
BOOKS & WRITERS

A Housecarl in Loyola's Menie

By Hilary Corke

THERE is a current myth, still not scotched, about the publishing of Gerard Manley Hopkins, nor will the present completion* of his "Collected Works" go far to scotch it. This myth (glib and ungenerous even as these things go) is to the effect that Robert Bridges held on to the manuscripts of the poems for thirty years without at all realising their quality; and that, when he was finally persuaded to publish, he seized the opportunity to pen a long patronising and impercipient introduction which did the worst for the poems that it could. It is a view that will stand up to neither common-sense nor hard fact, and yet one hears it sufficiently often. This is not the place for a refutation; but a brief unargued rehearsal of a few of the relevant considerations may serve to remind the reader. Thus, when Hopkins died in 1889, so far from being the renowned Laureate-figure Bridges had not published publicly a single volume of verse, and his sponsorship would have carried no weight whatever. Again, though critical in part—and what craftsman was ever wholly uncritical of the work of another?—Bridges was responsible for the saving of the manuscripts and the fact that to-day we (apparently) have every line of verse that the mature poet ever wrote. Bridges was perfectly aware that his friend was going to be a classic; he carefully collected every letter, every scrap of writing, remarking "these will all be needed later." Then again Bridges did not "sit on" the manuscripts. He managed to get poems included in a number of anthologies, and the overwhelming rounds of silence with which they were greeted showed only too clearly the

fate that would have awaited them as a collection. It was only in 1915, when he published his own anthology, *The Spirit of Man*, and was able to include a properly representative selection, that public interest was first faintly stirred. Publication of the *Poems* soon followed, in 1917, and if the public had only been waiting for this moment they certainly showed no over-eagerness when it came. The tiny edition of 750 took ten years to sell, settling down after the first few months to a steady rate of thirty copies a year. And suppose Hopkins had lived, and he and Bridges had grown old together? It is morally certain that then at any rate no question of publication would have ever arisen; the poet's own tragically equivocal attitude to his work would have seen to that. It is possible to disagree with Bridges' decision (even if a volume in 1889 had found only one reader, that reader might nevertheless have been precisely he who most needed it); but not to disrespect it. It is quite probable that the course he pursued was the very best one possible for the safeguarding of Hopkins' reputation; just as it is equally probably that one (and this he would have cared for not at all) which was the unluckiest for his own.

As far as the present volumes are concerned the myth would remark that Hopkins' Notebooks were first, and last, published in 1937 and have since become so downright out-of-print as to rank as almost legendary. Just as an earlier generation was denied the poetry for twenty-nine years, so a generation to-day has been denied the prose (apart from rare copies in libraries and a good but necessarily insufficient volume of selections) for twenty-two. It is true, and it is regrettable, but it is not without due cause. In the first place the volume of 1937 was itself only a selection, and it was felt that the time had come for everything—diaries, journals, lecture-notes, sermons—to be published *in toto*. Then in 1947

* *The Journals and Papers of G. M. H.* Edited by HUMPHREY HOUSE. Completed by GRAHAM STOREY. Oxford University Press. 63s.

The Sermons and Devotional Writings of G. M. H. Edited by CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN, S.J. Oxford University Press. 42s.

three new volumes of the "Journal" were discovered at Farm Street, entailing revision of plans and much extra work. Next, incredible as it might seem, Hopkins' last surviving brother lived on until 1952 (he was ninety-seven), and only then was it possible to examine the family papers for new material. And finally, with his work only three-quarters done, Humphrey House himself died suddenly in 1955, leaving it to Mr. Graham Storey to complete the arduous work.

And arduous it must most certainly have been. In all his editors, from Bridges onwards, Hopkins has been extraordinarily fortunate, and the annotation, both in *The Journals* and *The Sermons*, is of an exemplary thoroughness behind which must lie untold hours of patient and ingenious enquiry. The matter undoubtedly required it. The journals and diaries in particular are replete with passages like

July 9. Fine. At French and Belgian exhibition. Interesting to remember Daubigny's suggestive and *sombre* landscape (a view of Villerville and a river-scene) not unlike Crome. Compare, too, Tissot's *Spring* (curiously like in motive) with Millais', and Baron Leys and Lagye his pupil with our mediævalists. All their colouring "sleepy."

This is of biographical, not literary importance, but clearly, if it is to be printed, then it will require half a dozen notes. It gets them. There are indeed of necessity so many notes that one might well use *The Journals* as a supplementary reference-book of the late mid-Victorian period: but they are all "honest" notes—that is to say, elucidations of fact not airings of opinion. Fr. Christopher Devlin's editing of *The Sermons* is necessarily less mechanical but especially valuable in that it is the informed and humane commentary of one Jesuit upon the religious thinking of another.

