INTRODUCTION

To make a study of Hopkins as a poet quite apart from a study of him as a man, and specifically a Jesuit priest, is but to explore only a fragment of him. Yet, this is what has usually been done, and too exclusive an emphasis has been laid on his experiments in vocabulary, rhythm, metre and syntax. Hopkins was born a Victorian but is rightly recognized as one of the most revolutionary and influential pioneers of modern poetry. His influence upon later poets, which is quite unmistakable, is mostly of a technical nature, and the character and experience of the man behind these technical experiments have been quite overlooked. Even when the man has been recognized, it has been done chiefly to find out some rationale for the bold changes which he introduced into English poetry. In Hopkins's work there is a tone, a temper, a vitality, an exuberance, a boldness as well as independence of language and rhythm, and a rich store of striking imagery - all of which seem to proclaim that a poem written by Hopkins could definitely not have been written by anyone else. What is usually not immediately recognized is that Hopkins also has a substance, an experience and a vision which is as distinctive and
unique in English literature as his poetic rhythm and style. He is not merely a poet of the sensuous beauties of Nature like Keats, he is also a lover and seeker of the Divine like Blake and Vaughan. This love and search for the Divine, the thrills as well as the terrors of the ordeal which he experiences as a result of it, are not just an ornament, an additional beauty or enlargement to his work but an integral part of it.

For a complete understanding and appreciation of the output of Hopkins's genius, an insight into his life and the influences which moulded him is essential. The Hopkinses of Stratford, Essex, were respectable Tories, High Church Anglicans, English to the core. Gerard Manley Hopkins was born, the eldest of eight children, on June 11, 1844. His father, Manley Hopkins, was an indifferent poet, but a successful Consul of the Kingdom of Hawaii; his mother united the feminine attributes of common sense and religious fervour. To his teacher, Canon Dixon, Gerard Manley Hopkins appeared a pale young boy, very light and attractive, with a very meditative and intellectual face. Of the two school poems that exist, The Escorial is written in fourteen Spenserian stanzas, dated Easter 1860.
There are some striking descriptions, echoes of Byron perhaps, that certainly seem creditable for a young boy of sixteen:

"He rais'd the convent as a monstrous gate;
The cloisters cross'd with equal courts betwixt
Formed bars of stone; beyond in stiffen'd state
The stretching palace lay as a handle fix'd ......

The rang'd long corridors and cornic'd halls,
And damasqu'd arms and foliag'd carring piled -
With painting gleam'd the rich pilastered walls.
There play'd the Virgin Mother with her Child....

But, hopeless youth, Antinous the while
Gazes aslant his shoulder, viewing nigh
Where Phoebus weeps for him whom Zephyr's guile
Chang'd to a flower; and there, with placid eye
Apollo views the smitten python writhe and die".

The other, A Vision of the Mermaids was written towards the close of 1862, and is in heroic couplets. Already a more supple mastery of rhythm is evident, and the evocation of the mermaids is rich and sensuously
Keatsian in its beauty:

"Some trail'd the Nautilus; or on the swell
Tugg'd the boss'd, smooth - lipp'd giant
Strombus - shell

Some carried the sea-fan; some round the head
With lace of rosy weed were chapleted;
Or bound o'er-drippling gold a turquoise - gemm'd
Circlet of astral flowerlets - diadem'd
Like an Assyrian prince, with buds unsheath'd
From flesh-flowers of the rock........"

In this early piece there is assonance and alliteration, there is an unmistakable flair for the crucial adjective and there is the alert hammering out of combinations like "encrimsoning spot", "rosy-budded fire", "dainty-delicate fretted fringe", "dainty onyx coronals". These artifices might be amateurish but they indicate what direction Hopkins's poetry might follow subsequently.

