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The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Volume I: Correspondence 1852–1881.

Volume II: Correspondence 1882–1889. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

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After more than half a century, a new edition of the letters by and to Gerard Manley Hopkins is finally available in two generous volumes. It is also the first time Hopkins's correspondence has been made available in strictly chronological order, so that it is possible to get a sense of who Hopkins was writing to and what others were writing back to him from the early 1860s, when he was living with his large family at Oak Hill, Hampstead, until his death in 1889 in Dublin at the age of forty-four.

Even as late as 2008, when I was completing my biography of Hopkins, I still had to rely on the three orange-tan volumes published in 1955 and 1956: Claude Colleer Abbott's *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, the slimmer volume of *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, both books first published twenty years earlier and revised for the 1955 edition, and then—a year later—*Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*, which had first been published eighteen years earlier, but had been revised and enlarged with the discovery of new letters.

Further Letters began with a collection of thirty-eight miscellaneous letters to high school and college friends and associates, his mentor and model, John Henry Newman, and a few letters to fellow Jesuits. This section was followed by eighty letters to his family, the bulk of them to his mother, some forty-two letters to Alexander Mowbray Baillie, whom he had known at Oxford and who later became a London lawyer and whom Hopkins consulted for his knowledge of Egyptology, and—finally—a series of almost sixty letters between Hopkins and the English Catholic poet, Coventry Patmore, written between August 1883 and May 1888. For a biographer, especially, the three volumes meant continually jumping back and forth, and finally having to scan (and edit) the contents in order to create something like a reliable thirty-year timeline of how Hopkins's life and interests evolved, along with attempting to place his journal entries, sermons, spiritual reflections and the development of his poetry in context. And then, of course, there was the problem that all three of these volumes had long been out of print.

For years I waited for the new edition of correspondence—so long in preparation—to become available. I remember all (or most) of the editors of the series gathering at various Hopkins conferences at Oxford or in Dublin to discuss various issues dealing with the publication of the *Collected Works*, and

I am still waiting—as a boy waits for Christmas—for the other volumes in the series to be published. Eventually, there will be eight in all, of which—as of the writing of this review—three have now been published. The first was volume IV, Hopkins's *Oxford Essays and Notes*, edited by the indefatigable Lesley Higgins, and published back in 2006, early enough that I was able to use it in writing my biography. And sometime this spring (of 2014) volume VII, the *Dublin Notebook* (the black book Hopkins kept while he was teaching the classics at University College Dublin in the mid-1880s, and which contains his translation of Cicero's *On Duty*, notes on Pindar, and the text of what he called the longest sonnet ever written—*Spelt from Sybil's Leaves*—along with grades, reflections, and other scraps worthy of intense scrutiny) will at last be released. This particular volume of some 200 pages has also been edited by Higgins, along with Michael F. Suarez, S.J. But it will still be several years before all eight volumes are finally available: so enormous has this eminently worthy project proven. But then, for this reviewer at least, all of the letters, every scrap, every footnote, is like one more message from a dear, long lost friend.

And what a resource we now have available in the new two-volume correspondence: everything arranged chronologically, along with some forty-three letters, all discovered since 1956, including a few discovered by the present editors. Many of these additional letters were long ago printed in various journals—notably *The Hopkins Quarterly*—as these scattered limbs of Osiris were discovered by Joseph Feeney, S.J., as he researched the Bischoff Collection at Gonzaga, but now they too form part of the unfolding epistolary narrative available for the first time.

But there is so much more in these two volumes as well: a chronology, a thirty-five-page introduction which gives us a rich and nuanced insight into Hopkins, Bridges, Dixon, Patmore, Mowbray Baillie, and Hopkins's own family, as well as an intriguing section on letters to and from Hopkins which were lost or destroyed, and a *Biographical Register of Major Correspondents and Persons* frequently cited in the letters. These include William Addis, a friend who also converted to Catholicism and became a priest but, a year before Hopkins's death, left the priesthood and renounced his faith, to Hopkins's deep disappointment; his fellow Jesuits, Peter Gallwey, Francis Goldie, and Francis Bacon; Baillie, Edward Bond, Ernest Hartley Coleridge, the grandson of Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Richard Watson Dixon, Digby Dolben, the handsome, wispy cousin of Robert Bridges, who drowned at nineteen, and to whom the young Hopkins felt attracted; William Garrett, Martin Geldart (another victim of drowning, and whom Hopkins was convinced had died a suicide); the Gurney brothers, Frederick, Alfred, and Edmund; John Henry Newman (who brought Hopkins into the Catholic faith through his writings and his personal contacts with

Hopkins); Edward Pusey, the Tractarian, who struggled to find a middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and worked alongside Newman until Newman converted; the Irish poet, Kate Tynan, part of the circle of the young William Butler Yeats; Patmore, Baron Francis de Paravacini of Balliol College, and his wife, Frances, who fondly remembered dear Fr. Hopkins after his death in a letter to his mother; William Urquhart, Alexander Wood, and Harry Wooldridge, who—at Bridges's suggestion—painted Hopkins's portrait in 1886 based on the black and white photograph taken of him at Oxford on the eve of his departure from that city of bells in 1879.