Now that the whole (or almost the whole) of Hopkins is in print, it is the right moment to take a general survey of what he has left. Six volumes hold it: *The Poems*; *The Letters to Bridges*; *The Dixon Correspondence*; *The Further Letters* (of which the second edition includes the family letters discovered in 1952); and the two volumes under review. These last are essentially a greatly expanded re-issue, in two volumes, of the old *Notebooks* of 1937. In *The Journals* we have first the "Early Diaries," now printed complete (with a single serious exception, which I note later): these are mostly of only personal interest, but there are some five hundred lines of previously unprinted early verse—most of it, however, no more than moderate. Then there are the "Journals," including the three new volumes, about which something

should now be said. These are earlier than the volumes previously known and of less than half their length. If we did not already know the later parts, they would be considered remarkable; as it is, they must be confessed to be less realised, less fine. They include the same meticulous descriptions of natural objects in which Ruskin is their writer's only rival; but the tools are not yet at command, the terms are dark and mistakable.

I have now found the law of the oak leaves. It is of platter-shaped stars altogether; the leaves lie close like pages, packed, and as if drawn tightly to. But these old packs, which lie at the end of their twigs, throw out now long shoots alternately and slimly leaved, looking like bright keys. All the sprays but markedly these ones shape out and as it were embrace greater circles and the dip and toss of these make the wider and less organic articulations of the tree.

That is obviously the product of a splendid mind. But to one reader at least it conveys more shadow than light. There is nothing here in these earlier volumes to equal the later description of the criss-crossing of the waves at Douglas or the miraculously sustained passages on the bluebells

in falls of sky-colour washing the brows and slacks of the ground with vein-blue.

Finally, there are "Lecture Notes," "Undergraduate Essays" (some written for Pater), a long section on Hopkins' drawings with a very generous selection of reproductions, and a similar section on his music with all his extant settings printed.

There is, as I hinted, one omission; and I believe it is a serious one. Mr. Storey has decided, "after discussion with interested people and other lovers of Hopkins," to print none of the "notes of daily self-examination" in the Early Diaries. More food for the myth. Surely, in the long run, this decision is not defensible. If we are interested in Hopkins as a poet, we are interested only a little less in him as a person. In his relations with his friends, still more in his tortured relations with himself, Hopkins stands as a very key to one of the mysteries, that classic combination of the puritan and the sensual which we find also in Milton but in purer as well as in more modern form in the 19th-century poet. It is right that we should wish to know as much as possible about these things and right therefore that nothing should be withheld from us. As it is, Hopkins curiously denies us himself in his journals; and the only two extracts from the confession-notes here printed ("Nothing read, not very culpable perhaps, but chiefly through going to Bridges in the evening;" and "Foolish gossipy

way with Bridges") tell us plainly at once what we were only free to suspect before: that Bridges represented for him the principle of temptation, irreligion, was the Devil's advocate if not the Devil. The coexistence of this religious repulsion and the tremendous poetic attraction accounts for the strange tension always underlying the Bridges-Hopkins' friendship—a tension proceeding as much from Bridges as the other, for no man likes to be regarded by his best friend as dogmatically doomed to damnation. (One must always bitterly regret, incidentally, Bridges' destruction of his own side of the correspondence; there, and there only, was the disservice that he did to his friend.) From everything that we know of Hopkins, too, we may be utterly certain that nothing in these notes could be to his discredit—it may be remembered, for instance, that we have the similar confessions of Johnson and think all the better of him for them. Publication will certainly take place sooner or later: it would have been better now.

OF *The Sermons* I feel less able, or qualified, to speak. Of many of the beliefs on which such a book is founded I find *what* is believed horrible and *that* it is believed unbelievable. Hopkins takes hell-pains literally, for instance, and lingers upon them with 17th-century concern:

In that flame then see them now. They have no bodies there, flame is the body that they wear. You have seen a glass-blower breathe on a flame; at once it darts out into a jet taper as a lance-head and as piercing too. The breath of God's anger first kindled the fire of hell; it strikes with a distinct indignation still on each distinct unforgiven sin; the wretched soul starts into a flame that has some frightful and fantastic likeness to its sin; so sinners are themselves the flames of hell.

If we found it in the works of Donne or of Taylor we should (divided by comfortable centuries) admire with open heart. Coming from the 19th century it gives us pause. One must add that it also gave Hopkins' superiors pause. He was (poor man) "in a manner suspended" for using the word *sweetheart* in a sermon in cleanly Liverpool. And what, one wonders, would an audience of honest mechanics have made of

We shall die in these bodies. I see you living before me, with the mind's eye, brethren, I see your corpses: those same bodies that sit there before me are rows of corpses that will be. And I that speak to you, you hear and see me, you see me breathe and move: this breathing body is my corpse and I am living in my tomb. This is one thing certain of your place of death; you are there now, you sit within your corpses; look no farther: there where you are you will die.