Hopkins entered Balliol College in 1863. The Oxford of Hopkins's day was not all that peaceful, as since 1858 it had ceased to be purely sectarian and Protestant. Benjamin Jowett was the guiding spirit
at Balliol, with his vast Greek erudition and his seeming professorial infallibility. Hopkins at first fell under Jowett's influence, and, as earnest student, the scholarly Jowett satisfied his love of learning. But there were other cravings simultaneously, silent stirrings within him that gave him no quite, that insisted on self expression. The companionship of William Addis acted like a catalytic agent and quickly increased Hopkins's aesthetic pulse. They had numerous enjoyable walks together, and their travels to Nuremberg and the Bavarian and Swiss mountains intensified Hopkins's perception of the beautiful in Nature.

Meanwhile, Hopkins's religious opinion, convictions and faith itself were undergoing a rapid transformation. The Oxford of Hopkins's day had sustained several cracks in the rigid Protestant framework. The agitations of the Tractarian movement had calmed down, but the Puseyites were still very loud and active, and Newman was not very far off. Presently, Hopkins was writing to Newman expressing his anxiety to become a Catholic, this wish being fulfilled in 1866 and at once Hopkins braced himself to face an alien world. Pusey and Liddon were grieved beyond measure, and the decision came as a rude
blow to Hopkins's parents. Hopkins wrote to Newman:

18 New Inn Hall Street,
Oxford
St. Theresa (15 Oct.) 1866

Very Reverend Father,

I have been up at Oxford just long enough to have heard from my father and mother in return for my letter announcing my conversion. Their answers are terrible; I cannot read them twice. If you will pray for them and for me just now, I shall be deeply thankful. But what I am writing for is this — they urge me with the utmost entreaties to wait till I have taken my degree — more than half a year. Of course it is impossible, and since it is impossible for me to wait as long as they wish it seems to me useless to wait at all. ...... You will understand why I have any hesitation at all, namely because if immediately after their letters urging a long delay I am received without any, it will be another blow and look like intentional cruelty. I did not know till last night the rule about communicatio in sacris — .......

but I now see the alternative thrown open, either to live without Church and sacraments or else, in order to avoid the Catholic Church, to have to attend
constantly the services of that very Church. This brings the matter to an absurdity and makes me think that any delay whatever relief it may be to my parents, is impossible .......

Strange to say of four conversions, mine is the earliest and yet my reception will be last. I think I said that my friend William Garrett was converted and received shortly after hearing of my conversion; just before term began another friend, Alexander Wood, wrote to me in perplexity, and when I wrote back to his surprise telling him I was a convert he made up his own mind the next morning and is being received today ......... Addis, who had put off all thought of change for a year, was by God's mercy at once determined to see a priest and was received at Bayswater the same evening. All our minds you see were ready to go at a touch and it cannot but be that the same is the case with many here.......

During the Oxford period, Hopkins wrote about a dozen pieces, most of them more or less direct translations of his religious beliefs and convictions. One of these poems **Summa**, is a fine effort:
"The best ideal is the true,
And other truth is none
All glory be ascribed to
The holy three in one".

Not less interesting, though more elaborate, is
Heaven—Haven, purporting to be spoken by a nun who
takes the veil:

"I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come
Where the green swell is int/the havens dumb
And out of the swing of the sea."

But more than all these, it is The Habit of Perfection
that has received the greatest attention. We may be

amply sure that it was written when Hopkins had no
more doubts as to where his only consistent position
in religion should be, when he had even dimly imagined
himself in the role of a priest in the order of the
Society of Jesus. The poem is therefore important
as a page from his spiritual autobiography. The
hesitations and mental insurrections over²

"I do not want to be helped to any conclusions of belief, for I am thankful to say my mind is made up, and the necessity of becoming a Catholic I had long foreseen as the only consistent position in my life". He could now consecrate his life to a career of silent service:

"Elected silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear
Pipe to me pastures still and be
The music that I care to hear."