There is also the Hopkins clan—grandmother Ann, grandpapa John Simm Smith, aunts Annie and Katie, his parents, Manley and Kate, as well as his brothers Cyril, Arthur, Lionel and Everard, and his sisters Millicent, Kate, and Grace, most of whom lived on long after Gerard himself. Lionel—the longest living—died in his ninety-eighth year in 1952, double his brother's age. And finally, there is Robert Bridges himself, without whose mediation in preserving so many of his letters and poems would probably have resulted in Hopkins's entering the hallowed halls of oblivion long ago.

And then there are those letters which actually did enter that oblivion years ago. As the present editors point out, the loss of Hopkins's letters began with Hopkins himself, who made a habit of destroying many of them over some perceived scruple or dissatisfaction rather than posting them. "I could not get that letter finished," he wrote Bridges on July 23, 1877, "and have made up my mind not to go on with it." And this at the time when he was composing his brilliant nature sonnets in the grace-filled months leading up to his ordination. Or the letter he began to Baillie in the spring of 1880 while assigned to pastoral duties in the Irish working class slums of Liverpool and—while sitting in the confessional box—took the occasion to confess that he had decided to suppress what he had written about the numbing conditions of working among the poor, the filthy, and the drunkards—work that was killing him—but had decided to destroy the letter only after reading what he had written several times over, first with his head "on one side, then on the other."

Five years later, during his short Easter holidays in April 1885 and now exiled to Dublin, he wrote Coventry Patmore that some time back he had written Patmore "a longish letter, but repented of it, as I often do, and did not send it." And this at a time when he was undergoing that dark night of the soul which—paradoxically, as with John of the Cross—gave rise to a number of his bloodstained dark and terrifying sonnets, including—most likely—"I wake and feel the fell of dark not day," "No worse, there is none," and "Carrion Comfort." And, in the letters themselves, he admits to composing other letters, some of them lengthy, but then never sending them. Or beginning a letter and

then using the paper on which the letter was begun to compose a few scraps of poetry.

We know too that Bridges (who eventually became England's Poet Laureate) destroyed virtually every letter he ever wrote to Hopkins over a period of some twenty-four years. When these letters finally came into his possession following Hopkins's death he burned them because he wanted no biography written about him, though many of his letters to others did survive and were subsequently published. But he thought Hopkins's letters too important to meet the same fate and so he was careful to preserve them, though he did occasionally cut out names and sections of letters from Hopkins which he regarded as too personal, especially where Hopkins related something about his own family.

We know—alas—that letters written to Hopkins as he lay dying were read and then destroyed by his mother as being of a private nature. And we also know that Hopkins destroyed a number of letters, especially from his family, as he went over his personal effects in his sparse quarters at 85 St. Stephen's Green in Dublin.

Are there still other letters somewhere out there that will be discovered in the decades to come? Possibly a few. In the meantime, the editors have been careful to give us every letter and every scrap of a letter to and from Hopkins that have been assembled in the 125 years since his death.

What the editors have done in presenting this invaluable correspondence is an attempt "to represent in print as accurately as we can the letters as we have them." This includes all "crossings out and alterations," because—as they explain—these "help to reveal Hopkins's hesitations, ponderings, second thoughts, and difficulties" in expressing what he had to say at the moment of writing down his thoughts. This sometimes means being witness to the stammering and indecisions we all make in composing our thoughts, but—as with reading successive drafts of a poem—it also allows us to capture Hopkins's thought processes as they unfold, or as he edits himself. Also, to distinguish between letters to and from Hopkins, the editors have used italics for the first, and roman type for the latter. Furthermore, considering the international readership of Hopkins, the editors have annotated anything that would appear to warrant a footnote.

There is also a list of every letter included in the two volumes, arranged chronologically, beginning with the letter written by his aunt or his nurse from the Grove sometime in 1852, when Hopkins was seven or eight, followed by a tongue-in-cheek letter written in May of 1861, when Hopkins was sixteen, to a Dr. Müncke, a teacher of French and German at Highgate, where Hopkins was a student. It concerns an aesthetic and moral dilemma raised by Goethe in his *Faust* created by Mephistopheles not offering Faust more of the higher

pleasures and “subtle charms” afforded by poetry, music, and art. In this question alone we see the older Hopkins peeking through the young man.

The correspondence proliferates between 1866 and 1868, the years from Hopkins’s conversion at the age of twenty-two to his entry into the Society of Jesus when he was twenty-four. Then the letters taper off as he undergoes his training as a novice at Manresa House in Roehampton outside London, then—as he continues the *Ratio studiorum*—as a scholastic at St. Mary’s, Stonyhurst, and finally as a theology student at St. Beuno’s in North Wales. But it is only after his ordination as a priest in September 1877 that his extant correspondence finally flourishes.

