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The Date and Sequence of the Terrible Sonnets of Gerard M. Hopkins, S.J.

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THE DATE AND SEQUENCE OF
THE TERRIBLE SONNETS OF
GERARD M. HOPKINS, S. J.

by
John Diedrich Gerken, S. J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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1953
LIFE

John Diedrich Gerken, S.J. was born in Toledo, Ohio, on November 21, 1924.

In September 1938 he entered Central Catholic High School and graduated in June 1942. In September of the same year he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio. Nearly all his work toward the B. A. degree was done at Milford, which was affiliated with Xavier University. In August 1946 he transferred to West Baden College, an affiliate of Loyola University of Chicago, and was granted the B. A. degree from that university in February 1947. In July of the same year he entered the Loyola Graduate School.

During the scholastic years of 1949 to 1952 he taught Latin and English at Loyola Academy, Chicago.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Among the many fine poetical works of Gerard Manley Hopkins a certain group of poems have come to be known as the Terrible Sonnets. They are regarded by the major Hopkins commentators as some of his finest work. But in spite of the fact that they enjoy such esteem among the critics, no one as yet has made an authoritative study of the chronological inter-relationships of these sonnets.

In general there seem to be two reasons for this. First, many of Hopkins's other sonnets seem to reveal the same desolation so characteristic of the Terrible Sonnets. In fact, the similarity is so marked that some authors treat both groups together. Consequently the term Terrible Sonnets is made more

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comprehensive than originally intended; and the impression is created that the sonnets represent nothing more than Hopkins at different levels of fear and discouragement. As a result the Terrible Sonnets are not studied as a unit, and their inter-relationships pass unnoticed.

A second reason why a study of these relationships has not been made is the scant evidence at hand to establish the first requisite of such a study, namely, the date and sequence of the Terrible Sonnets.

The author of this thesis believes that there are definite relationships among the Terrible Sonnets which indicate a period of spiritual maturing in the life of Hopkins. For example, sonnet No. 32, "Spelt From Sibyl's Leaves," expresses anticipation and fear of an unexperienced trial; sonnet No. 40 shows him in the first stages of the trial; No. 41 shows him at his worst; Nos. 44 and 45 show him as resigned, patient, but also courageous enough to hope, to look away from his tortured self, to take joy in his confidence in God. Such relationships can be discovered if one reads those poems carefully. But the question immediately arises: Can such relationships be substantiated by external and internal evidence?

If such relationships can be substantiated, then a deeper appreciation of the Terrible Sonnets and a more profound insight into a particular period in Hopkins's life would result. For one could witness the separate steps of his trial and study
With profit the relationship between this period of severe trial in Hopkins's life with the trials of his final days. Another advantage would be that one would know clearly which poems were, and which were not, to be included among the Terrible Sonnets. But the most important advantage would be the deeper understanding and appreciation of the sonnets gained by being enabled to read them in the order in which they were written. The purpose of this thesis is to make possible such an understanding and appreciation.

In order to achieve that object the author will have to determine the date and sequence of the Terrible Sonnets. With a high degree of probability these can be determined. The period in which the sonnets were written can be determined with certitude. It can also be shown with certitude that "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" was written before any of the other sonnets. With great probability it can be shown that Nos. 40 and 41 precede Nos. 39 and 44-47; and with slightly less probability one can show that the Terrible Sonnets were written in the following sequence: Nos. 32, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 39.

In order to prove that the sonnets were written in the above sequence between late in the year 1884 and September 1, 1885, the author will have recourse to the Letters and Note-Books of Hopkins. These will prove that the sonnets were certainly written between 1884 and September 1, 1885. Then the notes which Bridges—the literary executor of Hopkins—gives on the manu-
scripts of the **Terrible Sonnets** will be presented. A study of these, together with the remarks Hopkins makes in his letters of May and September of 1885, will show that sonnets Nos. 40 and 41 were written in May or slightly earlier and that Nos. 39 and 44-47 were written in late August. The notes will also indicate the probable sequence of the sonnets. Then from an interpretation of the sonnets themselves it will be shown that the sequence which external evidence indicates is fully warranted.

From the brief mention of desolation and despair, a newcomer to Hopkins studies might safely hazard a guess as to the reason why the poems under consideration are referred to as the **Terrible Sonnets**. Bridges was the first to use the term and, although he did not explicitly state to precisely which sonnets he applied the term, still no one reading Hopkins's works would have any difficulty in discovering why he used such a strong term.

The experiences which some of the sonnets reflect are terrifying and must have caused Hopkins great feelings of anguish. Lines like the following leave no doubt about this.

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.4

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3 Hopkins, Poems, No. 41.
4 Ibid., No. 40
If one relates these few lines to the few statements Hopkins made about his state of health during 1884 and 1885, one gets a deeper understanding of why Bridges described the sonnets as "terrible." For during that period, as Bridges knew from his correspondence with Hopkins, the Jesuit poet was going through the greatest trials of his life. He frequently mentions that he is jaded, worn, and weary. He was bothered during that period, too, by an unexplainable inability to get things done; but his greatest trial was the fear that he would crack under the strain of work and come to lose his mind. Obviously Bridges's knowledge of this, coupled with the spirit of the poems, prompted him to call them the Terrible Sonnets.

Though it is quite clear why Bridges used the term, it is not too readily discovered just which sonnets he so designated. Only a careful reading of his "Preface to the Notes" reveals what he meant. Even then certain deductions must be made to determine to which Bridges referred.

At the end of the "Preface Bridges says, "Few will read the terrible posthumous sonnets without such high admiration and respect for his poetical power as must lead them to search out the rare masterly beauties that distinguish his work." This

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6 Hopkins, Poems, 99, 100.
immediately sets us hunting for the "posthumous sonnets." The object of our search is to be found earlier in the "Preface" where Bridges describes the H manuscript, which is the fourth source for text of Hopkins. He says,

H is the bundle of posthumous papers that came into my hands at the author's death. These were at the time examined, sorted, and indexed; and the more important pieces--of which copies were taken--were inserted into a scrap-book. That collection is the source of a series of his most mature sonnets, and of almost all the unfinished poems and fragments. Among these papers were also some early drafts.7

The words "posthumous papers" and "most mature sonnets" indicate the source of the text of the Terrible Sonnets. But which ones belong to the category of Terrible Sonnets must still be determined.

In reading the "Notes" we find that there are only eleven sonnets designated as coming from the H source. They are Nos. 34, 38-41, 44-47, 56, and 69. Four of these, Nos. 34, 38, 56, and 69, Bridges could not have intended to include in the category of Terrible Sonnets. This is clear from what he himself has said and from the internal evidence of the sonnets themselves.

Bridges says of No. 69 that it is one "which he himself could not have wished permanently to intrude among his last serious poems."8 Since this is Bridges's opinion of the poem, it is clear that No. 69 does not belong in the category of the "most

7 Ibid., 94. The underscoring is mine.
8 Ibid., 121.
mature sonnets" and therefore is not one of the Terrible Sonnets.

No. 38 is clearly not a personal sonnet; it does not contain pathos or signs of a great struggle; in brief, it contains nothing in the least terrifying or harrowing. Rather, its subject matter is one that has always fascinated Hopkins—mortal beauty. In the sonnet he contemplates this beauty, sees that its purpose is to keep "warm men's wit to the things that are." It is as if he said, "Beauty is here to cry out against scepticism, idealism, materialism, anything that makes man forget his fellow man and his world." Then Hopkins continues by recalling that day when Pope Gregory, so struck by the beauty of the young Angle slaves, called them angels; and thereupon sent his missionaries to England to preach the same love he had for those slaves. In the sonnet Hopkins speaks of that incident in Rome as a gift to the nation. "But God to a nation dealt that day's dear chance."10

Hopkins then enunciates that law of charity and then poses the problem of how to meet beauty. And the solution is: Merely meet it, acknowledge it, then leave it alone, only wish that it be complemented with a finer beauty, God's grace.

Such an interpretation of the poem readily admits, and therefore it becomes obvious that No. 38 is not what Bridges

9 Ibid., No. 38.
10 Ibid.
would call a Terrible Sonnet. The text of the poem is given here to verify the above interpretation.

To what serves Mortal Beauty?

To what serves mortal beauty—dangerous; does set dancing blood—the 0-seal—that-so feature, flung prouder form
Than Purcell tune lets tread to? See: it does this: keeps warm
Men's wits to the things that are; what good means—where a glance
Mastor more may than gaze, gaze out of countenance.
Those lovely lads once, wet-fresh windfalls of war's storm,
How then should Gregory, a father, have gleaned else from swarm-ed Rome? But God to a nation dealt that day's dear chance.
To man, that needs would worship block or barren stone,
Our law says: Love what are love's worthiest, were all known;
World's loveliest—men's selves. Self flashes off frame and face.
What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave, let that alone.
Yea, wish that though, wish all, God's better beauty, grace.

Nos. 34 and 56 are the other sonnets in the manuscript which should not be included among the Terrible Sonnets. Unlike No. 38, both are undated.

No. 34 is a poem on two of Hopkins's favorite themes: The importance of "self"—that individualizing principle—and the incarnation of Christ in man. The sonnet, as is evident in one reading lacks the pathos and personal struggle so characteristic of the others in this manuscript. The text of the poem is given to verify these statements.

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

11 Ibid.
selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces. 12

No. 56 is a nature poem which Bridges entitled "Ash-
boughs." It was, in its first form, a curtal sonnet of eleven
lines. Later it was revised so as to contain thirteen lines. In
neither form is there a sign of pathos and personal struggle.
Therefore it, too, must be considered as outside the classifica-
tion of Terrible Sonnets. The revised form reads as follows:

(Ash-boughs)

Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,
Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep
Poetry to it; as a tree whose boughs break in the sky.
Say it is ash-boughs: whether on a December day and
furled
Fast or they in clammyish lashtender combs creep
Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most high.
They touch, they tabour on it, hover on it; here, there
hurled,
With talons sweep
The smouldering enormous winter welkin. Eye
But more cheer is when May
Mells blue with snowwhite through their fringe and fray
Of greenery and old earth gropes for, grasps at steep
Heaven with it whom she childs things by. 13

From the above discussion of the sonnets in the H man-
uscript it is clear that Bridges would not have included Nos. 34,

12 Ibid., No. 34.
13 Ibid., No. 56.
38, 56, and 69 in the category of Terrible Sonnets. Therefore there remain but seven sonnets (Nos. 39-41 and 44-47) to which we can say Bridges would apply this term.

