purple eyed and seas of liquid leaves all day".

A passage from one of Hopkins's discourses clarifies this description. In it, he states:

"No, we have not answered God's purposes, we have not reached the end of our being. Are we God's orchard or God's vineyard? We have yield rotten fruit, sour grapes or none".

It would seem, therefore, that the past work whose ruin patience masks is equivalent to the end for which man
was created—union with God. The purpose is ruined by man's pride in himself for he is not satisfied in being a part of the divine vineyards; rather, he wants to be master of it. As a result, he becomes merely a vine yielding sour grapes. Patience is needed, therefore, if man is to fulfil the purpose of his existence. Basking in the sun and yielding divine fruit, it helps man to accept his conflict-ridden life. But,

"We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so".

This is the near-death state of existence, to which the poet has been led by his spiritual crisis. Man must take an active part in resolving his spiritual conflict. As Hopkins wrote in the essay *On Personality, Grace and Free Will*:

"... . . . it is here that one creature, one man, differs so much from another; in one God finds only the constrained correspondence with his forestall.... in another he finds after this an act of choice properly so called. And by this infinitesimal act the creature does what in it lies to bridge the gulf fixed between
its actual present and worser pitch of will and its future and better one.*4*

The final definition of Patience is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself:

"And where is he who more and more distills Delicious kindness? - He is patient, Patience fills His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know."

The sonnets ends on a peaceful note as the poet discovers the divine Essence in Patience; for where acceptance lives, so also does God. In the end, the poet receives the gift of grace from God, but of a different kind than the previous one. It is less dramatic, but more sustaining. It is the kind of grace which was given at Pentecost, an "elevating grace . . . . which fastened men in good. This is especially the grace of the Holy Ghost and is the acceptance and assumption of the victim of the sacrifice."*42*

Hopkins ultimately learns that man must accept the limitations of his finite understanding. Man must struggle for a reconciliation with the Spirit from whence he came, and in life he approaches this reconciliation through the complex virtue of Patience.
Six months before his death, Hopkins observed: "There is a happiness, hope, the anticipation of happiness hereafter: it is better than happiness, but it is not happiness now. It is as if one were dazzled by a spark or star in the dark, seeing it but not seeing by it: we want a light shed on our way and a happiness spread ever of our life". 43

Now in the next poem, the poet turns to himself, hopefully for some relief:

"My own heart let me have more pity on; let Me live to my sad self hereafter kind, Charitable; not live this tormented mind With this tormenting mind tormenting yet".

This poem is a companion-piece to the earlier sonnet on Patience. It is a recognition that man, though he can actively seek patience, cannot actively seek solace. This must come unexpectedly after patience has taught man to accept his plan in the divine scheme of things. The sonnet begins with "My own heart let me have more pity on" - one is impressed by the sincerity of the plea. The poet has come to understand that there is a place where self-torment ends and living begins.
He next reviews the state of his own soul, only to conclude that he turns to himself in vain:

"I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet".

The use of "comfort" here recalls "carrion comfort, Despair", and the Spirit of Jesus the "Comforter" as well as the twofold Paraclete of the Sermons. Here he likens himself, a comfort-seeking "comfortless" soul to daylight-seeking blind eyes or a thirst searching for water. This corresponds with Hopkins's long-standing prayer that God "may give us a true knowledge and understanding whereby we may intimately feel that it is not in our own power to acquire or retain great devotion, ardent loves, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is a gift and grace of God our Lord."44

Comfort means Christ's company, known and affirmed in his risen reality, stirring the soul to possess Him forever:

"Come on, come on! - a Paraclete is just that, something that cheers the spirit of man, with
signals and with cries, all zealous that he should do something and full of assurance that if he will he can, calling him on springing to meet him half way, crying to his ears or to his heart: This way to do God's will, this way to save your soul, come on, come on!" 45

In the absence of all sensible spiritual comfort the poet addresses himself in the sestet:

"Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile 's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather- as skies Between pie mountains - lights a lovely mile".

