



Glory Be to God for Dappled Things

A Service of Praise, using the writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins

*by Don Friesen
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The Life and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins, regarded as a principal poet of 19th century England, was born in Stratford in July of 1844. He was educated at Oxford, where in 1866 he converted to Roman Catholicism, under the influence of John Henry Newman. Newman, apparently, had already facilitated several other Anglican “defections,” and in one such incident a certain Mrs. Arnold wrote to Newman, “Sir, you have now for the **second** time been the cause of my husband’s becoming a member of the Church of Rome and from the bottom of my heart I curse you for it.” Not content with this, she also threw a brick through the window of the church where her husband was being received.

Two years after his conversion, and against his parents’ wishes, Hopkins entered the Jesuit order, whereupon he **destroyed** any poetry he had already written. In 1877 Hopkins was ordained a Jesuit priest, and he then served as a parish priest and teacher in England and Scotland before becoming a professor of Greek at University College in Dublin (1884).

It was while a student of theology in northern Wales that Hopkins learned Welsh, and, inspired by the Welsh language and **its** poetry, he began to write again. One of his initial efforts was a poem entitled, “The Wreck of the Deutschland” (1875), a long religious poem about the heroic sacrifice of a group of German nuns who were crossing the North Sea to England when their boat sank in a storm. It’s a difficult, experimental poem, not much understood, and even his friends didn’t like it; wrote one of them, “I wish those nuns had stayed at home!” When Hopkins tried to submit it to a Jesuit magazine, it was rejected, but it got him writing again, and he went on to write more accessible poetry.

Hopkins’ years in Ireland were unhappy years. His delicate disposition was exacerbated by overwork and ill health, and he produced a series of poems known as the “terrible sonnets,” the first of which had the rather uncheery title of “Carrion Comfort” (c.1885).

Hopkins was, in his own lifetime, virtually unknown. His poems were read only by friends and fellow poets, and we have his poetry today only because it was collected and published by his friends some thirty years (1918) after his death. A second, complete, edition of his poetry appeared only in 1930, and it was only then that his work received due recognition and established its influence on 20th century English poetry.

Though I would not even pretend to understand poetry in general, and Hopkins’ poetry in particular, his poems **appeal** to me, for several reasons. Firstly, his poetry is explicitly **Christian**. His references to Christ are many. A student of his poetry calls Hopkins a Christian poet, “for whom faith is life, and art the voice and **instrument** of faith.” (Virginia Ridley Ellis, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Language of Mystery*)

Secondly, there is in Hopkins’ poetry an amazing tension between his intense response to the world of the **senses**, on the one hand, and on the other, the **ascetic** demands of his particular

religious vocation. Hopkins had long shown a tendency toward severity and asceticism. His health, both mental and physical, had always been delicate, and he was prone to digestive problems and severe depression. As a result he was often forbidden to join in Church fasts, to his disappointment. Said one of his superiors, "He is clever, well-trained, teaches well but has never succeeded well: his mind runs in eccentric ways."

In fact, in the last few years of his life, Hopkins sank into a bleak depression from which he was never to recover. He writes, "I began to enter on that course of loathing and hopelessness which I have so often felt before, which made me fear madness ... All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch." One of his poems expresses it well:

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

Hopkins died in Dublin in 1889, at the age of 44.

What I find touching and compelling is that despite, or perhaps **out** of these torments arose beautiful expressions of **praise** and **adoration**. Says another student of his poetry, "The ... basic structure that informs so many of his poems ... can be stated in the following form: true beauty, true life, true victory can only be achieved, as Christ has shown, by being bruised and crushed." (George P. Landow, "Allusion to the Bible, Imagery, and Structure in Hopkins's Poetry") Out of Hopkins' **own** bruised existence came the most exquisite sounds of words, like, for example, "Glory be to God for dappled things..." It is poetry to be **heard** — read aloud for optimum effect. It's probably best, upon first hearing, not to try to understand the poem, but simply let the musicality of the words and striking phrases wash over you. A few of his poems, then...

Pied Beauty

GLORY be to God for dappled things —
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

The May Magnificat

MAY is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due to season —

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
Why fasten that upon her,
With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight her?
Is it opportunist
And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
Question: What is Spring? —
Growth in every thing —

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all together;
Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
Forms and warms the life within;
And bird and blossom swell
In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
With that world of good,
Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind
With delight calls to mind
How she did in her stored
Magnify the Lord.

Well but there was more than this:
Spring's universal bliss
Much, had much to say
To offering Mary May.

When drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple
Bloom lights the orchard-apple
And thicket and thorp are merry
With silver-surfèd cherry

And azuring-over greybell makes
Wood banks and brakes wash wet like lakes
And magic cuckoocall
Caps, clears, and clinches all —

This ecstasy all through mothering earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's birth
To remember and exultation
In God who was her salvation.

Peace

WHEN will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut,
Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs?
When, when, Peace, will you, Peace? I'll not play hypocrite
To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes; but
That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure peace allows
Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it?

O surely, reaving Peace, my Lord should leave in lieu
Some good! And so he does leave Patience exquisite,
That plumes to Peace thereafter. And when Peace here does house
He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,
He comes to brood and sit.

Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice (excerpt)

THE dappled die-away
Cheek and wimpled lip,
The gold-wisp, the airy-grey
Eye, all in fellowship —
This, all this beauty blooming,
This, all this freshness fuming,
Give God while worth consuming.

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 reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared 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 bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

A Hero All The World Wants

*A Christmas Meditation** by Gerard Manley Hopkins preached in 1879, based on Luke 2:33*

I also invite you to hear a Christmas meditation delivered by Hopkins in 1879. It's a call to **praise**, but also a call to reflect upon the person of Jesus in order that we might become **like** him. In the words of one of his poems:

HOPE holds to Christ the mind's own mirror out
To take His lovely likeness more and more.
(From an unfinished poem)

This, then, his Christmas meditation:

St. Joseph, though he often carried our Lord Jesus Christ in his arms, and the Blessed Virgin, though she gave him birth and suckled him at her breast, though they seldom either of them had the Holy Child out of their sight and knew more of him far than all others, yet when they heard what Simeon, a stranger, had to say of him, the Scripture says they wondered. Not indeed that they were surprised and had thought to hear something different, but that they gave their minds up to **admiration** and dwelt with reverent wonder on all God's doings about the child.

It is a good thing to hear about our Lord Jesus Christ, to **think** of him and **dwell** upon him; it did good to these two holiest people, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. It cannot but do good to **us**, who have more need of holiness, and who easily forget Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our **hero**, a hero all the world wants. You know how books are written that put one man before the reader and shew him off handsome for the most part and brag and call him, My hero, or Our hero. Soldiers make a hero of a great general; a party, of its leader; a nation, of any great man that brings it glory, whether king, warrior, statesman, thinker, poet, or whatever it shall be. But Christ, he is **the** hero. He too is the hero of books — of the divine Gospels. He is a warrior and a conqueror, of whom it is written he went forth conquering and to conquer. He is a king, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. He is a statesman, that drew up the New Testament in his blood. He is a thinker, that taught us divine mysteries. He is an orator and poet, as in his eloquent words and parables appears.

He is all the world's hero, the desire of nations. But besides, he is the hero of **single souls**; his mother's hero, because he was, as the angel told her, great and the son of the Most High, and all that he did and said she laid up in her heart. He is the true love and the bridegroom of our souls: the virgins and martyrs follow him; all his servants take up their cross and follow him. And those even that do not follow him, yet they look wistfully after him, own him a hero, and wish they dared answer to his call. Children, as soon as they can understand, ought to be told about him, that they may make him the hero of their young hearts.

There met in Jesus Christ all things that can make one lovely and lovable. In his **body** he was most beautiful. Accounts of him written in early times tell us that he was moderately tall, well built and tender in frame, his features straight and beautiful, his hair inclining to auburn, parted in the midst, curling and clustering about the ears and neck as the leaves of a filbert, so they speak, upon the nut. He wore also a forked beard and this as well as the locks upon his head were never touched by razor or shears. The account I have been quoting, we do not indeed for certain know to be correct, but it has been current in the Church and many generations have drawn our lord accordingly. His constitution, too, was tempered perfectly, he had neither disease nor the seeds of any; weariness he felt when he was wearied, hunger when he fasted, thirst when he had long gone without drink, but to the touch of sickness he was a stranger. I leave it to you, then, to picture him, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt **bodily**, in his bearing how majestic, how strong and yet how lovely and lissome in his limbs, in his look how earnest, grave but kind. In his Passion this lissomeness crippled, this beauty wrecked, this majesty beaten down. But now it is more than all restored I look forward with eager desire to Christ's body in heavenly light.