However there is another sonnet which, regardless of how Bridges would classify it, should properly be considered as one of the Terrible Sonnets, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," No. 32. The reason for including this poem among the Terrible Sonnets is that external and internal evidence demand that this sonnet be so considered. For the poem was written during the latter part of 1884 or early 1885, while Hopkins was entering upon some of his severest trials in Dublin. Moreover, the poem expresses the same struggle and pathos characteristic of the Terrible Sonnets. Therefore since it was written during the same period and is similar to them in expression, it must be considered as one of them.

Reverend Raymond V. Schoder, S.J. and John Pick agree with this opinion, at least implicitly. They do not explicitly state that No. 32 is one of the Terrible Sonnets, for they do not use that term when speaking of this group of poems. However they do admit that it was written contemporaneously to the

14 This will be proved in the second chapter.

15 Pick speaks of them as the "seven sonnets of 1884-5" in his chapter "Last Poems." Pick, Hopkins, 138. Schoder treats the Terrible Sonnets together with the other desolation sonnets of Hopkins's last years. Schoder, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," Thought, XIX, 637.
sonnets which Bridges denoted as Terrible Sonnets.\textsuperscript{16} They also connect it closely to these sonnets. Pick treats it as introductory to the period of trial and as written just before No. \textsuperscript{44}.\textsuperscript{17} Schoder says that No. 32 was written in "the same spirit" as Nos. 40, 41, and 45.\textsuperscript{18} Since No. 32 was written during the same period as the others and since the commentators admit its similarity in spirit to the others it can be said that this sonnet is a part of that group of sonnets which Bridges denoted as the Terrible Sonnets.

In conclusion, the term Terrible Sonnets applies to eight sonnets: Those of the H manuscript (Nos. 39–41 and 44–47) which express the struggles of Hopkins's mind and heart, and that other sonnet of trial, No. 32. The purpose of the thesis is to make it possible to say that the Terrible Sonnets indicate a definite spiritual maturing in Hopkins. Since this can not be said unless the date and sequence of the sonnets be determined, the problem of the thesis will be to show first, that the sonnets were written during the period extending from the latter part of 1884 to September 1, 1885; and secondly, that the sequence of the sonnets is: Nos. 32, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 39.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Pick, Hopkins, 141.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Schoder, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," Thought, XIX, 637.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Schoder, "Spelt," Thought, 638.
\end{itemize}
The method to be followed in showing this will be:

first, to determine from external evidence the period in which the sonnets were written; secondly, to determine the sequence which external evidence indicates; thirdly, to indicate the sequence which the internal evidence of the poems supports; and, finally, to summarize the findings of the thesis.

With that said, let us turn to the problem of determining the approximate date of the Terrible Sonnets.
CHAPTER II

THE APPROXIMATE DATE OF THE TERRIBLE SONNETS

It is quite possible by means of the correspondence, the Note-Books, and sonnets of Hopkins together with Bridges's notes on the manuscripts of the sonnets to determine the approximate date of the sonnets and their sequence. For, to begin with, there are only nine undated sonnets in Hopkins's entire output; this fact together with the remarks in his letters about sonnets which were "written in blood" or which came "unbidden and against my will" is very helpful. For of the nine undated sonnets, several might well be judged to have come "unbidden and against" his will or to have been "written in blood." Thus the sonnets which express great personal struggle and show a high degree of inspiration would, ceteris paribus, correctly be dated by the letters describing such sonnets.

Another factor supplied by external evidence which also helps to determine the dates of the sonnets is the principle Hopkins followed in dating his poems. According to Bridges he dated his poems from their inception, and however much he
revised a poem he would date his recast as his first draft."¹ Therefore, if some sonnets have qualities corresponding to remarks found in Hopkins's letters, we can be sure that those sonnets were written prior to the date of those letters.

A final factor aiding us in determining the dates and sequence of the sonnets is the degree of revision found in some of the poems. Some poems in the manuscript give very few signs of revision; others give many. When this observation is referred to the fact that some sonnets came to Hopkins "unbidden and against" his will, i.e., that the inspiration was so clear and forceful that he had little difficulty fitting it into the sonnet form, then we can safely conclude that the unrevised poems were written prior to the letter which speaks about "unbidden" sonnets.

In this chapter, however, just one problem will be treated, viz., the determining of the approximate date of the sonnets. The problem of the sequence of the sonnets from external evidence will be treated in the following chapter.

Of the eight sonnets considered in this thesis, only one, No. 39, has a date. That poem was written while Hopkins was vacationing at Clongowes in August of 1885. The simple dating of the poem reads: "Clongowes, Aug. 1885."²

¹ Hopkins, Poems, 95.
² Ibid., 114.
The Terrible Sonnets (except for No. 39) and Nos. 34 and 56 make up the nine undated sonnets in Hopkins's works. The last two mentioned have been excluded from the discussion in this thesis on the grounds that Bridges would not have included them among the Terrible Sonnets, as was proved in Chapter I. Therefore their dates are properly outside the scope of this thesis; and henceforth we shall speak of them and their dates only when it is pertinent to the dates of the Terrible Sonnets.

Now that those two poems have been eliminated from the discussion, we turn to Hopkins's Note-Books for evidence that will help us to determine the approximate date of sonnet No. 32. There we find proof that this sonnet, which Bridges suggests as being written in 1881, was really written in the Dublin years of Hopkins's life. Mr. Humphry House, editor of the Note-Books, does not print what he found in the "Dublin Note-Book"; but he describes its contents thus:

An unbound book of same [about 9" x 11"] size and paper [thin]. Miscellaneous notes 1884-5. Markings of exam. papers, spiritual notes, lecture notes on Tacitus, Cicero, 'Roman Literature and Antiquities,' &c., scraps on metre. Contains also early drafts of Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves and Caradoc's Soliloquy... These drafts belong to the end of 1884 or the beginning of 1885 and are contemporary with those of Caradoc's Soliloquy. 

3 Ibid., 51.

House's statement that "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," No. 32, was first written in the latter part of 1884 or early part of 1835 is consistent with Hopkins's dating principle. For Hopkins, in a letter dated March 24, 1885 said that he was going to send a part of his poem, "St. Winefrid" (which contained Caradoc's soliloquy)5 to Bridges for reading and comments. Therefore No. 32, since it is, on the word of House, contemporary with this soliloquy, must have a date near or prior to the March 24th letter; for Hopkins, as we have seen, always dated his works according to the date of their first writing. It should be noted, too, that the order in which House gives the contents of the "Dublin Note-Books" is consistent with the approximate date he assigns to sonnet No. 32. For the examination papers therein mentioned could very well be those of the students who matriculated in August, 1884. The lecture notes were probably those of his first classes or courses, and drafts of "Caradoc's Soliloquy" and "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" could have been done after he had prepared his lectures—in other words, at the end of 1884 or at the beginning of 1885.

Now that the approximate date of No. 32 has been determined, we very naturally turn to what looks like our most valued evidence, namely, the manuscript of sonnet No. 40. For that sonnet in its second stage of revision is found on the same

5 Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 211; also Poems, 119.
sheet of paper as Nos. 38 and 39 (both of which are dated August 1885); and in its final form it is on the same sheet of paper as sonnet No. 41. 6

One's first impulse is to say that these two poems, Nos. 40 and 41, were written sometime near the dates given for No. 38 and No. 39. 7 But on second thought two objections come to mind. First, Bridges disagrees with that opinion. For some reason, which he does not give, Bridges says that No. 40 probably corresponds to the "written in blood" remark Hopkins made in a letter to him dated May 17, 1885. 8 Bridges's opinion, of course, is to be respected. For he had the evidence we speak of and yet decided that the "written in blood" sonnet was No. 40—therefore written before Nos. 38 and 39. Another objection is that Hopkins may have written No. 40 on the reverse side of a piece of paper and then later put Nos. 38 and 39 with it. In view of these objections, therefore, we must refrain from stating that Nos. 40 and 41 were written after Nos. 38 and 39; and therefore we cannot say that they were written in August or later of 1885.

The evidence that does help in determining the approximate date of the sonnets is found in the letters Hopkins wrote to Bridges. In the letter of May 17, 1885 he says, "I have after a

6 Hopkins, Poems, 114.
7 Ibid., 113. Date given for No. 38 is Aug. 23, 1885.
8 Ibid., 114.
long silence written two sonnets, which I am touching: if ever anything was written in blood one of these was.\(^9\) These words are important. First, there are two sonnets. Secondly, he is "touching," or revising them. Thirdly, they are expressive of suffering and are very personal, for that is the obvious meaning of "written in blood." Then in the next letter written to Bridges (Sept. 1, 1885) he makes this rather informative remark, "I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will."\(^10\) So these few words here are also very important. There are more than five sonnets, four of which required little or no revision; and these, like the "written in blood" sonnet, are personal and indicative of the sufferings of Hopkins. Any other interpretation of the words "unbidden and against my will" is out of the question.

At this time Hopkins was suffering greatly from melancholy and dejection which came to him because he was worn out in body and had the feeling that he was not physically capable of his task. He saw before he came to Dublin that this weakness would grow, and he spoke of it in March of 1884 after he had been elected Fellow of the Royal University of Ireland in the department of classics. He says to his friend Bridges,

\(^9\) Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 219.
\(^10\) Ibid., 221.
I have a salary of £400 a year, but when I first contemplated the six examinations I have yearly to conduct, five of them running, and to the Matriculation there came last year 750 candidates, I thought that Stephen's Green (the biggest square in Europe) paved with gold would not pay for it. It is an honour and an opening and has many bright sides, but at present it has also some dark ones and this in particular that I am not at all strong, not strong enough for the requirements, and do not see at all how I am to become so.\footnote{Ibid., 190.}

Then after he had been at the Royal University for quite some time, he wrote a more complete description of his sufferings to A. W. M. Baillie on April 24, 1885. He said,

The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling. One, the lightest but a very inconvenient form of it, is daily anxiety about work to be done, which makes me break off or never finish all that lies outside that work. It is useless to write more on this: when I am at the worst, though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like madness. I see no ground for thinking I shall ever get over it or ever succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me to do of any consequence.\footnote{Gerard Manley Hopkins, Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore, edited with Notes and an Introduction by Claude Collee Abbott, London, 1938, 109-10.}

Though the suffering described here is very great, yet one must remember that the "daily anxiety" is the lightest form of his trial. So, though he seems to be telling much about himself, he is in reality hiding some of his suffering.