Perhaps anticipating his resolve on becoming a Jesuit in 1868, to write no more poems, he continues in the same poem:

"Shape nothing lips; be lovely-dumb:
It is the shut, the curfew sent
From where all surrenders come
Which only makes you eloquent".

Even at this early stage, Hopkins was a poet at once a member of the Church Militant "justifying the ways of God to men", yet fully aware of the influences and the pristine purity of Nature.
It has been a topic of controversy as to why such an original genius like Hopkins should have shut himself up in a Jesuit institution where, as some firmly believe, his genius could not grow. People pity this tender flower, rather eccentric, planted in the rough, uncongenial soil of the Society of Jesus. They believe that the poetic genius of Hopkins was stifled in the cramped, ascetic atmosphere of religious life. But Father Daniel A Lord, S.J., quells all such doubts when he says:

"There is a sort of persistent legend to the effect that the young Jesuits are put into a sort of concrete mould and turned out exactly to the same pattern ...... Of course, any man who believes that legend has never met more than one Jesuit. Fancy the brilliant and popular Father Vaughan beside the shy little spiritual father in a small community; or William Doyle, that English Chaplain slain at the front, beside the studious, scholarly, retiring professor of Philosophy. Take four Jesuits in any community, and you will have four distinct men with divergent characteristics."

"Remember! our novice master insisted from the start, 'Nature is the foundation of Grace'."
Keep your natural gifts and develop them. God gave you your natural talents and abilities to use. Keep your individual character and build upon it the character of Jesus Christ. In those passages are the essentials of the Jesuit's training nature preserved, but with Christ's characteristics added. No one was, of course, allowed to develop a one-sided character. If a novice was melancholy he was given the cheerful garden to work in. If he showed a proud streak, out he went where the fresh hash had been spilled on the floor, and on hands and knees wiped it up. Was he a frivolous or fastidious soul? Then he dipped his hands in the kitchen sink and scrubbed unromantic dinner dishes. That was simply wise discipline. It was one of these terrible Jesuits (Fr. George Johnson, S.J.) that demanded from his scholars "Less Piety and more poetry." 

Nence, Father Peters, S.J. is led to say directly of Hopkins that "religion hardened him morally and intellectually, provided him with a background infinitely better suited to his genius than Greek myth, and brought into his poetry the polyphony of style, particolour of pattern, and the expanding, realistic and passionate force of his great work. In the fact of this it seems
to me absurd to speak of damage done to him conflicts of art and religion, sensuousness and asceticism. From the very beginning, Hopkins seems to be struggling hard to express by means of original similitudes some fundamental truths. Almost anyone can comprehend the material attributes of the external work: but to see into the heart of things, to apprehend the design and the purpose behind the apparent chaos and cruelty, to relate the Creator in the most perfect way with all things created, these are tough tasks which require a far stern exercise of the poet's art. The spiritual and physical world were inherently related, and the filiations between them, drawn in closer and ever closer harmony, would be the subject matter of the bulk of Hopkins's poetry.

In an address in Great St. Mary's Church, Cambridge, Cecil Day-Lewis said that joy is the affirmation of life. He quoted Dylan Thomas when he wrote that his "collected works, for all their crudity, are written for the love of man and in praise of God". How fitting this would be to describe Hopkins's work - "in love of man and in praise of God". It is with great joy, joy in life, and joy in Christ, that Hopkins writes, and by contrast, not only joy but "the gall", the "heart burn" when God "bitter would have the taste". Again,
from Day - Lewis: "I cannot possibly dismiss the belief that what is given to the artist from time to time, is a form of divine grace. It may be convenient now-a-days to speak in terms of individual psychology, or a collective unconscious which the poet can tap to make his myths of 'archetypal reality', but such explanations do not fully satisfy; they do not explain the poet's conviction that, perhaps once or twice only, he has come close to the Ground of Being".