The poet's long struggle has exhausted him, but he knows now that comfort is rooted inside man, it is the consolation which Hopkins once defined as

"any increase of hope, faith and charity and any interior joy which calls and attracts one to heavenly things and to the salvation of his soul, rendering it quiet and at peace with its Creator and Lord" 46.
Since comfort comes from within, we can assume that like patience, it is a gift of the Holy Ghost who cheers people

"not like Christ by his example from without, but by his presence, his power, his breath and fire and inspiration from within".47

In the concluding lines of the sonnet, Hopkins explains

Joy's " . . . . . . smile
's not wrung, see you; unforseen times rather - as skies
Betweenpie mountains - lights a lovely smile".

Thus, the soul which has prepared itself through agony will receive suddenly a "stress" from God, teaching it to value above all else the end for which it was created. Thus, at last, the light of the Creator and Saviour returns and opens the way ahead. Then joy deeper than sorrow beams within the self from off the mountains of the mind. None can lay claim of such joy - the Lord alone provides it:

"Now you are sad, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one shall take from you".48
The final image of the sonnet is admirably chosen to represent the resolution to Hopkins's spiritual crisis; for when the poet compares his sudden feelings of joy to a dappled sky which unexpectedly appears between mountains, he is again demonstrating his earlier perception of inscape in Nature. This inscape is the ultimate infinite inscape of God, of which man is merely an infinitesimal part.

The forthrightness of Thou art indeed just, Lord finds its basis in the familiarity with his King, whom he addresses as "Sir", in the scriptural tradition of interrogation with God, like that of Jeremiah whose remonstrance supplies this sonnet with its epigraph and opening statement. Although this poem does not officially belong to the chain of the "Terrible" sonnets, its theme of literary and spiritual barrenness is a continuation of the same theme that forms the nucleus of the sonnets of Desolation. The enigma of Christ's treatment of His servants, a theme well established in the Church and found in St. Theresa of Avila's autobiography, for instance, is here set in a Biblical style suitable to the poem as a vehicle of man's age-old dilemma in dealing
with the mystery of the suffering servant of God marked out for opprobrium and rejection:

"Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but Sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper, and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?"

The logic in the argument continues:

"Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worst, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me?"

Although he spends "life upon thy cause", he finds that it is "the sots and thralls of lust" who thrive. The next few lines are a moving comparison between the process of creation and regeneration that is ever-present in nature and the "eunuch"-like condition that the poet finds himself in:

"... See, banks and brakes,
Now, leaved how thick! laced they are again
With pretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build - but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes"

In a letter to Bridges, Hopkins complained:
"Nothing comes: I am a eunuch - but it is for the Kingdom of heaven's sake."49.

All of Hopkins's last works, particularly the letters to friends, are dotted with the recurring epithets "tired", "jaded", "weary in body and mind", "incapable of anything".

The sonnet ends with a moving request for some kind of fertility of spirit:

"Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain".

The Maker of the Universe is asked to bring renewal to the innermost depths of one who spends "life upon thy cause".

The Sonnets of Desolation have been rightly called a "suicidal struggle between the priest and the nature-loving poet"50, depicting the poet's fagged mind, continuous anxiety, and a confession that his view of creativity shows no sign of ever flowering again. At this period, his mind is dull and museless, having "no inspiration of longer jet than makes a sonnet". In his dealings with his fellow-men as well, he appears to have met with little success. Severed from family and friends, facing the hostility of Irish politics and the part played
by the Irish clergy in defence of Irish nationalism, Hopkins lived in a virtual coffin of weakness and dejection, without the hope of change. His sufferings at this stage were truly "terrible" (as the sonnets show); no wonder he speaks of a state of dilapidation, of prostration of strength, and of such a neurotic state of mind that made him fear madness. But all this was borne by Hopkins for "the Kingdom of heaven's sake", as he himself wrote to Bridges. He had earnestly prayed to be raised to a higher degree of grace, and he had been, in his suffering lifted to a higher Cross.

