



**INFLUENCES ON THE POETRY  
OF HOPKINS**

## CHAPTER II

### INFLUENCES ON THE POETRY OF HOPKINS

Every writer or poet is delivered by the pangs of his time, the milieu and the movement. No great writers work has escaped ~~either~~ of these forces. Gerard Manley Hopkins is no exception to that. His ecclesiastical upbringing and vocation of priesthood empowered his total personality. He was a priest was always a student, always keen to know and study everything around him. His poems are the revelations of his precocious knowledge of art, keen observation and innovative spirit. There are undoubtedly various influences on his poetry. It is therefore, necessary to consider ~~thesis~~. The literary and social influences, which are formative in ~~molding~~ his poetry, are also worth considering for the proper assessment of Hopkins as a religious poet.

a) The Biblical Ethos

While considering the literary influences on Hopkins as a religious poet one cannot forget his ecclesiastical background. Hopkins's vocation as a priest couldn't separate him ~~from~~ The Bible. The Bible had become the part and parcel of his language. It was but natural for a priest poet to be overwhelmingly influenced by the Biblical ethos. Hopkins has handled his Biblical knowledge in his religious poetry with his aesthetic mind, superbly. Several Biblical words are verses ranging from Genesis<sup>1</sup> to Revelations<sup>2</sup> make his poetry rich in their effectiveness and depth of spirituality.

Hopkins's religious poems are influenced directly and indirectly, while there are some poems where the influence of the Biblical words and verses appear natural inspite of their presence. This researcher beings with some important poems, wherein the influence of The Bible has been directly traced. " A Soliloquy of one of the

"Spies of Wilderness" stands distinct in this respect. This is a beautiful poem, narrating the adventures of Moses,<sup>3</sup> to led his people, the Israelites out of Egypt. Until Moses and Israelites reach Canaan this story is derived from the Book of Exodus.<sup>4</sup> When Moses dwelt on the outskirts of the land of Canan, the Lord said to Moses : " Send me to spy out the land of Canan."<sup>5</sup> The title of the poem is derived from the above mentioned verse. Hopkins the speaker in the poem is a spy who sings his soliloquy from the wilderness. That entire episode of spying mentioned in the poem from The Book of Numbers<sup>6</sup> is self explanatory.

In "Barnfloor and winepress", Hopkins deals with the topic of the crucifixion of Christ. The title of the poem is derived from the Old Testament in The Holy Bible:

And he said, If the Lord do not help thee,  
whence shall I help thee Out of the barnfloop,  
or out of the winepress.<sup>7</sup>

The suffering of Christ is beautifully and pictorially stressed in the Winepress. Here

'Wine' signifies Christ Jesus who was crucified, and who died for all mankind. It is from Him that help comes to the righteous. When Christ was crucified, His body was thrown in Josephs Garden.<sup>8</sup> "New Reading" is another poem dealing with the crucifixion of Christ.

CHRIST at all hazards fruit hat shewed.<sup>9</sup> Hopkins has taken into account an incident recorded in Gospel of St. Mathews<sup>10</sup> when Hopkins mentions 'food for five thousand is clear that he is referring to the episode when Jesus fed five thousand people, with only five loaves and to fish. Hopkins ends the poem "New Readings" with :

"And would not have that legion of winged things Bear Him to heaven"<sup>11</sup>

"He hath abolished the old drouth", is another religious poem based almost entirely on the teaching of The Bible. The whole poem is being charged with the Book of Worship: "Psalms"<sup>12</sup>

from The Holy Bible. The following lines from the poem are used by Hopkins from The Bible in their original form:

"And rivers run where all was dry".<sup>13</sup>

"He turns a desert into pools of water".<sup>14</sup>

"He hath put a new song in my mouth".<sup>15</sup>

"The valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy".<sup>16</sup>

"The Wreck of the Deutschland " is one of the greatest religious poems in English Literature. Hopkins has put the best of his poetic talent in it. Though ~~its~~ stands for ambiguity for ~~its~~ thematic value and technical innovations it is one of the greatest poems. In this religious occasional ode Hopkins had used his knowledge of The Holy Bible effectively. If one is acquainted with the Holy Bible one cannot miss the Biblical ethos. Hopkins echoes Job from the Bible when he says:

Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh; and knit me together with bones and sinews.<sup>17</sup>

Grace is one of the most important beliefs of Christianity. "The main idea of the Word Grace is the freeness of God's Gift to man especially

with reference to the freeness of his forgiveness"<sup>18</sup> Hopkins expresses grace as explained by Saint John poetically. He says:

I steady as a water in a well.<sup>19</sup>

Hopkins uses image of water in a well for Grace which is replenished constantly. Hopkins is also conscious of Jesus's statement:

The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling upto eternal life.<sup>20</sup>

In the part IIInd of ' Deutschland' Hopkins very intelligently fuses two references pertaining to the topic of man's fragility. He speaks of man's fragility. Being "rooted in earth " and a "flower which is forgotten of the wave". Hopkins must have definitely borne in his mind the dictum in the Holy Bible:

"Dust thou art and to dust thou returnest "<sup>21</sup>

"The life of man to be like a "flower of the field that fade when the breath of the Lord blew upon it."<sup>22</sup> In signifying the truth that the good and the evil are always closely entangled on the earth Hopkins has used the

example of the world's first murder stated in The Holy Bible. Adam's son "Cain kills his brother Abel"<sup>23</sup> though both having 'sucked the same breasts'. Various symbolical phrases like "Beast of the waste wood"<sup>24</sup> "priced and price"<sup>25</sup> are from Hopkins's immense Biblical knowledge. 'Yore flood' bears an allusion to Noah's floods 'Body of lovely death' pertains to crucifixion.

"Carrion- Comfort" has the impact Book of Job<sup>26</sup> from The Holy Bible. Various illustrations in the poem are from the above mentioned book. Though the poem is not innately religious, the indirect influences are traced in the poem. When Hopkins yearns :

O in turns of tempest me heaped there; me  
frantic to avoid thee and flee.<sup>27</sup>

Hopkins almost echoes Job's Cry "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause"<sup>28</sup>

When Hopkins illustrates that his 'Chaff might fly' and his grain would lie 'Sheer and



clear'he echoes the words of John the Baptist,<sup>29</sup> who had prophesied that Christ would divide mankind in a similar way. The poem ends with Hopkins's wrestling with God as "Jacob wrestled with God."<sup>30</sup>

"The Soldier" is a poem Hopkins has written on Jesus Christ at whom Hopkins views as a soldier. He addresses Jesus as 'Christ our king and 'God made flesh' proving its Biblical religious overtoning.

Considering the poems in which the influence of The Bible has been exerted, one may state that in most of Hopkins's nature poetry he has used different phrases and words from The Bible to enrich the totality of the poem. In "Gods Grandeur " Hopkins speaks of the "Holy Ghost,"<sup>31</sup> "brooding the world with bright wings"<sup>32</sup> 'The dark out Lucifer' is about Lucifer the fallen angle i.e. Satan who exists in the form of snakes in 'touch- tree'<sup>33</sup>

In the distinctly catholic poems like " The Virgin Mary compared to the Air we

breath" "May-Magnificat" " Angelus ad Virginem" there is praise for Mother Mary .Have all been evolved from Biblical truth at the backgrounds. The Biblical prophecy in respect of the same having come true has made sufficiently moved him to write such poems.

In certain poems the Biblical ethos hides in vein. But there presence behind the vein does the task more effectively. In "To what serves Mortal Beauty", Hopkins seems to have been influenced by the Biblical saying Charm is deceitful and beauty is vanishing. In "Candle Indoors".Hopkins speaks on behalf of Christ, teaching us "not to beam-blind"<sup>34</sup> i.e. being ignorant to ones own fault and not to 'Spendsavour Salt'<sup>35</sup> i.e. not to loose the power of preserving mankind. Similarly in "on the Portait of Two Beautiful Young People", Hopkins suddenly emerges as a thoroughbred religious poet. When he says:

"There's none but truth can stead you, Christ  
is truth "<sup>36</sup>

He is echoing Christ statement in:"I am the Truth ".In "spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" Hopkins

speaks about the second coming of Christ where in it is explained that Christ shall come in His glory and separate the nations as in 'two flocks' 'black, white'<sup>37</sup> which refers to the obedient and disobedient people to the word of God.