Special pleading, but magnificent special pleading—even though one is sometimes reminded of the verdict of his colleague Br. Marchant: "He was not always judicious in his sermons; once he compared the Church to a milk cow and the tits to the seven sacraments. But great genius must be excused eccentricities." One thing at any rate emerges as one reads through these sermons, and the long annotations on Loyola's *Exercises*, and the notes made in retreat: Hopkins is a whole man. It is not possible, though those who do not share his tenets may try hard to achieve it, it is not possible to divide off the poet from the religious and simply to close one's eyes and mind on what the religious believes and says. If, as one may feel, the result is that the man "dwindles into a Jesuit," that is a risk to be taken.

OVER the past month I have read more or less the whole of Hopkins, a task which the splendid typography and editing of the Oxford volumes has made all the more pleasant; and I suppose I might be tempted to deliver myself of some sort of general appraisal. But no, thank you, no, no. Everyone nowadays, I imagine (with the exception of a few Bourne-mouth voters, *Times* reviewers, Hairy Ains, etc.), is sufficiently convinced of the nature and quality of Hopkins' genius as a poet. Let me conclude rather with a few scattered observations (of which my opening paragraph may stand as the first):

2. If we did not have the poems, we could only think of Hopkins as a brilliant but hopeless amateur. Evidence of his false starts in all directions litters almost every page of both letters and journal. There are his philological speculations, ingenious enough but quite uninstructed, witnesses indeed of wasted hours. His drawings are meticulous and deeply pondered but in the event what may be found in many a Victorian album. His music, on which he lavished most of the rare leisure of his latter years, is mildly adventurous but in effect so minor an achievement that one can only weep for the major poems that were abandoned in favour of it. Even much of his thought may be called "amateurish"—the curiously naive quality of his patriotism, for instance. The whole thing is a tragically common phenomenon, the naturally artistic temperament lacking the art by which it might be expressed—the frustration, the dogmatism, the occasional childish glee. And yet when we turn to the poems all falls suddenly into place. The philology becomes

*Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade.*

The anxiously accurate "sketch from nature" becomes

*some branchy bunchy bushybowered wood,
Southern dene or Lancashire clough or Devon
cleave,
That leans along the loins of hills, where a candy-
coloured, where a gluegold-brown
Marbled river, boisterously beautiful, between
Roots and rocks is danced and dandled, all in froth
and water-blowballs, down.*

And the sense of musical rhythm and counter-point underlies every line he wrote.

3. His abstention from poetry (which he *must* have known secretly was his one true worldly good) is a deliberate attempt at unworldly perfection. This is evident from a key passage (in the *Loyola* notes) on "the great sacrifice"—a passage acutely marked down by Fr. Devlin:

[Christ] could not but see what he was, God, but he would see it as if he did not see it, and be as if he were not and instead of snatching at once what all the time was his, or was himself, he emptied or exhausted himself so far as that was possible, of godhead. . . . It is this holding of himself back, and not snatching at the truest and highest good, the good that was his right, nay his possession from a past eternity in his other nature,

his own being and self, which seems to me the root of all his holiness and *the imitation of this the root of all moral good in other men.* [my italics.]

4. Hopkins' goodness, though utterly genuine, was nevertheless of the sort that tends to incommode other people—his spiritual "duty to himself" took all precedence over his social duty to his fellows. Thus he cannot stay with his beloved correspondent Dixon because he feels he will be unable to say Mass in the house of a Protestant Canon. Add to this his opinionatedness, his serene conviction of being invariably in the right of it, and the character that emerges is distinctly prickly and even unattractive in certain aspects. One may well shudder at the terrible coldness of his letters to his father when the latter attempted to dissuade him from his conversion—all head and no heart. Poor sane, level-headed, mature Bridges had a thoroughly difficult time when Gerard decided that he ought to be converted too, to Christianity if not to Catholicism; of course it did not enter his head (indeed a *principiis* could not enter his head) that Bridges' clear and carefully thought-out humanism might be just as valid a creed as his own.

Different friends reacted differently to the spiritual and intellectual arrogance of the man. Canon Dixon, a sweetly good soul if ever there was one, took him at his face value: so did Patmore, a woolly man, exclaiming in some trepidation at "the *authority* of his goodness." Bridges saw through it to the prisoner crying for help from within and was gentle accordingly. Not so the charming old Irish Professor of Music to whom Hopkins had taken a composition for criticism:

DARLING PADRE! . . . Indeed I *cannot* follow you through your maze of words in your letter of last week. I saw, ere we had conversed ten minutes on our first meeting, that you are one of those special pleaders who never believe yourself wrong in any respect. You always excuse yourself for anything I object to in your writing or music so I think it a pity to disturb you in your happy dreams of perfect ability—nearly everything in your music was wrong—but you will not admit that to be the case—What does it matter? It will all be the same 100 Years hence.