Having traced the poet's spiritual torment, having studied his crisis and recovery, we are able to understand Gardner's statement that "the agony in the Garden constituted for Hopkins the prototype of all desolation". As Hopkins pointed out, the ultimate consolation coexists with human misery;

"If you say that when all is said you feel your sorrows still; why yes, for comfort is not to undo what is done and yet it is comfort, yet it comforts. If we feel the comfort little, there, my
brethren, is our fault and want of faith . . . .
It is a comfort that inspite of all God loves us;
it is a comfort that the sufferings of this present
world . . . . are not worthy to be compared with
the glory that is to be revealed in us; such thoughts
are comfort, we have only to force ourselves to see it,
dwell on it, and at last to feel that it is so".52

In the same line of thinking, Hopkins wrote in his
Retreat Notes at Beaumont in 1883:

"Sept 10, The walk to Emmaus. This morning
in Thanksgiving after mass much bitter thought but also
insight in things. And the above meditation was made in
a desolate frame of mind; but towards the end I was
able to rejoice in the comfort our Lord gave those two
men, taking that for a sample of his comfort and them
for representatives of all men comforted and that it
was meant to be of universal comfort to men and
therefore to me and that this was all I really needed;
also that it was better for me to be accompanying our
Lord in his comfort of them than to want him to come
my way to comfort me."53

The "Comfort" so often referred to in the
writing of his last years is specifically the orthodox
Catholic doctrine of sanctifying grace, that enables
man to elevate himself from the "blight he was born
for*. In the "Terrible" sonnets, Hopkins never again approached the simple rapture, the "juice" and "joy" of his Nature poetry, but he carried on his unflinching conviction that there is someone—God—, and there is something—Grace— which transcends his particular sufferings. Father Lahey, in his memoir of Hopkins, speaks of the three sorrows of his last years. The first two were due to external causes, then Father Lahey writes:

"Of Hopkins's third sorrow it is more difficult to speak. It sprang from causes which have their origin in true mysticism. Hopkins, smiling and joyful with his friends, was at the same time on the bleak heights of spiritual might with his God. All writers on mysticism—St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Poulain, Maumigny, etc.—have told us that this severe trial is the greatest and most cherished gift from. One who has accepted literally His servant's oblation, Hopkins was always remembered by all who met him as essentially a priest, a deep and prayerful religious. With the fine uncompromising courage of his initial conversion, he pursued his never-ending quest after spiritual perfection. The celebrated 'terrible' sonnets are only terrible in the same way that the beauty of Jesus Christ is terrible. Only the strong pinions of an eagle can realise the
cherished happiness of such suffering. It is a place where Golgotha and Thabor meet. Read in this light, his poems cease to be tragic”.

(G.F. Lahey, S.J., "Life" p. 235)

Lahey’s contention that Hopkins was able to reach the summit of the mystical experience (what is called "the dark night of the soul" by St. John of the Cross) is not the point to be argued about here. What we must be convinced about is the fact that in the gradual process that underlies the writing of the Sonnets, the space between self and Self has been bridged by the gift of Divine Grace. Mentally scarred as he had been, the final sonnets declare that Hopkins kept himself together through the Agony. It should not be surprising, then, to find this entry in Hopkins’s journal:

“One day in the Long Retreat... they were reading in the refectory Sister Emmerich’s... account of the Agony in the Garden and I suddenly began to cry and sob and could not stop”.

Quite aware of his own shortcomings and deficiencies, Hopkins yearned to tear away the partitions of self-will and move into a larger vision of God. But
this was not to be achieved without a consci
struggle. What was the secret of Hopkins's strength
in so facing his inner battle? What was the remedy he
could invoke for his own and for others' sore needs?
We may justifiably say that it is the positive side
of Hopkins's thinking on the subject of sin and redemption
that should be stressed. In more recent times, even
in the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church, there
has been a tendency to play down both the concepts of
God's justice and sin's terror. Such an attenuation
was quite foreign to Hopkins's thinking, as to the
thinking of his age. In any case, it would not have
been in Hopkins's nature to rationalise or to
sentimentalise in matters of such vital moral import.