The major recipients of his letters in these last dozen years of his life are his closest friend, Robert Bridges, to whom he wrote most and most openly, then his former teacher and—like himself—underrated poet, Richard Watson Dixon, and—beginning in August 1883, when he was teaching at Stonyhurst—the poet, Coventry Patmore, who, try as he might, admitted that he never could understand the poems his Jesuit friend had sent him. But then too there is Mowbray Baillie, his friend from his Oxford days, who became a London barrister, and who, though their paths did not often cross, reciprocated his deep sense of friendship in the letters they shared. In their 1886 exchange of letters (and Hopkins’s barraging Baillie with postcards about Egyptian cuneiform and the relationship of the Greek gods to the Egyptian gods and how that might be ascertained through their linguistic affinities), what really comes across is Hopkins’s deep need in his existential loneliness to hear his old Oxford friend’s honest and forthright voice once again.

For that is what one looks for and finds in these letters again and again: how important family and friends were to Hopkins, bonds formed while Hopkins was still at home or at Oxford, but which are also filled with his youthful self-assurance and ego. Friendships, deep friendships, which became all the deeper as Hopkins grew older and began to understand at a far greater level the sacramental gift of friendship from his perspective as a Jesuit and as a priest: the kind of thing one finds in a poem like “Felix Randal,” when he confesses that, tending to one of his Liverpool parishioners who had died of cancer in his thirties, if his “tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,” the man’s tears had likewise touched his heart, leaving him to mourn Felix’s passing. It is that sort of thing one finds over and over in these letters, as he worries about the health of Bridges or Baillie or a member of his family, praying for them, wanting to be there for them, to comfort them.

But let us not forget the wonderful sense of humor in these letters: the jokes, the awful Jesuit puns, the gentlemanly wit, the raucous, boisterous humor which he allows sometimes to escape. Here he is, in a letter to Bridges written

in November 1887, remembering a drunken organist when he was saying Mass at St. Xavier's in Liverpool. "I have now twice had the experience," he writes, "it is distressing, alarming, agitating, but above all delicately comic; it brings together the bestial and the angelic elements in such a quaint entanglement as nothing else can; for 'musicians' never play such clever descants as under those circumstances and in an instant everybody is thrilled with the insight of the situation" (904).

Or the prank he pulled on an Irish friend who had tried to pull one over on him, and whom he warned he would return the favor. "Accordingly," he wrote Bridges in October 1888, he had written him a letter from "'the son of a respected livery and bait stables in Parteen sometimes employed by your Honoured Father' asking for an introduction to one of the Dublin newspapers 'as reporter, occasional paragraphs [sic] or sporting intelligence.' The sentence I think best of was one in which I said I (or he) could 'give any color which may be desired to reports of speeches or Proceedings subject to the Interests of truth which must always be the paramount [sic] consideration.' It succeeded beyond my wildest hopes and action is going to be taken. The letter is even to be printed in the *Nation* as a warning to those who are continually applying in the like strain" (969—970), though he added that he would have to step in and confess what he had done as a practical joke by way of his contribution to Irish political journalism at the moment.

Over and over Hopkins displays his delicious and sometimes outrageous humor, going so far as to sometimes anger the person to whom he is writing, as he did in his last months in telling Bridges to stop publishing in limited editions of twenty-five or so and to get his poems out to as wide an audience as he could because the poems deserved a larger readership. In turn the offended Bridges burned two of the last letters Hopkins ever wrote him. Hopkins, already ill with typhoid and wanting to mend matters as quickly as possible, apologized, adding that he now had it "down in my tablets that a man may joke and joke and be offensive...tho' goodness knows the 'joke' that gave most offense [on how not to gain fame] was harmless enough and even kind." Then he added, as friend to friend, "You I treated to the same sort of irony as I do myself," though of course it was true that it made "all the world of difference whose hand administers" (990).

That was written in late April, 1889. As it turned out, Professor Francis de Paravicini of Balliol had been in Dublin at Easter, which that year fell on April 21. He had seen Hopkins once or twice, and they had spent an evening together. But, when Paravicini returned home, he told his wife, Frances, that Hopkins had looked "very ill" and seemed "much depressed," enough so that they had called upon the English provincial to recall Hopkins to England, at least for a

spell. Alas, it was too late, and Hopkins died on June 8. "He was so lovable," Frances wrote Hopkins's mother six days later, "so singularly gifted—&, in his saintliness, so apart from, and so different to, all others. Only that his beautifully gentle and generous nature made him one with his friends; and led us to love & to value him—feeling that our lives were better, & the world richer, because of him" (1003). How deeply those words must resonate for thousands upon thousands of Hopkins readers, who can only know him now through his poems, his journals and notes, and these—his letters.

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