A month later he wrote to Bridges again and complained
of this sadness and its resemblance to madness. He says, "I think my fits of sadness resemble madness. Change is the only relief and that I seldom get." 13

From these few remarks concerning his health it is quite clear that there was but one thing to which Hopkins reacted with all his powers. It was not his classes; they did not receive his enthusiasm, nor did the many projects lying outside the requirements of his classwork. Rather, he was preoccupied and excessively aware of his own miserable feelings. Nothing was more in the forefront of his consciousness.

Since he was so aware of his trials at this point in his life, it is most improbable that the four sonnets referred to as "unbidden and against my will" could be about anything other than himself and his trials. It is unimaginable that a man in his condition should be suddenly so inspired that four sonnets on nature or some other topic should come to him out of the blue.

On the other hand, that he should easily and vividly express himself and his sufferings, even though he did not want to, is in accord with the laws of psychology and our own experience. It is most natural for one to find expression for thoughts and feelings one has experienced over a long space of time. So also, who has not at one time in his life found himself expressing feelings which, in a period of calm, he would never think of

13 Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 216.
uttering? Therefore, we must conclude that Hopkins wrote seven sonnets during the spring and summer of 1885; and we must also conclude that these sonnets are in their content very personal and indicative of the suffering Hopkins was experiencing at that time.

The next question to be answered is: Does it therefore follow that the May and September letters refer to the undated sonnets? Is it not possible that those letters refer to sonnets Nos. 48, 50, 51? For in each of those poems there are lines manifesting great suffering and great love of God. For example, in No. 48 there is the exclamation "Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection."\(^{14}\) Certainly that is an echo of the letters of 1884 and 1885. Then in the sonnet No. 50 we find these lines:

\begin{verbatim}
Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

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0 then if in my lagging lines you miss
The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,
My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss
Now, yields you, with some sighs, our explanation. 16

At first sight the above objection seems very formidable, but it can be answered. For the above quoted lines are taken from poems which are dated three years or more later than the May and September letters. No. 48 has the date of July 26, 1888; 17 No. 50 was written on March 17, 1889; 17 and No. 51 has been dated April 22, 1889. 17 Since Hopkins always dated his poems at their first writing, these sonnets are not among those spoken of in the May and September letters; for if they were, Hopkins would never have put dates later by three years on them.

Perhaps, then, the May and September letters do not refer to the undated sonnets, but to dated sonnets of an earlier period than the spring and summer of 1885?

This conjecture immediately collapses when we recall that both letters imply that the sonnets spoken of were recently written. In the May letter he declared, "I have after a long silence written two sonnets." 18 Therefore those sonnets could not be any of those having a date earlier than 1885. So, too, in the September letter, he makes a remark which rules out the possibility that the five sonnets spoken of could have been

17 Ibid., 117, 118, 118.
18 Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 219.
written before 1885. In that letter he says, "I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you. . . . four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will." 19 The obvious meaning of this text is that he had recently written some sonnets and was waiting to revise them before sending them to Bridges. If Hopkins were not waiting to revise them, then there seems to be no logical reason for his not sending them along with the September letter. Therefore the September and May letters could not refer to the earlier dated sonnets.

In confirmation of this it should be noted that "Ribblesdale" is the latest sonnet before the 1884 and 1885 period. 20 It was written two years before that period while Hopkins was at Stonyhurst. The poem is not about himself, nor does it show any of the sufferings one would expect if it were one of the poems Hopkins spoke about in the May and September letters. Also, this sonnet is followed by two other poems 21 (not sonnets) which again are not autobiographic or suggestive of suffering.

Since, therefore the May and September letters do not refer to the later dated sonnets (Nos. 48, 50, and 51), nor to the earlier dated sonnets, we must conclude that those letters

19 Ibid., 221.
20 Hopkins, Poems, 112.
21 Ibid., No. 36, called "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo"; No. 37, called "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe."
refer to the sonnets under consideration in this thesis, i.e., Nos. 39-41 and 44-47. Therefore the approximate date of the Terrible Sonnets is from late 1884 to sometime in August of 1885.
CHAPTER III

THE SEQUENCE OF THE TERRIBLE SONNETS
FROM EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

Now that we have determined that the May and September letters refer to sonnets Nos. 39-41 and 44-47, we are faced with a double problem—the determining to which two sonnets the May letter refers and to which four sonnets the September letter refers. Solving this problem is the first step in this chapter. After that has been accomplished, we shall examine the evidence referring to the sequence among the sonnets and determine that sequence.

The best way of handling the problem of the May and September letters is to begin by studying the evidence concerning sonnets Nos. 44-47. For these sonnets, since they are closely related in the manuscripts and since they have few corrections, are more likely to be the ones Hopkins described as coming like "inspirations unbidden and against my will." If these sonnets are the ones referred to in the September letter, then it will necessarily follow that the sonnets numbered as 40 and 41 are the ones referred to in the May letter. This is necessarily so because all the other possibilities will have been
The approximate date of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 32) is sometime between the latter part of 1885 and April 1, 1885—as was proved in the preceding chapter; then of the other eight sonnets Hopkins wrote during the spring and summer of 1885, two are dated August, i.e., Nos. 38 and 39; therefore, if Nos. 44-47 are the ones referred to in the September letter, the only alternative is that Nos. 40 and 41 are the ones referred to in the May letter.

There are two reasons for saying that the September letter refers to sonnets Nos. 44-47. First, and most important, those sonnets are found together on one piece of paper and indicate a development in Hopkins's maturity. That four sonnets, expressing the feelings that these do, should be found together on one sheet of paper immediately leads one to suspect that these are the four unbidden sonnets Hopkins spoke of in his September letter. The second reason leading us to refer these sonnets to that letter proceeds from the amount of revision found in the manuscripts; for Nos. 44-47 there is very little revision work, whereas the manuscripts of Nos. 40 and 41 show that Hopkins was not satisfied with the expression of his inspiration and that he spent considerable time recasting it.

This evidence suggests the following argument. The September letter refers to those four sonnets whose inspirations came to the poet so clearly and forcibly that he could easily fit them into the sonnet form and thereby dispense with much
revision. But of the seven sonnets written between May and September of 1885 there are found five sonnets whose manuscripts show very little revision—at least in comparison with those of Nos. 40 and 41. Therefore four of the five sonnets (Nos. 39, 44-47) are the ones referred to by the September letter, for they, rather than Nos. 40 and 41, are more likely to have come "unbidden" to the poet.

However, can we be sure that we have all the revision work belonging to these five sonnets? If there is a reasonable doubt about this, then the argument from the clarity and force of inspiration collapses. There are several reasons which lead one to believe that we have all the revision work on these sonnets. First, we know that Hopkins was a great saver of his papers, and especially of his rough drafts. Proof of this is found in his letter to A. W. M. Baillie on May 8, 1885. He writes,

_Sometime since, I began to overhaul my old letters, accumulations of actually ever since I was at school, destroying all but a very few, and growing ever lother to destroy, but also to read, so that at last I left off reading; and there they lie and my old notebooks and beginnings of things, ever so many, which it seems to me might well have been done, ruins and wrecks..._

So it is clear that he was inclined to save rather than destroy his papers. True, he did burn some things, but only his letters. Besides, it is most probable that he did not have the drafts of the Terrible Sonnets at this time because he does not

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1 Hopkins, Correspondence with Patmore, 108.
speak of the "unbidden" sonnets until September, nor of the "written in blood" sonnet until May 21, 1885.²

It is clear from some of the notes which Bridges gives concerning the manuscripts that Hopkins was careful to save rough drafts of his poetical works. For example, many of the fragmentary pieces were written on literally "scraps" of paper.³ Then too, Hopkins kept early drafts of sonnets which are similar in spirit to the Terrible Sonnets. Of No. 69, which Bridges described as "thrown off in a cynical mood, [and one] which he could not wish to intrude permanently among his last serious poems,"⁴ he kept various "consecutive full drafts."⁵ Of No. 51—a pathetic poem which explains to Bridges Hopkins’s lack of inspiration—there are early drafts in H.⁶ So also, No. 40 was revised twice, and its drafts were preserved.⁷ Therefore it is clear that Hopkins was in the habit of keeping the rough drafts of his work, especially, it might be noted, of his most personal

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² What has been called the May 17th letter must be qualified here. Hopkins began that letter May 17th, took it up twice—May 21 and May 28—and finally finished it on May 29th. The words "written in blood" occur after the May 21st date.
³ Hopkins, Poems; confer notes of Nos. 53, 55, 57, 66.
⁴ Ibid., 121.
⁵ Ibid., 120.
⁶ Ibid., 118.
⁷ Ibid., 114.
works, as Nos. 40, 41, 51, and 69 certainly are.

That Hopkins kept these personal poems excludes the possibility that he destroyed the drafts of Nos. 44-47 for fear that they might someday be made public reading. The fact that several drafts of No. 69 exist is sufficient to prove Hopkins did not destroy his works because of fear.

Another point worthy of note is that the manuscript of Nos. 44-47 is probably not what we might call the good copy of the poems taken from drafts which were later destroyed. The reason for saying this is twofold. First, Hopkins was very remiss in making "fair copies of his work," even to the extent that he did not keep a copy of a poem very dear to him—"The Wreck of the Deutschland." Secondly, the manuscript of Nos. 44-47 has corrections by Hopkins in its texts. This indicates that he was not working on a paper he considered to be the final or "fair" copy Bridges speaks of. If there were no corrections and if Hopkins's habit was to make fair copies, then we might conclude that this manuscript was the fair copy; but Hopkins's remissness and the lack of rough drafts of those poems—when we might rightly expect them to be present—argue against this. Since there are no rough drafts of those poems we can conclude that this manuscript is the only one containing sonnets Nos. 44-47.

Perhaps someone might object at this point that there

8 Ibid., 95.
were rough drafts of the sonnets, but that they were lost in the process of being gathered and sent to Bridges. The evidence to answer this objection has already been presented. Moreover, if Father Wheeler—the Vice-President of University College and the man who sent Hopkins's papers to Bridges—was careful enough to see to it that even "scrapsof poetry should be safely deliv-
ered, then it is hard to believe that rough drafts of four poems should be over-looked or lost in the process of delivering.

