


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