I come to his **mind**. He was the greatest genius that ever lived. You know what genius is — beauty and perfection in the mind. For perfection in the bodily frame distinguishes a man among others: so may the mind be distinguished for its beauty above other minds and that is genius. Then when this genius is duly taught and trained, that is wisdom; for without training genius is imperfect and again wisdom is imperfect without genius. But Christ, we read, **advanced** in wisdom and in favour with God and men; now this wisdom, in which he excelled, had to be founded on an unrivaled genius.

You must not say, Christ needed no such thing as genius; his wisdom came from **above**. To say so is to speak like the heretic Apollinaris. Christ was perfect man and must have mind as well as body and that mind was, no question, of the rarest excellence and beauty; it was genius. As Christ lived and breathed and moved in a true and not a **phantom** human body and in that labored, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried; as he merited by acts of his human will; so he reasoned and planned and invented by genius made perfect by wisdom of its own, not the divine wisdom only.

A witness to his genius we have in those men who being sent to arrest him came back empty handed, spellbound by his eloquence, "Never man spoke like **this** man." A better proof we have in his own words, his Sermon on the Mount, his parables and all his sayings recorded in the Gospel. My brethren, we are so accustomed to them that they do not strike us as they do a stranger that hears them first, else we too should say, "Never man spoke like this man." No stories or parables are like Christ's, so bright, so pithy, so touching; no proverbs or sayings are such jewelry; they stand off from the thoughts of others like stars, like lilies in the sun; nowhere in literature is there anything to match the Sermon on the Mount: if there is, bring it forward. Besides Christ's sayings in the Gospels a dozen or so more have been kept by tradition. Though one cannot feel sure of every one, yet reading all in one, they make me say, "These must be Christ's, never man spoke like **this**."

Now in the third place, far higher than beauty of the body, higher than genius and wisdom, comes the beauty of his **character**, his human character. For the most part his very enemies — those that do not believe in him — allow that a character so noble was never seen in human mold. Plato, the greatest of the Greek philosophers, foretold of him: he drew by his wisdom a picture of the just man in his justice crucified, and it was fulfilled in Christ. Poor was his station, laborious his

life, bitter his ending: through poverty, through labor, through crucifixion his majesty of nature more shines. No heart as his was ever so tender, but tenderness was not all: this heart so tender was as brave. He found the thought of his Passion past bearing, yet he went through with it. The thought of his gentleness towards children, towards the afflicted, towards sinners, is often dwelt on; that of his courage less. But for my part I like to feel that I should have feared him. We hear also of his love, as for John and Lazarus; and even love at first sight, as of the young man that had kept all the commandments from his childhood. But he warned or rebuked his best friends when needful, for, as St. John says, he was full both of **grace** and **truth**.

But, from all that might be said of his character I single out one point and beg you to notice that. He loved to **praise**, he loved to **reward**. He knew what was in the human heart, he best knew men's faults and yet he was the warmest in their praise. When he worked a miracle he would grace it with: "**Thy** faith hath saved thee," that it might almost seem the receiver's work, not his. He said of Nathanael that he was an Israelite without guile; he that searches hearts said this, and yet what praise that was to give! He called the two sons of Zebedee Sons of Thunder, kind and stately and honourable name! We read of nothing thunderlike that they did except, what was sinful, to wish fire down from heaven on some sinners, but they deserved the name or he would not have given it, and he has given it them for all time. Of John the Baptist he said that his **greater** was not born of women. He said to Peter, "Thou art the Rock," and rewarded a moment's acknowledgment of him with headship of his Church. He defended Magdalen and took means that the story of her generosity should be told forever. And though he bids us say we are **unprofitable** servants, yet he himself will say to each of us, "Good and faithful servant, **well done!**"

And this man whose picture I have tried to draw for you, is your **God**. He was your maker in time past; hereafter he will be your judge. Make him your hero now. Take some time to think of him; praise him in your hearts. Praise him over your work or on the road, saying over and over again: **Glor**y be to Christ's body; **Glor**y to the body of the Word made flesh; **Glor**y to Christ's body in its beauty; **Glor**y to Christ's body in its weariness; **Glor**y to its courage; **Glor**y to its meekness and mercy; **Glor**y to its every heartbeat, to its joys and sorrows, wishes, fears; **Glor**y to Christ's body risen and in the Blessed Sacrament. **Glor**y in all things to Jesus Christ, God and man. If you try this when you can, you will find your heart kindle and while you praise him he will praise **you**.

** Adapted from William Alan Sadler, Jr., ed., *Master Sermons through the Ages, gleaned originally from Christopher Devlin, S. J. (ed.), The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)