Since Hopkins was inclined to keep his papers and especially rough drafts of his personal sonnets, since he was re-
miss in making fair copies of his work, since he was not troubled by the fear that his works might be made public, and since there is no reason for believing that the rough drafts of Nos. 44-47 were lost, it can safely be concluded that the manuscript con-
taining those sonnets is probably the only draft there was of those poems. Therefore we can begin to study the notes Bridges gives on Nos. 44-47 in order to see if there is any reason for connecting these sonnets rather than any others with the Septem-
ber letter.

It would be well here to recall the notes of identifi-
cation found in that letter. They are as follows: Five sonnets are spoken of; four are described as having come "unbidden and against" the will of the poet. Therefore one would rightly

9 Hopkins, Note-Books, xii.
expect that the sonnets be personal, indicative of some struggle, and have few marks of revision. With this in mind let us examine the notes to these sonnets.

Bridges writes,

44, 45, 46, 47. These four sonnets (together with No. 56) are all written undated in a small hand on the two sides of a half-sheet of common sermon-paper, in the order in which they are here printed. They probably date back as early as 1885, and may all, or some of them those referred to in a letter of Sept. 1, 1885. [Here follows the quote about five sonnets, unbidden and against my will, etc.] I have no certain nor single identification of date.

44. To seem the stranger. H, with corrections which my text embodies. [Here follows commentary] No title.

45. I wake and feel. H, with corrections which text embodies: no title.

46. PATIENCE. As 45. [Commentary] No title.

47. My own heart. As 45. Commentary Lines 13 and 14, the text here from a good correction separately written (as far as mountains) on the top margin of No. 56. [More commentary]

Since No. 56 is so closely related to these four sonnets, the significant part of its note will be given, too.

56. ASHBOUGHS (my title). In H in two sections: first as a curtail sonnet (like 13 and 22) on the same sheet with the four sonnets 44-47, and preceding them: second, an apparently later version in the same metre on a page by itself; with expanded variation from

10 Hopkins, Poems, 116, 117. The italics after the first period in each note are mine. That before the first period is Bridges's and italicizes the first words of the first line of the poems.
seventh line, making thirteen lines for eleven. 11

The first point in these notes to which attention must be directed is the size of the paper Hopkins used for the four sonnets. For the fact that he was able to get them on a half-sheet of paper is an indication of how unbidden the sonnets were. This paper was probably part 12 of the "Dublin Note-Book" and so was 9" x 11" in size. 13 Half-sheet size would be 5½" x 9", which would allow enough room for five sonnets if they were written in a small hand as the notes say they were.

The next point to note is that Nos. 44-47 have been corrected, but the corrections were so few and small that they were able to be made right in the manuscript, small as it was, and did not require that Hopkins make another draft of any of the poems. Certainly, that is what Bridges's remarks indicate; for in describing the poems, the greatest revision he refers to is in No. 47—a recast of lines 13 and 14. Of the other poems all he can note is "H, with corrections text embodies" or "as 45." Therefore it must be concluded that a very clear and forceful

12 House in the "Preface" to the Note-Books, xxxi, says, "There is a page of the notes in the Dublin book for a sermon... dated 'Aug. 2, '85.'" He then explains in a footnote that this page was torn out and preserved loose. Thus we know that Hopkins used 9" x 11" paper for his sermons. House also states in the same footnote that the pages following the sermon page were torn out and missing. One of these was probably used for Nos. 44-47, which were written on "sermon-paper" in 1885.

13 Hopkins, Note-Books, 425.
inspiration was the cause of these poems.

But with sonnet No. 56 we notice that a relatively great deal of revision has been done. It was first written on the same sheet as Nos. 44-47, then "an apparently later version"—one which began at the seventh line and varied the expression to the extent that two more lines were added—was made on a separate sheet of paper.

It should be noted, too, that this sonnet is in its first version a curtal or an abridged sonnet, whereas Nos. 44-47 are in the traditional fourteen line sonnet form. When Hopkins revised the sonnet, he had thirteen lines, which destroyed his original curtal sonnet form. In revising the poem, perhaps, he was trying to put his thoughts into the traditional sonnet form. Whatever was his motive for revising, it seems certain that he was dissatisfied with his first version. Therefore this sonnet did not come to him as easily as did the others.

Certainly the facts that Nos. 44-47 are found together on one piece of paper, have very few corrections, and are with another sonnet which has been greatly revised—certainly these facts agree with the words in the September letter: "I shall

14 Hopkins, Poems, 119.
15 Ibid.
16 Nos. 13 and 22 are Hopkins's other curtal sonnets. Each has eleven lines.
shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will."\textsuperscript{17}

The fact that commentators esteem Nos. 44-47 more than No. 56 is another reason for saying that the September letter refers to these sonnets. Bridges, Pick, Gardner, and Peters have all shown the great esteem they have for Nos. 44-47; whereas they have not exhibited a like esteem of No. 56.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that they do so praise Nos. 44-47 indicates that these sonnets are better than No. 56, and therefore more likely to have come unbidden than No. 56.

The final argument for saying that the September letter refers to Nos. 44-47 is that the May letter seems to correspond more to Bridges's notes for Nos. 40 and 41 than to his notes for Nos. 44-47; whereas the September letter does not seem to correspond to his notes for Nos. 40 and 41. For in the May letter there is mention of revision. "I have," Hopkins wrote, "after a long silence written two sonnets, which I am touching."\textsuperscript{19} A study of Bridges's notes for Nos. 40 and 41 reveals that those poems have been worked over--No. 40 having been revised twice and No. 41 revised once. Bridges says of these poems:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Hopkins, \textit{Letters to Bridges}, 221.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Hopkins, \textit{Poems}, 119. Pick, Hopkins, 55, 143-150.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Hopkins, \textit{Letters to Bridges}, 219.
\end{itemize}
40. CARRION COMFORT. Autograph in H, in three versions. 1st, deleted draft. 2nd, a complete version, both on same page with 38 and 39. 3rd, with 41 on another sheet, final (?) revision carried only to end of 1. 12 (two detached lines on reverse). Text is this last with last two lines from the 2nd version. Date must be 1885, and this is probably the sonnet 'written in blood,' of which he wrote in May of that year.--I have added the title and the hyphen in heaven-handling.

41. No, worst. Autograph in H, on same page as third draft of 40. One undated draft with corrections embodied in the text here.--l. 5, at end are some marks which look like hyphen and a comma: no title.20

That Hopkins speaks of two poems being in need of revision and then speaks of four which simply came to him unbidden--this fact coupled with the fact that two sonnets show signs of extensive revision and four exhibit very few signs of revision leads but to one conclusion; namely, that the May in all probability refers to sonnets Nos. 40 and 41 and the September letter to sonnets Nos. 44-47.

The next point to be determined is the sequence of the Terrible Sonnets. It has been proved that No. 32 was written first, for its rough draft was found in the Dublin Note-Book with "Caradoc's Soliloquy." Since it is contemporaneous with the soliloquy, it must have been written before March 24, 1885.21 Next in order are sonnets Nos. 40 and 41, and then come Nos. 39 (dated poem) and 44-47. Two questions must now be

20 Hopkins, Poems, 114.
21 Hopkins, Note-Books, 425; Letters to Bridges, 208.
answered. First, does No. 40 precede No. 41 or vice versa? Second, what is the order existing among Nos. 39, 44, 45, 46, and 47?

There is not much external evidence pertaining to the sequence of the sonnets, but there is enough to permit one to give the sequence of six of the sonnets with a high degree of probability. The evidence for the position of No. 39 is the most tenuous of all.

It is most probable that No. 40 was written prior to No. 41 because No. 40, in what appears to be its final form, is on the same manuscript as the first version of No. 41. That Hopkins should finish No. 41 and then sometime afterwards write No. 40 above No. 41 is most improbable. Therefore we can only conclude that since the manuscripts indicate the priority in time of No. 40, and since Bridges shows by his edition of the poems that he himself agrees with that arrangement, No. 40 was written before No. 41.

So also, the arrangement which Nos. 44-47 have in the manuscripts argues that they were written just as they are numbered. For there is no reason—at least from the evidence of the manuscript—for thinking that they were written in any other order.

As for No. 39, the most that can be said for its position in the sequence is that it does not come anywhere between Nos. 44-47; and the reason is that No. 39 is not found among
those sonnets.

Arguing from internal evidence, which will be given in the next chapter, one would put No. 39 at least after No. 45; for it is somewhat different from that poem and written in a spirit more like that found in Nos. 46 and 47. Therefore, since the sonnet is dated August, 1885, and since it is not found in the manuscript with Nos. 44-47, it seems that it was not written before Nos. 32, 40, and 41, and that it was written either before or after Nos. 44-47.

In brief, from a study of the September letter in conjunction with the notes on the manuscript of sonnets Nos. 44-47 and No. 56 a great similarity was noted between the description of the sonnets mentioned in the letter and the description of the sonnets Nos. 44-47 and 56. On examination the May letter in conjunction with sonnets Nos. 40 and 41 and the conclusions formed about the September letter and sonnets Nos. 44-47 and 56 revealed that the September letter most probably did not refer to Nos. 40 and 41, nor the May letter to Nos. 44-47 and 56. Finally, the sequence of the sonnets was determined from their arrangement in the manuscripts. No. 40 preceded No. 41; and Nos. 44-47 followed in the same order as on the manuscript paper. As for No. 39, evidence indicated it was either prior or subsequent to Nos. 44-47. No. 32 came first in the sequence because it was found with some early drafts of "Caraëoc's Soliloquy," which was
written earlier than the May letter of 1885. Therefore, external evidence indicates with a high degree of probability that the sequence of the sonnets runs: Nos. 32, 40, 41, 39 (?), 44, 45, 46, 47, and 39 (?).
CHAPTER IV

THE SEQUENCE OF THE TERRIBLE SONNETS
FROM INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The study of Hopkins's letters and Bridges's notes showed that No. 32 ("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves) was written before any of the other sonnets; that the May letter of 1885 referred to Nos. 40 and 41, and the September letter to Nos. 44-47. Finally, the arrangement in the manuscripts favors the theory that No. 40 precedes 41, that No. 41 precedes Nos. 44-47, that the last were written in the order in which they appear. As for No. 39, it was certainly written after Nos. 40 and 41, and possibly before Nos. 44-47.