Hopkins just cannot separate himself from the word of God, The Bible. Besides preaching, since that was his vocation, this person was also using language as if he was mesmerized by the word power of The Holy Bible. The words from The Bible flew swiftly in his veins. Even if he wrote some poems on nature and its beauty, he did not do it in the sense of 'Glory to God'. He brings in a unique kind of metaphysical effect owing to the implementation of Biblical words making his poems classic. They really remain original, permanent in their flow of thoughts of and originate from the poet's motives. The poems have a religious spirit due to the words from The Holy Bible making God presence, real Saint John rightly says:

"Though Him all things were made;..In Him was life.."38

b) INFLUENCES OF LITERATURE ON HOPKINS;  
THE VICTORIAN

Hopkins lived in the Victorian era. Most Victorians agreed with Ruskin and his teachings. 'The self' was found to be at unrest and it was concluded that some thing larger than the 'self' only would bring rest. Hopkins too as a poet was influenced by the literature he read was then applauded by the masses. Hopkins was a voracious reader and read Classical literature, History, Philosophy, The Gospels and also studied Logic. He read with care Dickens, George Herbert, Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson and his old love, books on religious topics and architecture. His breadth of reading reflected in his poems written at Oxford. Their topics differ from Biblical ones like "A Soliloquy of one of the spies left in the Wilderness", "Heaven-Haven", "New Readings and other like "The Halfway House", "Nordum", "Habit of perfection" and "Dun's Scotus's Oxford". A copy of Oxford Commentary of Dun Scotus was a strong pill of tonic, a much

needed support for his religious poetic creativity. He mentions in his Diary about the book: "It may be a mercy from God"<sup>39</sup> Hopkins was encouraged and his enthusiasm justified in Dun Scotus's philosophy of 'haecaitas' or 'thisness'. Scouts's emphasized the immaculate conceptions of Mother Mary and the Incarnation of Jesus. It is not surprising that several mature poems like "Angelus ad Virginem" "the Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" and "the Heraclitian fire the comfort of the Resurrection" have a strong influence of Dun Scotus. Hopkins expressed all his affection for this Franciscan philosopher in his sonnet "Duns Scotus's Oxford", where he says:

"Who of all men most sways  
my spirits to Peace".<sup>40</sup>

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius too played their role in consciously moduling Hopkins as a poet. The Meditations are the central study of The Spiritual Exercises. They given a simple plain format of meditation. Firstly, to picture the scene, associated with the meditation, secondly to realize the scene in its depth and

absorb its message and applying it. On this basis many of Hopkins's poems begin with a vivid description of scenes and then go further either to relate some Christian doctrine or autobiographical significance. But Hopkins was moved by the statement "Man was created to Praise" in further notes of The Spiritual Exercises. On this basis Hopkins wrote some of his best loved poems like "Pied beauty", "Gods-Grandeur" and "Starlight night" praising God for the beautiful nature around him.

i) The Ruskinian Hopkins

One can never deny that if Ruskins works would never be encountered by Hopkins, his poem would be totally different from what they are today. Ruskins view was that "Truth of nature is Truth of God" and man has to understand it by perception, the artists' sight ' and 'soul' being the sole witnesses. He termed it as the 'innocence of the eye' a sort of aesthetic law Hopkins has tell that. An artist who lacked this vision was one whose "eye had not

been trained to look several at things apart from their association innocently or purely."<sup>41</sup> The concept of 'the innocence of the eye' corresponds to the 'instress' theory of Hopkins. The ardent zeal of admiring and loving the inscape of things that have been observed 'by the innocence of the eyes' had been the major mainspring of Hopkins's personality.'