"......... once or twice only" for most people: Hopkins by contrast lived almost the whole of his life next to the Ground of Being. He knew "God's better beauty, grace". The most remarkable characteristic of Hopkins, not only as a poet, but as a Jesuit priest, is his entirely relentless effort at combining the natural and the supernatural into one coherent whole. His vision, as a Catholic priest, extends to the concept of Nature being the Divine Hieroglyph, an image of Divine Immanence. Thus, a poem on the Resurrection of Christ begins with a description of a cloudscape:
"Cloud-puffball, torn tufts tossed
pillows/flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
built thoroughfare: heaven roysterers,
in gay-gangs/they throng
they glitter in marches."

(That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire)

Or the lines about wilderness which sound so strangely contemporary to our exploited planet:

"What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet".

(Inversnaid)

Indeed, Hopkins might be thought of as the poet of conservation in an environment conscious world. One wonders how he might have borne our present urbanization, worse even than that which sickened him at Leigh or Liverpool:

"O if we but knew what we do
When we delve or hew -
Hack and rack the growing green!
Since country is so tender
To touch, her being so slender,
That, like this sleek and seeing ball
But a prick will make no eye at all,
Where we, even where we mean
   To mend her, we end her,
When we hew or delve:
   After-comers cannot guess the beauty been
Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve
Strokes of havoc unselve
   The sweet especial scene,
Rural scene, a rural scene,
   Sweet especial rural scene".
    (Binsey Poplars).

Yet the poet who wrote thus about the external world
of Nature was the same person who saw Christ "play in
ten thousand places", "lovely in limbs and lovely
in eyes not his": it was the same Hopkins who
dedicated his poem on the Windhover to "Christ our
Lord". For Hopkins the Jesuit, both Nature and
Christ coinhere.

When he had entered the order of the Society
of Jesus, Hopkins had forsworn all poetry and had
burnt all the earlier pieces. But as he explained to
his friend Bridges in a letter, which reveals, in spite of his abstinance, a continuous and secret interest in poetry:

"When in the winter of '75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck laws, aboard of her were drowned, I was affected by the account, and happening to say so to my Rector, he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work, and though my hand was out at first, produced one. I long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which I now realized in paper."

The poem referred to, of course, is The Wreck of the Deutschland, of which Bridges says, "The poem stands logically as well as chronologically in front of his book, like a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance and confident in his strength from past success." This is the first stanza:

"Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me."
fastened me flesh
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing; and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

Like the Choruses in *Atalanta in Calydon*, but in a
different and more profound and manly way, these
lines make a disturbingly vital use of assonance,
alliteration and of deceptive rhythm. While Swinburne
produces a temporary lulling of the senses, Hopkins
pursues a far subtle strategy that keeps our
faculties perpetually alert. The thirty five stanzas
have two themes, artfully soldered into one. Rebel
man

"frail clay, nay but foul clay" - has to be
beaten hard, thrown into the forge of suffering, till
transmuted:

"  Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,
  Man's malice, with wrecking and storm ..... 
  With an anvil-ding
And with fire in him forge thy will
Or rather, rather than, stealing as Spring
Through him, melt him but master him still".

The second part deals with the nuns, their
earthly travail and final spiritual triumph in
heaven. The intimations of brute nature, of tranquillity, of doubt and despair, of illumination and triumph, are all thrown together until at last the whole terrible situation courses home to one in a flash. The stanzas roll precipitately forward, in jerks and jumps; the diction is full of new significances but nevertheless intact with a proper harmony. In the evocation of a heart-rending moment, in the instant of piercing death-shrieks, in the assertion of a faith that countenances no defeat, in depicting desolation or in symbolizing undying hope, Hopkins is impeccable.

There is the description of Nature in

"and so the sky keeps
For the infinite air is kind,
And the sea flint-flake, black-backed in

The regular blow,
Stirring eastnortheast, in cursed quarter, the wind;

Wiry and white fiery and whirlwind—Swivelled snow
Spins to the widow-making unchilding

Unfathering deeps";

The note of despair in

"What could he do
With the burst of the fountains of air,

Suck and the flood of the wave?"
Verbal camouflage of puzzlement in

"Why, tears! is it? tears! such a

Melting, a madrigal start!