The internal evidence of the poems themselves corroborates the sequence indicated by external evidence. This internal evidence can easily be presented by following the general procedure of citing the text of the sonnet and giving its interpretation.¹ In particular, No. 32 expresses anticipation of very

¹ It would be more desirable to have one of the critics seconding these interpretations, yet this is impossible. For either the critic is untrustworthy—as Pick is—or he has nothing to say concerning the sequence of the sonnets, which is true of Peters and Gardner. Pick, for example, even though he
severe trials; No. 40 the first experience of those trials and superficial recovery from that experience. No. 41 indicates intense struggle and the very depths of fear and desolation. Nos. 44 and 45 are seen to express deep suffering coupled with resignation and patience—signs that Hopkins has matured and that those poems were written after Nos. 32, 40, and 41. Finally, Nos. 39, 46, and 47 evidence not only suffering and resignation, but also hope and confidence. These last three poems give further signs of maturity and therefore indicate that they were written after Nos. 44 and 45.

As shown in Chapter II, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" is the first in the sequence of Terrible Sonnets. Now at the first careful reading of this long sonnet one can detect two qualities in Hopkins's spirit which prove conclusively that the inspiration for this sonnet came prior to the inspirations of the other Terrible Sonnets. The first quality is his anticipation of a great struggle; the second is his inexperience with or lack of understanding of that struggle. The text of the sonnet is given below.

had the May and September letters, the poems, and the notes to them at his disposal, still maintained—without any substantiation of his statement—that No. 44 was the first in the sonnet sequence. (Pick, Hopkins, 114.) And Gardner and Peters do not even enter upon the question of the sonnet sequence. (Gardner, Hopkins, Vol. 2, 332–348; Peters, Hopkins, 200.) Therefore, all that we can hope to gain from them is an interpretation of a word or line.
SPELT FROM SIBYL'S LEAVES

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous, . .
stupendous
Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all,
hearse-of-all night.
Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, her wild hollow
hoarlight hung to the height
Waste; her earliest stars, earl-stars, stars principal, overbend
us;
Fire-featuring heaven. For earth her being has unbound, her
dapple is at an end, as-
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self
steeped and penned—quite
Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart, you round me
right
With: Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms, and
will end us.
Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth
bleak light; black,
Ever so black on it. Our tale, 0 our oracle! Let life, waned,
ah let life wind
Off her once skined stained veined variety upon, all on two
spools; part, pen, pack
Now her all in two flocks, two folds—black, white; right,
wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each
off the other; off a rack
Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheaths—and shelterless, thoughts
against thoughts in groans grind. ²

A brief prose translation of the sonnet would be some-
thing like the following: Hopkins, being deprived of the various
spiritual joys of his life, is afraid he will be too weak to be
faithful to God. Subsequently he sees in nature a phenomenon
which is at once a symbol of his own state and an answer to his
problem. The intuition of this symbol and answer is the cathar-
sis to his irrational fear; yet it also is a bitter catharsis

² Hopkins, Poems, No. 32.
because Hopkins sees that he must detach himself from those spiritual joys and struggle to serve God without their help. Such is the prose meaning of the poem.

Now attention must be called to the first characteristic of this poem, its anticipation of a great struggle. This anticipation has two phases, the first comes in the line "Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms, and will end us."³ Here Hopkins sees that just as evening quietly and inevitably swallows up and ends the myriad variety of earth and sky, and leaves nothing but a night of black pierced by the fires of the stars, so an evening, a time of dark is coming upon his life and bringing to an end all the "dapple" and variety of that life.

This anticipation terrifies him. To drive out this fear he utters the childish prayer, "Heart, you round me right with."⁴ It is a childish prayer because he knows it could never be granted. Also, there is something cowardly about the prayer, for it shows that Hopkins is willing to run away from the challenge of life to the security of circumstances which will not permit him to have a choice between good and evil.

However, this prayerful attempt to dispel the fear is not effective. He seems to realize the futility of the prayer,

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
and the continued presence of the fear makes him look for another
more real catharsis. He sees in nature

Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth
bleak light; black
ever so black on it. 5

Here is variety. It is not the manifold and beautiful
variety that made praise of God so pleasant to him that he could
sing out

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; 6

Rather, the variety he speaks of is nearly the direct opposite of
that. What he sees is "dragonish" and "ever so black." He is
not pleased, not stirred to praise God for it. Yet he is glad
that he has seen it, for it is the symbol of his own state of
mind; it contains the secret solution to his difficulty. Its
intuition dispels his foolish fears; he sees that there is a
reasonable way in which he can get along without the help of
spiritual joy. In exultation he cries: "Our tale, O our or-
acle!" 7 In this intuition he understands, as Schoder points out,
that "this state of mind he has been in, this drab and undappled
aspect life has worn of late is a natural phenomenon of the

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., No. 13.
7 Ibid., No. 32.
spiritual life, a law of progress in sanctity, as inevitable and irresistible as the advance of night." 8

Consequently, no longer is he going to seek the many different and varied feelings of spiritual joy that he has frequently found in the service of God. He understands that that attitude is rebellious, and as foolish as a child's lamenting that night must follow day. Therefore he turns to the "dragonish" and "ever so black" dapple which lies before him, and he embraces it. He wishes that during his remaining service of God his life should be for a him a world of black and white, a world of choices based on morality and not on their ability to give him consolation. His deep love of God prompts him to make the difficult choice

Let life, waned,

ah let life wind
Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack
Now her all in two flocks, two folds--black, white; right wrong; reckon but, reck, but, mind
But these two; 9

With this intuition and the embracing of a life of black and white, Hopkins's fear that his night will end him is dispelled; but in its place is left a fear that is more real, more worthy of his reasonable caution. For he knows from making the Spiritual Exercises and from his own ascetical experience

8 Schoder, "Spelt," Thought, XIX, 644.
9 Hopkins, Poems, No. 32.
as a priest that it is going to be most difficult for him to serve God without God's consolations. Now he is aware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other; of a rack where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind. 10

This is the second phase of Hopkins's anticipation, and it is clearer than the first. In the former he was afraid of something he could not even express except by an analogy with the advent of night. But in this anticipation he knows exactly what is to be feared: The struggle that comes when a man sees what he must do, yet wants with every appetite and impulse of his being to be free from that obligation. He fears the constant clash of moral judgments which he knows he will have to face. The choosing of the right solely because it is right and not because it is full or destitute of attractiveness—this choosing is what he described by the words, "thoughts against thoughts in groans grind."

It has been said that the two phases of Hopkins's anticipation of suffering plus the fact that he did not experience that suffering prove that "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" is the first in the sequence of the Terrible Sonnets. That he had not experienced those sufferings, at least to the degree he had anticipated and will speak of in the other sonnets, becomes quite

10 Ibid.
clear when the catharsis of the poem is considered.

The exultation and the enthusiasm with which he tells of the discovery that will free him from his night has no meaning unless at the same time he is anticipating suffering with which he has had no previous acquaintance. The reason for this is that if he had experience of the sufferings suggested in the last lines of the poem, there would be no reason for him to be enthusiastic about choosing a world of black and white; for the sufferings suggested by "thoughts against thoughts in groans grind" are the result of his choosing a life of black and white. The choice expressed in the lines

Our tale, 0 our oracle! Let life, waned
ah let life wind
Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack
Now her all in two flocks, two folds--black, white; right, wrong;

is a choice that is new, one that fixes a painful future for him. Therefore, since this sonnet expresses anticipation of sufferings and shows that its author has not experienced them, it must be considered as first in the sonnet sequence.

The next problem is to determine whether sonnets Nos. 40 and 41 are second and third in the sonnet sequence; and if so, to determine which is second and which third. The best approach to this problem is a study and comparison of the two sonnets.
No. 40 reads

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist--slack they may be--these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but 0 thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against
me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to
avoid thee and flee?

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lot lapped strength, stole joy,
would laugh, cheer.
Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me,
foot tred
Me? or me that fought him? 0 which one? is it each
one? That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my
God!) my God.12

Study of this sonnet reveals that there are four dif­
f erent parts, two in the octet and two in the sestet. The first
part, ending with the fourth line, expresses Hopkins's feelings
of frustration and his determination not to surrender to despair.
The last line and a half expresses very vividly both his feelings
of weakness, helplessness, and futility and his firm resolution
not to give up the struggle. He says

    most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
    Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.13

But in the second part of the octet he expresses his perplexity.

12 Ibid., No. 40.
13 Ibid.
This feeling is accompanied by many others: He fears, he is awed, he is in pain because the 'terrible' one is chastising him; and Hopkins doesn't want that chastisement; he is frantic to avoid it and flee.

The perplexity introduced by "But ah, O thou terrible, why wouldst thou etc." is dispelled by the first line of the sestet, which constitutes the third part of the sonnet. To dispel the perplexity, to strengthen his determination, Hopkins has turned to his religion and the symbol of the wheat and chaff so frequently found in the Scriptures and spiritual writers. Seeing himself as grain that must be cleansed, he understands why God permits him to suffer and to experience such helplessness. This relieves him of his perplexity and leads him on to feelings of joy and confidence and triumph.

The last five lines of the sestet give the fourth and final part of the sonnet—the feeling of triumph. It is difficult to fit this feeling logically into the poem. It is not an answer to the question in the octet; it is not even an elaboration of "That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." Rather, it is a reflection on what happened to him when he accepted the suffering God sent for his purification; and its place in the sonnet is dictated by the logic of the heart, not that of the mind.

In these last five lines he speaks of his previous sufferings as "toil" and "coil." Certainly they were these, for
they wearied him and bound him in helplessness and futility. But then there was a time that he—so it seemed to him—"kissed the rod," (no it was the hand) of his chastising father. The filial submission expressed by this symbol then gave him the strength he needed, this became the joy and happiness that makes the children of God laugh and cheer. Joy and happiness in turn led to a question. Should he cheer God, thank Him for His chastisement or should he cheer himself for having conquered with God's grace "that night, that year of now done darkness"? This question he answers by another: "is it each one?" Yes, it is each one. He must exultantly give thanks to God for purifying him, and he must give himself some credit for accepting the purification and thereby bringing himself to the end of his suffer-
ing.