The common feature of Ruskin's prose and Hopkins's poetry is their Praise for God and Gods gifts to man. Hopkins had accepted Ruskin's principle "ALL GREAT ART IS PRAISE" and Nature is 'ART OF GOD'. In "The work of the Deutschland" the Ruskin's tool of praise and object are distinct. Hopkins worship the creator of this world, through His creation and tries to spot Him more clearly in nature. Being successful in this attempt he breaksly forth:

Since, tho' he is under the  
World's splendor and wonder.<sup>42</sup>

Ruskin's another principle of  
'Sacramental energy' influenced Hopkins

considerably. By sacramental energy, Ruskin actually meant that in the moving, living and growing objects one could sense the 'Majesty of God' in the 'Majesty of Motion.' Ruskin called it divine law of 'Vital Beauty'. Hopkins seems to make a conscious effort of this principle since his school days. As in "Escorial" the rain fall in "clattering gullies" and "Il Mystico" the air moves in 'breezy belts', the purple sunset with 'Spikes of light/spear'd open lustrous gashes' in "A vision of mermaids." In "The Blessed virgin compared to the Air We Breathe" the air is 'wild-world mothering'. In 'spring' the weeds do not grow but 'shoot long and lovely lush.' Many more such examples can be cited but the thought comes alive nowhere as powerfully as in "Hurrahing in the Harvest" where he in expresses the stillness of the end of Summer ;

Summer ends now, now barbarous  
 in beauty, the stocks rise  
 Around; up above, what wind walks  
 What lovely behaviour.<sup>43</sup>

Hopkins observed life in a unique way. 'Winds



are walking and the march of Summer is supposed to have come to a stand still.

Yet another Ruskinian Principle that Hopkins adapted was that of 'Chiaroscuro'.<sup>44</sup> Hopkins might have obtained the information from the book called Truth of Chiaroscuro. 'Chiaroscuro' means 'abrupt'<sup>45</sup> changes of shade, colour, shape, tone or size. Some examples will give insight of this principle. As in 'Hurrahing in Harvest" :

And the azurous hung hills  
are his world-wielding shoulder  
Majestic-as a stallion stalwart  
very - violet sweet.<sup>46</sup>

The 'azurous hung hills - very violet sweet' initially blue seem to have turned violet with the setting sun upon them. In 'God Grandeur' Hopkins describes sunrise as :

And though the last night  
Off the black west went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink  
eastward, springs.<sup>47</sup>

He seem to have surveyed the Sky at dawn which is brown before sunrise on the eastern side while the western side is black.

Ruskin too influenced Hopkins in the concern of the making of a Christian gentleman. "In their voluminous comment on the making of a Christian artist, Hopkins and Ruskin implied that they were equally concerned with another problem insperable from it in Victorian eyes the making of a Christian gentleman".<sup>48</sup> Both agreed on the point of raising the moral standards of a person to make him a good gentleman. The result was the creation a number of poems like "The Handsome Heart", "The candle indoors", "To what serves Mortal beauty" and "The portrait of two young people".

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a ~~marvelous~~ combination of an aesthetic Victorian and a genuine Jesuit Priest, but he was more of a Ruskinian, priest.

ii) Other Literary and Social Influences

Hopkins was also influenced by some British poets. He was haunted by Keats's poetry from his school days. His first poem "Escorial" which had won for him a school prize was replete with Keatsian colour. Though "Escorial" is a highly imitative poem, it was an achievement of a fifteen year old lad worthy to be praised. In "Convent thoughts" Hopkins echoes Keats when he says :

To fields where files no sharp  
and sided hail  
And a few lilies blow.<sup>49</sup>

The influence of Keats on Hopkins on Hopkins has been witnessed to by many students of his poetry. It is the Keatsian colour that enriches the mermaids in "The vision of mermaids:

Clouds of violet glowd  
On pranked scale, or threads  
of Carmine, shot  
thro 'Silver, gloom'd to a  
blood- vivid clot.<sup>50</sup>

" In the habit of Perfection" the sensational sensuousness of Keats is sensed when 'Elected Silence' sings and 'lily colored' Clothes are provided. George Herbert was another major influence in the development of Hopkins as a poet. The title of " Heaven -Haven" surely must have been obtained from George Herbert's poem "The Size" wherein he says:

These Seas are tears and  
Heaven the haven.<sup>51</sup>

Even " The Starlight Night" shows similarity in "Church Porch" of George Herbert. George Herbert Being a religious poet, on reading him, Hopkins must have been filled with more nourishment of intellectually handled vocabulary. Hopkins specially learnt the use of the Central Christian traditions of 'iconography' and 'topology' though" It was possible to use a plain style and diction for spiritual ends; above all he wrote a poetry that , through humble and devout was also argumentative and dialectical".<sup>52</sup>

Even Tennyson seems to have exerted his influence to some extent on the poetic talent of G.M. Hopkins. The lyrical melancholy of Tennyson appealed to him considerably. Tennyson did not lower the melody or the poetic charm of his verse at any stage. The researcher personally feels that Hopkins and Tennyson both shared a common sorrow, of religious problems and a vacuum deep inside.