Coming upon this at the end of so much high-seriousness upon the flying trapeze of conscience, we let out a great *Oof!* of laughter.

Robert Bridges should have the last word. In his life-time Hopkins had done all the preaching, all the pleading. But half a century later, Gerard's poems now some ten years safely out in print, the old man wrote in that astonishing production of his 'eighties:

*When the young poet my companion in study
and friend of my heart refused a peach at my hands,
he being then a housecarl in Loyola's menie,
'twas that he fear'd the savor of it, and when he
waived*

*his scruple to my banter, 'twas to avoid offence.
But I, upon thatt day which after fifty years
is near as yesterday, was no stranger to fear
of pleasure, but had grown fearful of thatt fear.*

Hilary Corke

Portrait of Joyce as Friend

Our Friend James Joyce. By MARY and PADRAIC COLUM. Gollancz. 16s.

THIS is certainly the *nicest* memoir of Joyce that has yet been written, for he was a man, whatever else may be said of him as a man, who aroused hostility as well as affection. More than twenty years ago I was taken round Gogarty's famous Dublin garden by its owner, and I remember how he would pause here and there to say: "And this was Yeats's favourite spot" or "A. E. and Synge had many an argument on this seat." But I, being young and impatiently single-minded, asked: "And where did Joyce sit?" Buck Mulligan's original lost his smile at once. "James Joyce was not a gentleman!" he muttered, and led us quickly indoors.

But he aroused no such feelings in the two delightful authors of this book. Neither of them is a subservient person, but each seems to have accepted without question that Joyce was one of those rare characters who have an indisputable right to make exceptional demands on their friends. Joyce had no high-falutin theory about the special privileges of genius; but he knew that he had a great work to be done and he thought it right that others should serve it with something of the devotion which he himself was giving to it. The Colums appear to have agreed with him. We can see, from their modest yet witty and clear-eyed account, that they must have been excellent friends; and they have given a further proof of their friendship by showing us aspects of Joyce's life and character which no one has shown us before.

We knew already about Joyce's pride and wit, his courage and his capacity for unconscious cruelty. We knew much less about his perpetual concern for the well-being of his friends, his courtliness and that curiously childlike and innocent quality which seems to have been possessed by so many of the greatest men. "Joyce spoke with dislike," Mrs. Colum tells us, "of the well-known official psychologists, but it did not take

much penetration to perceive how much he had been affected by them. He himself was a man of rather simple psychology, with simple reactions, but with a very complex mind and imagination..." I cannot remember to have read any sentence on Joyce's character more illuminating than this last one. At its worst this simplicity was that of a foolish child. "He had conceived," writes Padraic Colum, "the *idée fixe* that I knew the secret of the Dublin publisher's and printer's rejection of *Dubliners* and that there was some Church or State reason for my keeping my mouth closed." There was, of course, not a word of truth in this supposition, but Joyce believed it, against all the evidence of Colum's kindness and candour, up to the day of his death. On another occasion he had decided, quite wrongly again, that his good friend Sylvia Beach of the Shakespeare Head was making a huge profit on *Ulysses* and that the Joyce family was not getting its due. The following scene then occurred:

On Saint Patrick's Day Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier got together with Joyce's special friends to give him a grand dinner in a restaurant, each guest contributing to the expense. Joyce said he would order for himself, and what the waiter brought him was a dish of lentils. . . . I have come to think he was childishly showing he was "out" with Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier.

The other side of this curious aspect of Joyce is the kind of impregnable sincerity which he showed from one end of his life to the other. He was always himself alone and never made the slightest effort to appear, or to be, anything else. Here are a few illustrations of this quality, which mark Joyce out so signally from other famous writers of our time.

His aversion to aggressiveness, turbulence, violence of any kind was quite deeply felt. . . . He was not only dismayed at the thought of crime, he had no interest in it, and said he found this a handicap in writing *Work in Progress*; a book that dealt with the night-life of humanity should, he felt, have some reference to crime in it, but he could not bring himself to put any in.

He thinks it a waste of time to discuss what are called "ideas." I once asked him what a well-known sophisticated writer talks about when with him. "Ideas," Joyce said, and his tone suggested that he was not very much entertained by the conversation.

In spite of his having broken with the Catholic faith, Joyce had not, as far as I could know, any of what are called Bohemian qualities or unconventionalities, that is if one leaves out of account his occasional heavy drinking. He was scrupulously moral and ethically above reproach. In spite of his visits to Nighttown in his student