Now that the four main feelings of the poem have been explained, there immediately arises the problem that the words "Of now done darkness" seem to indicate that this sonnet is the last and not one of the earlier sonnets in the sequence. However, external evidence opposed this view on two points. First, No. 40 is followed by No. 41 in the manuscript, as was shown in the preceding chapter. Secondly, the May letter of 1885 most probably refers to one of these two sonnets, which makes it impossible that No. 40 be considered the last in the sonnet se-
quence. How then can Hopkins speak of a "now done darkness" in May when the other sonnets and letters of this period indicate
a great deal of darkness?

The probable explanation is that this poem is the expression of a particularly terrible experience from which Hopkins quickly recovered. The recovery was probably partly due to his seeking refuge in the symbols of the wheat and chaff, the chastising father, and Jacob's wrestling with God; and it was partly due to God's permitting him to think that his sufferings were over in order that further suffering would elicit even greater acts of patience, trust, and loyalty. Thus the recovery in this poem is a particular one and is not to be understood as a complete return to a life filled with the usual amount of consolations from God. Any other explanation of the recovery—since external evidence indicates that the sonnet was written in May of 1885—is simply contrary to the evidence found in his later letters and poems.14 There he shows that he is still suffering from the same difficulties.

To say that this recovery is a particular one agrees not only with the last letters and poems, but also with the evidence which places No. 40 before No. 41 in the sonnet sequence. For it would be the natural thing for Hopkins, coming for the first time face to face with his world of black and white, to flee it and seek for strength and consolation in God. He had

14 Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 250, 278, 282; Poems, Nos. 48, 50, 51.
acted this way and only recently—in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves"—decided in his mind not to seek for such consolation. Instead he would seek only the moral goodness in actions, regardless of how little that appealed to him.

black, white; right,
wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other; of a rack
Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe—and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.15

Another factor supporting this explanation is that in No. 41—as soon to be pointed out—Hopkins again experiences terrible sufferings from which he does not recover and which are terrible precisely because he remembers and is conscious of earlier sufferings. Therefore, since neither external evidence permits that No. 40 be considered last in the sonnet sequence, nor internal evidence favors such a consideration, the only remaining conclusion is that the poem was written before sonnets Nos. 44-47 and represents a temporary recovery from desolation.

This conclusion leads to the next difficulty of the sequence problem. Does No. 41 precede Nos. 44-47, and if so, was it written before or after No. 40? The interpretation of No. 41 makes it quite clear that this sonnet is prior to Nos. 44-47 and subsequent to No. 40. No. 41 reads

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.

15 Hopkins, Poems, No. 32.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting? 
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing--
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No lingering! Let me be fell; force I must be brief'.

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.16

In this sonnet Hopkins gives an intimate and accurate revelation of the terrible sufferings he is experiencing, and that is all. The poem expresses pain from its first line to its last. Nowhere, neither from creature nor from Creator is the poet able to find relief.

The first line points to a comparison. Hopkins's sufferings, which suggest excruciating physical pain, are not only numerous, but the grief they cause him is increased because they are pangs "schooled at forepangs." The memory of those earlier sufferings is now present to him and increases his present suffering. That is why he cries out that they "wilder wring."

He is impatient with this continued grief, and like a child, thinks only of his pain and the persons who can relieve it. He runs to them crying

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?

16 Ibid., No. 41.
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief? Receiving no answer, receiving no relief, he is left to his miserable self. He contemplates his cries for help and sees that they are centered in one source. It is his chief woe, it is the cause of the world's sorrow, it is self. He sees that his cries spring from him as he is beaten on an age-old anvil. He sees that they rise and fall, lull and leave off with the rhythm of the smith's hammer that is forging him. What is the anvil? It is his unpurified self. Who is the smith? God. What are His blows? They are the withdrawals of God's help which leave him struggling against his evil tendencies to attain moral good.

Such an interpretation of

My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing— Then lull, then leave off.

is the only one possible when we consider that "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" implicitly predicted a life of purification for Hopkins. That sonnet depicted Hopkins as being aware that soon his thinking would be a torture for him, that his thoughts would grind "in groans" against themselves. To consider that anything other than an unpurified self is the cause of his suffering, especially after studying "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" and "Carrion Com-

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., No. 32.
fort" is, in the words of Schoder, "to theorize in a vacuum." 20

The final line of the octet describes the panic this extreme suffering caused him. His only thought is that he can endure no more, that soon he must collapse and die.

Pity had shrieked 'No lingering! Let me be fell; force I must be brief.' 21

The interpretation of the sestet, though difficult, seems to be this: Hopkins thought that it would be impossible for him to suffer any more; yet when he saw that he must suffer more, the seeming contradiction was too much for his mind. In seeing no normal way of escape, he began to see only abnormal ways. These became for him his

mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. 22

Here he faced a new fear, namely, that his mind would soon break

20 Schoder, "Spelt," Thought, XIX, 640. That Schoder thinks that sonnet No. 41 expresses a purification process is clear from the following remarks. ". . . it is plausible that he was allowed by God to undergo, as a purifying preparation for yet higher things, a long period of trial similar to the "dark night" of the mystics. That Hopkins was undergoing this painful stage of the spiritual growth toward the end of his life seems the only adequate explanation of many poems of this period. We must study Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves and the "terrible sonnets" against the actual theological and ascetical background operative in their author's mind. They are personal documents of the highest candor and intimacy. To interpret them without full reference to their religious background. . . is to theorize in a vacuum."

21 Hopkins, Poems, No. 41.

22 Ibid.
This fear he spoke of in his letters, but it is crystallized in "Nor does long our small Durance deal with that steep or deep."

Abandoned to face such terrible suffering, Hopkins can only do what any good man could do--look forward to the end of life when his trials will be rewarded, look forward to sleep when part of his trials will be over.

Here's creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.24

Thus, if we compare No. 40 with No. 41, an advance can be noted in Hopkins's purification. For in "Carrion Comfort" although he faces despair and God's chastisements, his trial is made easy for him when God permits him to be inspired and strengthened by the thought that a loving Father is purifying him, chastising him, wrestling with him. Whereas in No. 41 there is no such inspiration, strengthening, and consolation. Hopkins is alone in his trials and his only consolation is the thought that death and sleep are not too far away. In this poem he indicates that he is able to suffer even more than in No. 40. This is a sign of growth, and growth implies a lapse of time. For that reason and because No. 41 follows No. 40 in the manuscript, No. 41

23 Hopkins, Further Letters, 109-10; Letters to Bridges, 216.
24 Hopkins, Poems, No. 41.
has a slightly later date than No. 40.

Now that it has been shown that "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" is first in the sonnet sequence, "Carrion Comfort" second, and No. 41 as at least third, we move on to the next problem of this chapter, i.e., to determine the sonnet sequence of Nos. 44-47.

The characteristics gleaned from the interpretation of the text of these four sonnets indicate that they were written after Nos. 40 and 41. Closer analysis indicates that No. 44 precedes No. 45, that Nos 46 and 47 follow No. 45, and that it is impossible to show from internal evidence alone whether No. 46 is prior to No. 47 or vice versa.

No. 44 reads as follows:

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
And he my peace my parting, sword and strife.

England, whose honour 0 all my heart woos, wife
To my creating thought, would neither hear
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I weary of idle a being but by where wars are rife.

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third
Remove. Not but in all removes I can
Kind love both give and get. Only what word
Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.25

In the opening lines Hopkins states the theme of the poem. He is lonely. First comes the thought that his family

25 Ibid., No. 44.
is separated from him by religion. Then even Christ, for Whom he left his family, is no longer a source of peace, but rather is now a "sword and strife" to him.

Secondly, the England which has been the "wife" to his creating thought and for whose honor he has been so zealous is now in difficult straits both at home and in Ireland. He knows what is for her good, but he also knows that she would never listen to him. Thus his zeal is frustrated, and he wearies of being idle "where wars are rife."

Finally, he reflects that he is away from his beautiful land. He finds it difficult, but not so much so that he cannot find or give love. Yet he has one complaint and it is this: All the plans he has worked on, all the prayers he has uttered to bring his family into the Catholic Church, to bring back the Christ of peace in place of the Christ that is a sword and strife to him, all these plans have been rejected by heaven or thwarted by hell. He is left baffled. He sees that he has not taken one step towards mending the breaches that leave him so lonely. That is why he says

Only what word
Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,

26 Hopkins, Letters to Bridges, 252, 256, 257.
27 Pick, Hopkins, 145.
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.28

As is obvious from the first reading of the poem, here there is not the same attitude of mind toward his trials as before. In No. 41 he was frantic, impatient, barely able to control himself. But in this sonnet when we listen to his clear narration of the trials that harassed him, we know and feel that he has control of himself. Fear and impatience have given ground in his soul to wisdom and patience. Wisdom shows him that Christ has now become the cause of his pain and anxiety. He is patient in this knowledge, he shows that he knows that the trial is for his betterment, and therefore does not impatiently plead

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us where is your relief?29

This wisdom and patience is a sign of progress. They indicate that Hopkins is farther along in the knowledge of spiritual things than he was when he wrote No. 41. For that reason this sonnet was probably written after No. 41.

Another reason for saying that No. 41 was written before No. 44 is that No. 44 shows that Hopkins has been baffled and bewildered for a long time, much longer than the Hopkins of No. 41. In No. 41 he suffers desolation, he is separated from his Lord and left to his own devices. In No. 44 he is not only

28 Hopkins, Poems, No. 44.
29 Ibid., No 41.
separated and left to his own devices, but he also suffers the continual frustration of seeing those devices fail to bring him relief. Thus the sonnet indicates a further development in Hopkins; for not only has he grown in wisdom and patience, but he has also experienced another phase of suffering, frustration.

Because No. 44 marks an increase in spiritual maturity and an increase in his sufferings, it should be considered as subsequent to No. 41.

The next sonnet for study is No. 45. It reads:

I wake and feel the fall of dark, not day. What hours, 0 what black hours we have spent This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went! And more must, in yet longer light's delay. With witness I speak this. But where I say Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me! Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse. Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see The lost are like this, and their scourge to be As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.30

In this sonnet Hopkins recalls that he awoke one night and was impressed with a bitterness that seemed to be part of the black night that surrounded him. This bitterness, this night, he perceives is to last for some time; and so he grieves, for he knows that the frightful images and apprehensions he has had this night are not to be taken from his mind by the absorb-

30 Ibid., No. 45.
ing interests that day will bring. Instead he must suffer until peace and joy dawn in his soul.

what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went! And more must, in yet longer light's delay. 31

He admits that God has been with him, "With witness I speak this." 32 But his thoughts turn back again to his time of trial. This night has been long, long as a year, long as a lifetime, and his prayers to the only Person he is in love with are treated as though they had not been uttered.