Hopkins's "Pilate" seems to have been influenced by Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites" which Hopkins greatly admired both in choosing to write the poem as a dramatic monologue and for the description of 'Pilates Sufferings'. Hopkins echoes Tennyson in "A Dream of Fair women." Tennyson's "In Memoriam" has its shadows on Hopkins "Nodum". Tennyson says: "She cries, A thousand types are gone"<sup>53</sup> while Hopkins says "No answering voice comes from skies".<sup>54</sup> Hopkins was thus influenced by almost every writer that he read to some degree.

The crisis in English poetry had begun about thirty years before the outbreak of the

first world war. Those were the times of religious Chaos. There was an air of fear of the breakdown in faith resulting in the Classic religious traumas for which the age morally decayed. Hopkins's works reflect the anguish of religious strife, abuse of labour, the after effects of industrialization, the quest for self realization and above all agony and frustration amidst this Chaos.

Hopkins was at Balliol when dogfights continued in Oxford in full swing. The Board Churchman and the Tractarian fought bitterly. The conflicts between faith and works were reaching their peaks even in the Upper and Lower Houses. The moral tensions were unendurable. Hopkins's poetry composed during this period clearly indicates this distress. His poem "New Reading" signifying the parable of the sower suggests that both the Tractarian and Broad Churchmen were throwing their seeds on rocks. The 'seeds' being the word of God and rocks to be hardened hearts, according to Hopkins's 'Half way House' refers to the Chaos in the religious

circle and the effects of the same on Hopkins himself representing a Victorian, pious mind. But the poem mainly reflects the waywardness, a picture of the disintegration of England's spiritual harmony.

The haunting anxiety about 'The future' the day of the second coming and apocalypse' was a topic for sermons all over England during 1840 as a result of William Wilberforce's first publication of 'Practical view of Christianity'. The Victorian too followed by the Romantics in voicing the mood of apocalypse.

The apocalyptic utterances of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blakes were lifted up by the tractarians. It is distinctly noted that the visions of the Apocalypse touched many writers that were the visions of the 'resurrection of the Dead' and the 'Second coming'. The Oxford temper of apocalypse was violent till the 1870<sup>s</sup>. Undoubtedly how could a Jesuit priest be left without being

influenced by this Victorian temper. In his Sermon he warned his parishioners:

For it is at any minute true  
that the world is,  
For it is at any minute true  
that the world has gone on  
sometime since Christ first coming  
world made some approached to his second.<sup>55</sup>

Hopkins "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is a complete apocalypse. The Christ of the wreck of Deutschland is the thirteenth of Revelation, an avenger of sin. This poem is christain and symbolic at the sometime and also an outcome of the influence of the times.

Hopkins was a typical Victorian poet. It was the Victorian poets business to reach his readers by comforting them, cheering them, even by exciting them as well as warning them of the effects of self or of national disaster Hopkins did truly this job well.



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

## Abbreviations :

H.B. - Holy Bible

O.T. - Old Testament

N.T. - New Testament

G.M.H. - Gerard Manley Hopkins. The Oxford Authors, ed. by Catherine Phillips. Oxford University Press, 1986.

1. First in the order of Books of the O.T. in the Holy Bible containing the account of creation of the world. (source The Readers Digest Encyclopediac Dic. Vol.1 Oxford University Press, 1962)
2. The last Book of the N.T. from the Holy Bible which consists of several series of revelations and visions in symbolic language (source.. Ibid. Vol.2)
3. Jewish Patriarch ; the great law giver of the Jews ; led them from Egypt after the captivity there ; was inspired by God to write down the Ten commandments on tablets of stone. (Source Ibid.)
4. Exodus: 2nd book of the O.T. of the Holy Bible; account of emigrant Israelites from Egypt (source Ibid. Vol.1)
5. Numbers 13:1 O.T. (H.B.)