What Hopkins needed to meet such realities as Sin
and God's judgement was something even more real,
something more powerful, and that greater reality
and power he found in the love and mercy of God as
expressed the concept of Divine Grace. One finds
in Hopkins's handling of this concept the remarkable
energy, immediacy and vitality of total identification
with it. He defines Grace as the shift from the old
self to the new being in Christ:

"For grace is any action, activity on God's
part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries
the creature to or towards the end of his being, which is its self sacrifice to God and its salvation. It is, I say, any such activity on God's part; so that so far as this action or activity of God's it is divine stress, holy spirit and all is done through Christ, Christ's spirit..."56.

It is difficult to define adequately a psychological condition at once so simple and yet so complex as "a state of grace", but certainly its reality has too often been clouded by exclusive association with formal creeds or conventional sanctity. Although the poet may usually catch it in high imaginative or spiritualized moments, while with the saint it is habitual, yet in both it would seem to be the reward of the individual who has subdued a personal discord by relating himself satisfactorily to his Maker. The subjective faculties cannot be truly harmonized without being reconciled with some governing Idea, some intuition of external unity, which the individual rejoices to reflect. The religion which was so much a part of Hopkins was behind all the ritual and vocabulary of orthodox Catholic dogma, some such spiritual synthesis. In it, for ecstatic moments, he merged, without denying totally his passions and his intellect. Unlike others... given
to the life of the religious, he never forgot, to his own anguish, the facts of sin and death. And so, his faith channelized his energies, diminished their wasteful friction, and provided the distraught genius of his later years with a mould into which to pour itself.

In the Terrible Sonnets, Hopkins stood alone with his God: the process of suffering was now far advanced:

"I am gall, I am heartburn, God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste; any taste was me!"

(I wake and feel the fell of dark)

Stricken and morbid, he now, more than ever before, took religion to his arms. In an essay, it has been justifiably argued that the moving words of Isaack Walton, the official biographer of Donne, on the agony of remorse and for the harmony of spirit and flesh, could well be applied to the afflicted Hopkins of the Terrible Sonnets:

"In this retiredness which was often from the sight of his dearest friends, he became crucified to the world . . . . . . , for now his very soul was elemented of nothing but sadness; now grief took so full possession of his heart as to leave no place for
joy; if it did it was a joy to be alone where,
like a pelican in the wilderness, he might bemoan
himself without witness or restraint, and pour forth
his passions like Job in the days of his affliction:
"O that I may have the desire of my heart! O that
God would grant me the thing that I long for!"

In the sonnet-sequence, Hopkins gratefully
records his conviction of grace, after the harrowing
dichotomy within himself. Glancing backwards and
forwards, he submitted the flaws and fluctuations
of his nature to the criterion of his ever-present
ideal of grace. Man's earthly existence, Hopkins believed
can be shared with God-made-Man, and thus to the
natural eye of faith, they become in and through
Christ, divine acts preparatory to the divine life
and eternal victory that is seen effected in the
Divine Head. Our earthly actions are no longer the
sterile acts to be passively accepted as punishments
as in the Old Law, but the life-giving acts of willing
sacrifice which Christ has made of them. The life of
man, even in his labour and his painful death,
becomes in Christ a divine life and is thus
infinitely superior in its intrinsic loveliness and
in its mastery of opposing powers to any merely
natural life and activity.
It would be wrong to conclude that the Hopkins of the Terrible Sonnets is despairing of the eventual relief, that his faith in God's mercy and love is giving way. If he did not hold hope and faith strongly, the positive assent of his will would have no roots at all. If he were weakening, the obvious course would be to let go, which he does not attempt to do. His grasp of God's grace and mercy are no weaker but the attacks (both external and internal) upon him are stronger. And in the suffering which that strain brings him, his unshaking resolve is to go on saying "Yes" to God; to say and to mean those words his Master dictated for all His followers: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Referring to his literary sterility, he could make a strong statement:

