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The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Volumes I and II: Correspondence

R. K. R. Thornton, Catherine Phillips

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Hopkins's letters are his secular confessional, and if we wish to understand the man and his poetry, this is material we cannot ignore. This is where his mind allowed itself its most expansive and unfettered expression.

This edition adds 43 letters to the total printed by Claude Colleer Abbott in his three-volume major edition of the mid-twentieth century. It further improves on the earlier editions in four ways: in its accuracy, in its order, in its inclusiveness, and in the thoroughness of its annotation. It is a completely new presentation of the letters, set out on radically different lines from earlier editions. It includes all the letters from Hopkins, but adds all the extant letters which were written to him. It is set out in a single chronological sequence, placing all the replies and queries at their appropriate place within the correspondence, thus providing as far as can be achieved, a narrative sequence. This acts in many ways as an informal intellectual biography of Hopkins, tracking his early ideas, his anxieties, his conversion, his friendships, his priesthood, his disappointments, and his ideas on literature and life. The transcriptions not only revise a large number of readings, but include all legible deletions and corrections, allowing the reader to follow the hesitancies and adjustments of Hopkins's mind.

Like most nineteenth-century poets, Hopkins never published a theoretical account of his work and his thoughts on poetry, but what he had to say can be found in these letters, and their extensive use by critics and poets indicates their richness as a source of ideas on Hopkins's poetry and on poetry and poetics in general.

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