And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent To dearest him that lives alas! away. 33

He therefore recognizes that Christ is testing him still, still seeing if he will serve without consolations.

Being deprived of the consolations of God, he is now left with an acute awareness of his own miserableness. This he sees is God's will. "God's most deep decree Bitter would have me taste." 34 The reason for this "decree" he knows, too. It is to purify him, to make him humble, less confident in his own powers—great as he knew them to be—and more dependent upon God.

Aware of the purpose of these trials, he calmly com-

31 Ibid.
32 Pick, Hopkins, 143.
33 Hopkins, Poems, No. 45.
34 Ibid.
pares his state to that of the damned whose greatest suffering is the consciousness of their own depravity and baseness. This terrible self-consciousness is what pains him so.

I see

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be,

As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. 35

What indicates that this sonnet was written after No. 41 is the resignation found in the midst of such terrible suffering. Throughout his trial Hopkins is resigned and patient, willing to suffer, not fooled into thinking that his sufferings are at an end simply because he recognizes the Author of them and His purpose. Love of God, faith in Him are singularly triumphant in this sonnet because they keep Hopkins patient and resigned to God's forging and fashioning him into a holier man.

This patient calm and resignation in the midst of suffering is not explicitly found in No. 41. This is not to say that he was not resigned and patient in that sonnet, for he obviously was; otherwise he would have succumbed to his trials. But in No. 41 his virtue is not as great as it is in this sonnet. There Hopkins was not strong enough to stand firm in the face of his trials; he tries to avoid them; he seeks for comfort in his "whirlwind." 36

But in No. 45 Hopkins shows that he has made progress

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., No. 41.
in the knowledge of God's ways with His children. He realizes that he must suffer, and this realization is so great that he is able to see that he would be slowing the purification process necessary for his union with God if he were to flee. Of course, he prays that his sufferings be brought to an end, but his prayers are tempered by patience and resignation. They are sent again and again "To dearest him that lives alas! away." They are not the prayers of an impatient and bewildered child that seeks comfort in the Holy Ghost: "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" and who then, hardly waiting for a reply, runs to another source of consolation, "Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?" and when this source of refreshment also seems to have run dry, finally turns to the quick and natural end of its pain in death and sleep. No, in this poem his prayers are those of a wise and patient man who sees that he must pray and must suffer. That is precisely how the Hopkins of No. 45 differs from the Hopkins of No. 41. This increased maturity distinguishes the two sonnets and indicates that No. 45 was written after No. 41.

Now that the reasons why Nos. 44 and 45 follow No. 41 have been given, the next problem is the precedence between them.

37 Ibid., No. 45.
38 Ibid., No. 41.
Internal evidence seems to indicate that No. 45 was written after No. 44. For in No. 44 Hopkins says "Only what word wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban Bars or hell's spell thwarts," indicating that he is confused at the continuance of his sufferings. But in No. 45 there is no question of "hell's spell" thwarting his prayers or heaven's "baffling ban" barring them from entrance into the court of God. Rather, Hopkins begins to understand that God has no intention of answering his prayers in the way he would prefer. He sees that there is no question of a "baffling ban" but rather an inscrutable and "deep decree" that he taste bitterness. This awakening to the fact that he must suffer instead of pray himself out of suffering is a significant development in Hopkins's maturing process, and therefore a sufficient reason for saying that No. 45 was written after No. 44.

Perhaps the objection will be brought forth that the argument from spiritual growth is false because it ignores the ascetical training Hopkins surely received as a religious and priest. Proof for this objection could be taken from sonnet No. 40 where he shows that he knows why he is being made to suffer. There the answer he advances is "That my chaff might fly; my train lie, sheer and clear."40

39 Ibid., No. 45.
40 Ibid., No. 40.
This objection may be answered by saying that the knowledge manifested in the above line is more notional than real, for as has been shown, this solution was not convincing enough to carry him through the trials expressed in Nos. 41 and 4. Moreover, it is necessary to keep in mind that although Hopkins knew how to pray from his religious and priestly training, yet it would be a great mistake to say that he could in the midst of great emotional disturbance immediately and expertly apply the principles of that science to himself. If he had been capable of so acting, he would not have suffered so much; and sonnets Nos. 40, 44, and 45 would never have been written.

Therefore it is more probable to say that he learned to solve his problems by a process of trial and error--his course of learning being somewhat like this: First, a terrible fit of isolation, then a quick recovery by having recourse to familiar truths of the spiritual life, i.e. that God sends suffering to purify man, that God is a Father who chastises, that suffering isolation is something like wrestling with God (No. 40). Then after the recovery another attack comes (No. 41). This is more severe than the first for the double reason that it is unsuspected and is not dispelled by the knowledge that conquered the previous attack. Then he recognizes God's hand in the sufferings, although he still does not understand why they last so long.

41 See pages 50 and 51 of this thesis.
which is expressed in No. 44. Finally, the sufferings, though very intense, become bearable because he recognizes that they are from God and that it is God's unfathomable decree that he bear them (No. 45). If we distinguish between Hopkins's notional knowledge of the laws of the spiritual life and his experiential knowledge of those laws, we can see that it is quite plausible to say that the signs of spiritual growth found in the sonnets are also signs of the chronological relationships that the sonnets have among themselves. Thus if one sonnet portrays Hopkins facing a problem more maturely than another sonnet shows him in regard to that same problem, we have reason to believe that the more mature action was described in poetry after the less mature.

The next problem to be considered in this chapter is whether sonnets Nos. 46 and 47 were written after No. 41, and whether they are the last two poems in the sonnet sequence.

Neither No. 46 nor No. 47 could have been written before No. 41 because they both give evidence that Hopkins has suffered a long time and is at last emerging from his period of terrible desolation. No. 41, on the other hand, has neither of these characteristics. In proof of this assertion certain lines in the texts of Nos. 46 and 47 that indicate Hopkins's long-suffering and increased maturity can be contrasted with other lines in No. 41 which indicate a lack of these characteristics.
The text for No. 46 reads:

Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,
But bid for, Patience is! Patience who asks
Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;
To do without, takes tosses, and obey.
Rare patience roots in these, and, these away,
Nowhere. Natural heart's ivy, Patience masks
Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks
Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day.

We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so.
And where is he who more and more distils
Delicious kindness?—He is patient. Patience fills
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.42

One cannot miss the tone of calm assurance that fills
the sonnet from the first descriptive definition of Patience to
the last statement about the way we become patient. Hopkins's
descriptive words come fluently and carry certitude with them. A
reader who takes the lines

Patience who asks
Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;
To do without, take tosses, and obey.42

in the context of Hopkins's life at this time can readily under­
stand that he here speaks from a heart taught by experience. The
office of teaching (for which he felt so unfit), the drudgery
of correcting so many examination papers, the constant and crip­
pling melancholia he experienced, his being in a foreign land—all
these contributed greatly to his suffering. God, meanwhile,
through Hopkins's superiors left him to face those sufferings as

42 Hopkins, Poems, No. 46.
best he could. Facing them, he learned what patience really was. He learned that suffering was absolutely necessary for becoming patient. He learned that weariness, work, privation, setbacks, and obedience were conditions—the life giving soil—for the roots of patience. He learned that patience gives a new strength to the soul, a strength which blocks out life's failures from the vision of the soul in order that the soul may take courage and try for success again and again.

The tone of calm, the strength, the assurance so evident in this sonnet contrast quite sharply with the restlessness, the weakness, and confusion found in No. 41. Lines like

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

illustrate his restlessness and confusion. The last lines of that sonnet show him in one of his weakest moments; it reads:

Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

How sharply No. 46 contrasts with this can be seen when Hopkins, instead of seeking to avoid suffering by fleeing to death or sleep says,

We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so.

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43 Ibid., No. 41.
44 Ibid., No. 46.
From these lines we see that Hopkins has arrived at that spiritual maturity which enables him not only to bear great suffering but to ask that that suffering be continued in order that his will be bent into conformity with God's.

Therefore in this poem Hopkins shows by this further development in maturity that he has suffered much since writing No. 41. He understands what patience is, and he himself is patient. But not only is he patient, he also looks to the future with calm hope—a disposition we have not found reflected by any of the other Terrible Sonnets.

Towards the end of the sonnet Hopkins says,

And where is he who more and more distils Delicious kindness?—He is patient.45

Here his comparison of God to a bee distilling delicious honey for a future period of rest and feasting is an act of love and confidence in God. It shows that he looks upon God as working—like the bee—to prepare an ecstatically sweet reward for him who is patient. Then, too, his answer to the question "And where is he etc." shows that Hopkins is confident, assured that just as he himself is serving God in patience, so God is constantly adding to a great reward prepared for Hopkins—divine, "delicious kindness."

Since the poem indicates that Hopkins has suffered a

45 Ibid.
long time and that he is spiritually more mature than he was when he wrote No. 41, it seems certain from the internal evidence that No. 46 was written after No. 41.

Sonnet No. 47 also exhibits a greater spiritual maturity than No. 41. Moreover No. 47 indicates that Hopkins has suffered for a longer time than at the composition of No. 41. An analysis of the poem together with an interpretation will show the validity of these remarks. There follows No. 47.

My own heart let me 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.

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather—as skies
Betweenpie mountains—lights a lovely mile. 46

It is clear from the first four lines that Hopkins has suffered a long time, for he begs himself to be kind to his tormented mind; and he decides with resolution that his tormenting mind should not live day after day constantly tormenting itself. "Tormented . . . tormented . . . tormenting" is a clever way of indicating his constant, continual, and painful mental suffering. The repetition and the rhythm of the words approximate a throb—

46 Ibid., No. 47
ping and pulsing sound which forces the reader to feel how constant and inescapable were Hopkins's sufferings.

The next four lines carry the reader farther away from the relaxed and sympathetic mood with which the poem opened. In the lines "I cast for comfort etc." Hopkins describes the frustration he feels. His purpose is to deter his anxious mind from restless comfort seeking. Comfort is not to be had by groping round his "comfortless" world.

After recalling the frustration and restlessness which he has so frequently experienced, he returns to the mood of sympathy. He begins to have pity on himself. He gives wise advice: "call off thoughts awhile Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room." Hopkins has come to know that peace of mind is not to be found in restlessly seeking for it. Rather it is to be found, and it is to grow to a great "size," in cherishing the thought that God knows when to do what is best for Hopkins.