Never-eldering revel and river of youth,

What can it be, this glee? the good you

Have there of your own?"

and quiet, unflinching assertion of faith in

"past all

Grasp God throned behind

Death with a sovereignty that needs but

hides, bodes but abides".

In the foregoing section of this introductory chapter, a brief survey has been made of Hopkins's early life, his early poetry and the influences on it. Determined in his endeavour to become a Roman Catholic, he feels at the age of twenty-one "the long success of sin". Anticipating some of the great sonnets which were wrung from a far deeper level of experience in 1885, the second-year student at Oxford says that prayer is now

"A warfare of my lips in truth

Battling with God .........."

Yet only a month later he could write

"I have found the dominant of my range and state

Love, O my God, to call Thee Love and Love."
Later in life, beginning with his conversion to Roman Catholicism and ending with his tenure as Professor of Greek at Dublin, we see Hopkins's soul as a battle-ground upon which the forces of the 'spirit' and the 'flesh' (to use the Biblical terms) clashed. Yet, the remarkable feature of his mature poetry is that, with the aid of the Christian concept of sanctifying grace, the war waging within this sensitive personality was overcome to the furthest extent possible. Hopkins as a devout Jesuit did not believe (as did the Calvinists) that the world was totally depraved. He saw that the world of Nature was intrinsically good, but tainted owing to the Fall and the Original Sin. Each human being bears the consequences of the First Sin, but with the divine gift of Grace, we are made aware of the divine within us. However, intense and introspective the conflict depicted in some of the poems, we may justifiably assume that Hopkins was a beneficiary of the gift of Grace, and was thus "lifted" into a deep sense of relief and fulfilment. By virtue of his deep underlying faith, from which he drew his powers of spiritual recovery, Hopkins could consistently preserve the sensitivity and control of the artist within him.
II

It is not to be denied that from Hopkins's poetry flows an intensity of passion indicative of much suffering, as well as a fully fresh, spontaneous total responsiveness to the physical beauties of Nature. Simultaneously, it should not be less acknowledged that his vital sensuousness and suffering are but an expression which enrich and deepen his complex spiritual personality. It has been recognized by all so obvious that one cannot help noticing its presence at once, that Hopkins was a devout Christian and that his poetry is richly coloured by the strain of his religious fervour in it. But it has been a subject of controversy as to whether Hopkins was more a poet of 'nature' or a poet of the 'spirit' and whether or not the Christian streak in his work is a sort of religious extension of his romantic sensuousness. Also it has been widely argued that Hopkins, the frail, meditative Jesuit priest, very often found himself in a state of terrible conflict on account of his no less inborn sensitiveness to the physical, sensuous beauties of the earth, that these two equally dominant strands of his experience
fought for supremacy within him and he remained till the end a poet of burning intensities rather than of that luminous tranquillity which is the ultimate achievement of Wordsworth.

The attractions of the 'flesh' - (though perhaps 'flesh' may not be the appropriate word to be used in connection with Hopkins, as it may be with another English poet of intense conflict, Donne) - were not negating forces coming between him and his spirit. Although they did war within his soul for supremacy within him, he could easily transmute them into natural outbursts and ecstasies of the inner divine being within him. The world of matter and the world of spirit were not in irreconcilable opposition for his experience and being – they were on the contrary, fulfilments of each other, held in equal balance. It is not true to say of Hopkins that his aspiring soul always burned and suffered, never achieving the peace of affirmation, the calm synthesis of a deepening divine knowledge. 'Nature' and 'Spirit' make up the totality of the omnipresence of God in every iota of the created world:

**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 smeared 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 beat
World broods with warm brest and with ah! bright
wings".