6. Extracted from the book of Numbers chapters 10,11,13  
O.T.(H.B.)
7. Kings II 6:27 O.T.(H.B.)
8. The Gospel of St. Mathews 8:57 - 60 N.T.(H.B.)
9. G.M.H. p.26 11 and 12.
10. The Gospel of the St. Mathews 14:15 - 21 N.T.(H.B.)
11. G.M.H. p.27 1.14 and 15
12. The Psalms collectively are called in Hebrew Tehillim  
or 'Praises'; included in the O.T.(H.B.) (source.. Concise  
Bible Dic. based on the Cambridge Companion to the  
Bible, Cambridge University Press, nd.)
13. G.M.H. p.g. 27 and 2. Psalms 107 v.  
35. O.T.(H.B.)
14. G.M.H. p.g. 27 ; Psalm 40, v.3. O.T.(H.B.)
15. G.M.H. p. 27 1. Psalm 118, v. 17. O.T.(H.B.)
16. G.M.H. Page 27 1. 16 and 17; Psalm 6 V.14. O.T.(H.B.)
17. G.M.H. Page 110 Stnz. 1; Job Chps. 10 and 11 and Psalm  
13. O.T.(H.B.)

Philip M. Martin Mastery and Mercy London, Oxford  
University Press, 1957, p.g. 30.

18. The main idea of the word Grace is the freeness of God's Gifts to man especially with the reference to the freeness of His forgiveness ( source .. concise Bible Dictionary)
19. G.M.H. p.g. 111 Stnz. 4.
20. The Gospel of St. John Chp.4. v.4. N.T.(H.B.)
21. Genesis, Chp. 3. vs., 19.O.T.(H.B.)
22. The Holy Bible Isaiah Chp. 40.:6-8. O.T.(H.B.)
23. The Holy Bible O.T. Genesis Chp. 2 Vs.23-36.
24. The Holy Bible O.T. Pslam 73 : 14.
25. The Holy Bible O.T. Pslam 73 : 14.
26. Book of the O.T. written probably in 4th century b.c. its how Job a wealthy and prosperous man, whose patience and exemplary piety are tried by dire and undeserved misfortune, and who inspite of his bitter lamentations remains finally confident in the goodness and justice of God.  
( source .. concise Bible Dictornary )

29. The Gospel of Saint Mathews  
Chp.3. v12. The Gospel of Saint Luke  
Chp.3. v17.n.t.(H.B)
30. The Bible , N.T. The Gospel of saint  
Mathews Chp.3. v.12. The Gospel of saint  
Luke,Chp 3.V.17.
31. The Bible O.T. extracted from the Chp.32. of  
the Book of Job. Chp.32.
32. The Bible, O.T. The Book of Genesis, Chp.1.V.2.
33. The Bible, O.T. The Book of Genesis, Chp.3.V.3.
34. The Bible N.T. The Gospel of Mathews  
Chp. 7. Vs.3-5.
35. The Bible, N.T. The Gospel of Mathews  
Chp. 5 . vs. 13-16.
36. G.M.H. p.g. 1.21.
37. G.M.H. p.g. 175.

38. the Gospel of John, c.1.vs.3 and 4  
N.T.(H.B.)
- 39.G.M.H. P.G. No.211
- 40.G.M.H.p.g.142 1.11.
- 41.Hopkins Gerard Manley. Journal and papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Humphry House and Graham Story.  
Oxford University press London-1950 p.g.77.
- 42.G..H. p.g.11. Stnz.5.
- 43.G.M.H. p.g.134 1 and 2.
- 44.Hopkins Gerard Manley. Journal and papers of G.M. Hopkins  
Humphry House and Graham Story. Oxford University  
press (London-1959) p.g.85.
- 45.Hopkins Gerard Manley. Journal and papers of G.M. Hopkins  
Humphry House and Grahm Story. Oxford University  
press (London-1959) p.g.104.
- 46.G.M.H. p.g.131 1. 9 and 10.
- 47.G.M.H. p.g.128 1. 11 and 12.