"... if I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget. After all, I do not despair, things might change, anything may be; only there is no great appearance of it ... . . . soon I am afraid I shall be ground down to a state like this last spring's and summer's, when my spirits
were so crushed that madness seemed to be making approaches . . . . . 58 Such a development, from despair, through desolation, to acceptance and the bestowing of grace, can be traced in the sonnets of 1885, from

"Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry I can no more, I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but 0 thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me.
Thy wring—world right foot rock? limb against me? Scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones?
and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?"

(Carrion Comfort)

through:
"No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief, 
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring, 
Comforter, where, where is your comforting? 
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?"

(No worst, there is none)

to:

"We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills 
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills 
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so. 
And where is he who more and more distils 
Delicious kindness? - He is patient - Patience fills 
His crisp:combs and that comes those ways we know".

(Patience, hard thing!)

and the final humility:

"Soul, self; come, poor jackself, I do advise 
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile 
Elsewhere; leave comfort root—root; let joy size 
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile 
'S not wrung, see you; unforeseen times: rather— as skies 
Betweenpie mountains — lights a lovely mile".

(My own heart)
Hopkins's experience of the redeeming grace of the Passion and Resurrection, lived out in his obedience to vocation, realized with such intensity because of the temperament, the physical frailties, the sensitivities he brought with him was a wholly creative experience. The state of mental and spiritual exhaustion in the last sonnets brings a cessation of struggle. Hopkins's words of acceptance do not simply switch from the despair and threat, to the consolation. Such mechanics would undo the process of redemptive poetry. There is a controlled restraint in

"My own heart let me have more pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet".

(My own heart)

The soul, the self, poor and jaded, no longer striving, heads for the state of divine grace. The 'natural' and the spiritual are interwoven in the final vision of the 'lovely' 'smile' that appears "betweenpie mountains". Hopkins the priest and Hopkins the poet are one at last.
To sum up, in the cry of anguish of the later sonnets, the gain to English poetry definitely outweighs the loss. Had Hopkins been physically stronger, less devout, less sensitive, less neurotic, we would have had more poems, but not of the kind we now treasure. His output was restricted, but at the same time intensified - allotropized from graphite to diamond (cf. Dixon's 'terrible crystal') in the stringency of his asceticism. He is one of those described by William James⁸⁹, as needing "some austerity, wintry negativity, roughness and danger to be mixed in to produce the sense of an existence with character, texture and power". Far from the spiritual vacuum in which the Terrible sonnets began, they end on a mellowed note, and out of his experience, he brings out the agony and the ecstasy: "dark" finally gives place to "day".

NOTES

1. Father M.C. Darcy, SJ. in his Foreward to John Pick's GMH Priest and Poet.
3. Ibid.


13. Quoted in William Jame's "The Divided Self" p. 176

14. Ibid.


17. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GWH, ed. C. Devlin (1959) p. 239.

21. 2 Cor. 4:16
22. Mark 14:34
23. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GMH ed. C.
30. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GMH ed. C.
    Devlin S.J. p. 138.
32. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GMH ed. C. Devlin
    S.J. p. 180
34. R. Boyle, Metaphor in Hopkins (1964) p. 155.
35. Matt. 13:33
36. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GMH ed. C. Devlin
    S.J. p. 197.
37. Ibid.
42. Op. Cit. p. 158
43. Op. Cit. p. 262
44. Op. Cit. p. 203
45. Op. Cit. p. 70
47. Op. Cit. p. 74
48. John 16:22
54. The Three Sorrows have been referred to earlier on in this chapter.
56. Sermons and Devotional Writings of GMH ed. C. Devlin p. 154.
57. Quoted in "Hopkins and Donne, Mystic and Metaphysical" by R. Coanda, Renascence, Vol. 9 No. 4 Summer 1957.