- "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" -
this could never be the experience of a soul in an
eternal state of pain and conflict. Not only is the
world "charged with the grandeur of God", but it "flames
out, like shining from shook foil". The striking
homely concreteness of the image with the help of
which Hopkins perceives the flaming out of the divine
grandeur of the world is itself indicative of a confidence, an assurance and a clarity, not only of what may be called the poetic perception of the divine flame shining all around, but a spiritual realization of it. Such is the truth and force of the poet's increasing consciousness of the divine light illuminating the world that his poetic perception crosses all conventional aesthetic limitations and attains its expression boldly, freely and diversely. These factors may hardly be said to betray a lasting inner conflict and division existing in the poet's personality. On the contrary, they point to the intimacy and lucidity of the poet's awareness of God's grandeur in the world of created things. It is this very awareness which holds an assured balance between the external world and the divine reality within his soul. Just as Wordsworth deplored modern man's estrangement from Nature by the sordid habits of "getting and spending", Hopkins laments that in the England in which he lived "all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil" — so much so that the very soil appears to be bereft of God's grandeur, nor can man's "foot feel" the divine flame gathering to a greatness, "being shod". But this bleak picture of man's alienation from God's grandeur does not dim the poet's own perception and realization
of the spiritual light subsisting in the world. To him, "Nature is never spent", whatever man may do to smudge and smear it. Nature here is not merely the 'Nature' of the Romantic poets or the Victorian and Edwardian aesthetes. It is "charged" with God's grandeur, the divine flame, because for Hopkins "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things". (The epithet "dearest" confirms the intimacy of the poet's contact with God's grandeur). At the close of the poem, there is incorporated the magnificent image of the Holy Ghost that "Broods" over the world "with warm breast" and "with ah! bright wings". No doubt an easily recognizable Christian symbol is used, but its implication and value are much wider.

Here is an ecstatically singing lover and devotee who sees the living beauty of God in its most tangible forms and not in any inaccessible regions— a poet whose soul is in full intimate touch with the ever-fresh grandeur of God pervading Nature and the world. In spite of all being "seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil", wearing "man's smudge" and sharing "man's smell". One feels oneself at once in the presence of a developed spiritual being, a soul lit into God-awareness.
In all of his poetry, Hopkins realizes a rich synthesis between spirit and matter, namely the subtle fact of spirit expressing itself richly through all natural objects.

But all of Hopkins's poetry is not encompassed in rapturous songs in praise of Nature. As a Jesuit priest, the vow of obedience to superiors taken by him dictated that he be sent to Ireland to teach Greek at University College, Dublin. As far as his vocation went, he was a success in Dublin, for he had the particular combination of profound scholarship and affectionate sympathy for the young which makes for abiding popularity in a teacher. (Though he was odd, some thought him even mad, his manner was most winning - to illustrate practically Hector being dragged away by Achilles, he himself dragged one of his astounded pupils by the heel to and fro in the lecture-hall!) But within himself, Hopkins was most unhappy in Ireland; he would have preferred to live in England, in the English scene he loved so much and by which he had been so inspired in the writing of his journals and poetry. In a letter to Bridges dated September 1, 1885, he wrote, "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 no way — nor with my work, alas! — but so it must be.

The "world" plunged Hopkins continually into conflict-ridden situations, while he dreamed of an inner unity of being.

The sonnets that closely follow the letter strike a note of doubt and anguish unheard in his poems of Nature. In the sequence is an intensity and urgency of utterance, a naked revelation of a crucial spiritual insurrection. The God of Hopkins here, as with Herbert, is his Friend as well as his Afflictor; it is by "God's most deep decree" that he is tasting such bitterness. He passes through some of the most terrible periods of what has been called "The flights of God". An especially sensitive spiritual being has to face moments when, even in the midst of the spiritual awakening, anguish arising out of some "divine despair" does overwhelm one's being. The "dark" sonnets clearly reveal how Hopkins's spiritual being had to bear with some hard blows of his priestly life. However, what stands out as most remarkable is that he stood and understood these tests well, and his faith in the Divine Grace and Bounty remained unshaken:
"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 long 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.

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.

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."

(I wake and feel the fell of dark....)

Besides the jading of his creative aesthetic powers, we may also rightly assume that his sexual impulses were thwarted. In his later writing, whether they
are the Sonnets of Desolation, or letters to his friends, Hopkins's references to his sterility, openly in sexual terminology, stand out clearly. He repeatedly calls himself a "eunuch", unable to "beget", and we are made aware of the suppressed sexual longings within the sensitive Hopkins. The "terrible" sonnets with all their passion and intensity are not totally erotic, but certainly not free from that suggestion either.

The restless, agitated conversational intimacy as well as the simplicity with which these lines are addressed to himself, his inward, tormented self, the spoken speech rhythm used, the avoidance of any heightening, colourful images and the dependence upon the stark suggestiveness of bare, epithet-free words, the humility of a priests' attitude towards "God's most deep decree" which has compelled him to taste bitterness, the poignant complaint against his Lord which is but

"cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away"

- all these contribute to the verbal as well as emotional organisation of the poem as a fervent prayer to the Divine. The emotional despair of the poet does
not, however, completely befog his understanding, for inspite of the hours and years, indeed a whole lifetime of the

"fell of dark" upon him, he knows that

"............. my taste was me;

Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours......."

In the upsurge of the spiritual intimacy and warmth within himself, a knowledge of the self makes him look at his own anguish less personally: "I see the lost are like this". There is a fine evolution of thought and emotion in the poem as it moves from octave to sestet. This means that the conscious creative being in Hopkins is in full control of his vital self which is in a mood of anguished complaint. The sonnet form used by the poet is itself a proof of the conscious control he exercises over himself, his experience as well as the expression of it. Yet the poem has all the spontaneity, fervour and pangs of despair scourging an aspiring soul.

One may recall a special spiritual affinity between Job, the Old Testament prophet, and Hopkins
the priest-poet. Both share the glory of God in Nature; both share a joy and delight in the world around us; and both share the darkness, pain and dereliction that was so inherent in their lives. Like Job too, although in fact modelled on Jeremiah, Hopkins cries out:

"Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend with thee, but, sir, so what I plead is just".

Like Job, Hopkins's acceptance was a questioning acceptance. Like Job, his faith never faltered in adversity. As with Job, God seemed to speak to him out of the whirlwind. But what Job could never know but only hope for, Hopkins actually experienced: the comfort of resurrection in the midst of darkness and death.

Out of the opposition, then, between agreement and disagreement, the tension between faith and doubt, was born this sonnet-sequence, "terrible" in its beauty. The eternal conflict between good and evil, form and disorder, is comprehended by the poet in all its poignancy and apparent futility. But in the final analysis, the vision of Hopkins beholds not merely the dichotomy but also the final achievement, and hymns the praise of the Ordainer of all order.
with unswerving and undying faith.

There is no doubt that Hopkins, though not without frustration and struggle, achieved this faith at last. On June 8, 1889, at the age of forty-five, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit priest and poet, great as both, succumbed to an attack of typhoid fever. He had been reconciled to his parents; regrets, disappointments were of no consequence at such a time. He was content simply to die, content to have strived towards perfection, patiently, unflinchingly to the last. In the midst of the approaching death of his years spent in Ireland, Hopkins knew a higher life, life through his Saviour in whom he lived and died. And so "away grief gasping". His epitaph might have been, in his own words:

"Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire,
leave but ash;
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poer potsherd, patch matchwood immortal diamond,

Is immortal diamond".

(That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire)

Hopkins's mode of expression in the last poems undergoes a complete change with the development of sensibility and the years. The early Hopkins, in his rapturous descriptions of nature was colourful and gorgeous, even flamboyant. There was a thick crowding of images of all kinds and colours, and words and phrases of rich abundance flew from his pen. In complete contrast, all this gives place to a pattern of utter simplicity, nakedness and barrenness resembling a humbled, chastened quietness. But for all the barrenness and colloquialism of expression in the later works, there is no diminution in the strength and fire of feeling and experience:—they are moving because they are so simple, spontaneous and charged with the native strength of the creative, constructive spiritual flame of an individual. Hence, what he had said in The Wreck of the Deutschland about the nature of the eternal almighty object of his poetic inspiration:
"Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a
winter and warm,
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung;
Hast thy dark descending and most art
merciful then"

became throughout his priestly life a continual, constantly living experience and he continued to bear and love the light and 'dark of his Lord, his scourge and mercy, "lightning and love".

III

In this work we survey both the poems of the 'Nature period' and the chain of the 'terrible' sonnets, "written in blood", during Hopkins's harrowing tenure as Professor of Greek at Dublin University. The text of the poems used for the analysis is the fourth edition of the Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by W. H. Garder, published by the Oxford University Press, London in, 1970.

As has been pointed out earlier, Hopkins has been immensely praised — as well as blamed — for his striking original technical innovations. That he
bequeathed to his successors a bold and vigorous instrument of poetical expression capable of producing some of the most surprisingly fresh, glowing and vibrant incantatory effects and satisfying the new needs which swept the twentieth century literary consciousness is true, but the fact remains that the source of his inspiration was elsewhere. It was not solely from his vital being, i.e. the usually recognized natural emotions and imaginative impulses, that he wrote. Hopkins himself said so significantly in his poem:

"Sweet fire the sire of my muse, my soul needs this;
I want the one rapture of an inspiration .........
The rise, the roll, the carol, the creation."

Hopkins found this "one rapture of an inspiration" within his own soul. The fullest appreciation of the poetry of the frail, meditative, eccentric Jesuit priest, can be made best when one takes into account that he was one of the truly great religious poets in English literature. He was one of those pure spirits who would have said with Pascal, "The zeal for the Lord hath eaten me up". In his earliest
piece written as a Jesuit he feels himself being mastered by his beloved God, and this results in his increasing mastery of spiritual, divine knowledge.

"Thou mastering me

God! giver of breath and bread;

World's strand, sway of the sea;

Lord of living and dead;

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me,

fastened me flesh,

And after it almost unmade, what with dread,

Thy doing and dost thou touch me afresh?

Over again I feel thy finger and find thee."

(The Wreck of the Deutschland)

Therefore, the prime aim of this work is to point out that from Hopkins's work, because "Over again" he could "feel thy finger and find thee", there flows an intensity of passion in whatever he sees, feels and translates into poetry. Further, this thesis aims at proving that 'Nature' and 'Spirit' need not necessarily be seen as opposing each other. In the work of a poet such as Hopkins, who, it must be remembered, was also ordained into the Society of Jesus, the two terms may be seen to be giving rise to each other. In the former part of this analysis we deal with the poet -
priest's fully fresh, spontaneous and totally joyous responsiveness to the physical manifestations of Mother Earth. Yet, and this is the vital factor, these ecstatic exultations are occasion for speculation and meditation upon the wonder and majesty of the Creator.

In the latter part, it will be shown that for Hopkins, Christ is the acknowledged pivot around Whom the whole created world revolves. Here the poet's vital sensuousness, as well as his suffering are but the expression of his inner psychic being which enrich and deepen his complex spiritual personality. Thus, the world of matter and the world of spirit are not in irreconcilable struggle in Hopkins's being: They are, on the contrary, a fulfilment of each other, leading to the eternal belief in Christ-awareness: Christ was, Christ is, and Christ ever shall be.

NOTES


10. As kingfishers catch fire .........

11. The Wreck of the Deutschland