Then comes the line which shows quite clearly that he has suffered a long time--many months from the composition of No. 41--and indicates his increase in maturity since the writing of No. 41. He says, "whose smile's not wrung, see you." Hopkins had tried to wring a relieving smile from God by means of cries "herds-long," 47 "cries countless, cries like dead letters sent

47 Ibid., No. 41.
To dearest him that lives alas! away."\(^{48}\)

It is only after Hopkins had tried to force God by his prayers and good works to brighten his life with joy that he gained the experiential, not theoretical, knowledge that God is not bound to bring him to perfection in the manner thought best by himself. Rather, the smile of God (which Hopkins has thought of as being a more frequent need in his life) is to come to him unpredicted and unsuspected, much like the unpredicted beauty of varied colored skies lighting (or appearing) between mountains.\(^{49}\)

The contrast that comes from placing the lines of No. 41

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long;\(^{50}\)

alongside the line of No. 47: "whose smile's not wrung, see you" shows quite clearly the difference in the spiritual maturity. There is more maturity in No. 47 because Hopkins has greater control of his soul and greater understanding of the action of God.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., No. 45.

\(^{49}\) In "Pied Beauty" (Hopkins, Poems, No. 13) Hopkins shows that he loves that beauty which contains much pleasing contrast. Pied is used to classify that type of beauty. Aware of this and the fact that he relates betweenpie analogously to the smile of God, we can say that his meaning for betweenpie is: The skies show pleasing and varied colors between the mountains.

\(^{50}\) Hopkins, Poems, No. 41.
So also No. 47 indicates that Hopkins has suffered more and longer up to the point of its writing than up to the writing of No. 41. This is clear from the fact that maturity comes with experience, and experience comes with time. Therefore, the greater the maturity, the greater the experience, and so the greater amount of time needed for the acquirement of that experience. Since No. 47 is more mature than No. 41, we must conclude that a longer period of suffering lies behind the inspiration of No. 47. Moreover, since it is more mature and manifests a longer period of suffering than No. 41, we must conclude that No. 47 was written after No. 41.

Thus far it has been shown that Nos. 44-47 were written after No. 41. Moreover, since No. 41 was written after Nos. 40 and 32, it follows that Nos. 44-47 were written also after Nos. 40 and 32. Internal evidence indicates that No. 45 follows No. 44. Consequently, the next questions to be posed are: Were Nos. 46 and 47 written after Nos. 44 and 45? and which was written first, No. 46 or No. 47?

First of all it can be shown that Nos. 46 and 47 were written after Nos. 44 and 45, even though it is true that the four sonnets in question are very similar in that each poem manifests great suffering coupled with intelligent and patient

51 See pages 45, 55, and 56 of this thesis.

52 See pages 63-65 of this thesis.
resignation.

In sonnet No. 44 Hopkins is patient in his sufferings, though not so much patient as baffled, and aware that Christ is trying him. This awareness and patience is evidenced by the simple and affectionate way he speaks of Christ in the lines

Father and mother dear,  
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near  
And he my peace my parting, sword and strife.  

These same qualities of awareness, patience, and affection for Christ are found in No. 45.

And my lament  
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
Bitter would have me taste.

No. 46 also shows Hopkins suffering patiently and with the awareness that a loving God permits that suffering. He says

We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills  
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills  
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so.  
And where is he who more and more distils  
Delicious kindness?—He is patient.

These same qualities appear in No. 47 when Hopkins encourages himself with the words

let joy size  
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile

53 Hopkins, Poems, No. 44.  
54 Ibid., No. 45.  
55 Ibid., No. 46.
Although the sonnets are much the same in the qualities of suffering, patience, and resignation, yet Nos. 46 and 47 have a characteristic which distinguishes them from Nos. 44 and 45. This characteristic is revealed in the last lines of these four sonnets.

As Nos. 44 and 45 end, Hopkins is still suffering, still patient, and unrelieved by anything approaching hope.

Only what word
Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.57

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be,
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.58

But notice how differently Nos. 46 and 47 end.

And where is he who more and more distils
Delicious kindness?—He is patient. Patience fills
His crisp combs, and that comes those wa's we know.59

whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather—as skies
Betweenpie mountains—lights a lovely mile.50

In the conclusions of these latter sonnets there is

56 Ibid., No. 47.
57 Ibid., No. 44.
58 Ibid., No. 45.
59 Ibid., No. 46.
60 Ibid., No. 47.
Hopkins is relieved. A new state has come upon him. He is no longer completely crushed and numb by his sufferings. He is able to advise and encourage himself with the knowledge of what God wants of him, is doing to him, and of the reward God will give him. True, he knew all these before, but now his will is strong enough to use this knowledge to his own advantage. His sufferings are not taken away, but now he has some little inspiration and light to make the darkness in which he has lived less dark and more tolerable.

This change can be interpreted as a sign that Hopkins was more mature when writing these sonnets than when he wrote Nos. 44 and 45. Therefore, it is also a sign that they were written after Nos. 44 and 45.

As for the priority of No. 46 or No. 47, there is no conclusive internal evidence which will solve this question. As has been seen, the two poems are very much alike. Both indicate that Hopkins has been suffering for a long time, that he is patient in those sufferings, and that he has experienced some feelings of hope. The only appreciable difference between them is the mild struggle with restlessness which Hopkins manifests in No. 47.

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.  

61 Ibid.
However, just because the poem ends on a note of hope, it cannot be considered as clearly showing either greater or less maturity than No. 46. In No. 46 Hopkins is less introspective and meditates on what experience has taught him of patience. In No. 47 he returns to his own sad self; but the catharsis, hope, is fundamentally the same as that of No. 46. Since the catharsis is the final and prevailing mood in both poems, no conclusive internal evidence can be advanced either for saying that No. 47 was written before No. 46 or after it.

The final problem is to determine the place of No. 39 in the sonnet sequence. This problem has been left until last for several reasons. First, since it is dated August, 1885, there is no reason for comparing it with Nos. 32, 40, and 41, since internal and external evidence indicate that those poems were written before the May 1885 letter. Secondly, since the manuscript does not show No. 39 intruding anywhere among Nos. 44-47, to think that Hopkins wrote this poem at a point somewhere between the writing of Nos. 44-47 would be to disregard the obvious suggestion of external evidence. For if he had actually written it between Nos. 44-47, one could rightly expect him to have placed it in its proper position in the manuscript. However, since it is not found there, one must conclude that external evidence suggests that No. 39 was written before or after Nos. 44-47.

A third and final reason for considering this problem
last is that having studied and interpreted Nos. 44-47, it will be easier to consider whether No. 39 was written prior or subsequently to them.

Bridges gave No. 39 its title. The text reads:

(The Soldier)

Yes. Why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him? bless Our redcoats, our tars? Both these being, the greater part, But frail clay, nay but foul clay. Here it is: the heart, Since, proud, it calls the calling manly, gives a guess That, hopes that, makes believe, the men must be no less; It fancies, feigns, deems, dears the artist after his art; And fain will find as sterling all as all is smart, And scarlet wear the spirit of war there express.

Mark Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through; He of all can handle a rope best. There he bides in bliss Now, and seeing somewhere some man do all that man can do, For love he leans forth, needs his neck must fall on, kiss, And cry 'O Christ-done deed! So God-made-flesh does too; Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this'.

In the octet Hopkins analyzes the human tendency to bless and admire servicemen. Why do we so esteem our soldiers and sailors? We do so because, thinking the service a manly, honorable thing, we precipitously judge the men in uniform to be exactly what the service would have them. We have idealized for ourselves the service; and so the men who are in it become, by our wishful thinking, ideals. Our heart does this for us. "It fancies, feigns, deems, dears the artist after his art."

62 Ibid., 114.
63 Ibid., No. 39.
64 Ibid.
In the sestet Hopkins drops the study of the way people look upon servicemen and begins to consider Christ as having been a soldier and as now looking upon His own soldiers who follow in His footsteps. The analogy is that Christ looks upon His servicemen just as we look upon ours, only with this difference: Christ appreciates this other service and the servicemen far more profoundly than we appreciate the military service and its men. "He knows war, served this soldiering through; He of all can handle a rope best."65

To show how profoundly Christ appreciates what His followers bear for Him, Hopkins pictures Christ as watching some poor struggling man doing all that he can do—and yet none too well. That man, says Hopkins, wins Christ's deep love. "For love he Christ leans forth, needs his neck must fall on, kiss."66 That man wins His approval. "O Christ—done deed! ... Were I come again . . . it should be this."67

After reading the poem carefully, one notices that it seems to be quite impersonal. There is no direct mention of the trials and sufferings that Hopkins has been experiencing; there is no reference to himself. However, the poem must be read in the context of Hopkins's life. It was written in August,

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
1885 when—as was shown in Chapter II—Hopkins was in a period of great trial. With this in mind we can say with Pick that the final lines of No. 39, "which he applied to all who struggle to attain perfection, apply to him as well."68

Consequently the sonnet is a personal one. It shows Hopkins has suffered and is suffering, but it also seems to be more similar to Nos. 46 and 47 than to Nos. 44 and 45. It does not have the intense suffering that is found in lines like

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night: what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!69

or like the line "I weary of idle a being but by where wars are rife"70 which we find in Nos. 45 and 44 respectively. Rather, No. 39 manifests the control, the lack of preoccupation with self, the joy, and the familiarity with God found in Nos. 46 and 47.

The quoted of Christ is a bold and loving gesture.

'O Christ-done deed! So God-made-flesh does too:71
Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this'.

The knowledge of asceticism found here reminds us of "whose smile's not wrung, see you"72 and "Patience fills His crisp

70 Ibid., No. 44.
71 Ibid., No. 39.
72 Ibid., No. 47.
combs, and that comes those ways we know."\textsuperscript{73} For Hopkins shows by daring to quote Christ that he knows Christ not only sees the life he is living, but also loves him very much because he, like Christ, is serving "this soldiering through." He shows too, by the fact that he ended the poem with this tone of love and joy and consolation, that he is in a different, a better, state of soul now than when he concluded No. 45 with

\begin{quote}
I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be,
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Consequently, the tone of No. 39 is more like that of Nos. 46 and 47, and so we say that it is most probable that No. 39 was written at least after No. 45, and possibly after No. 47.

To sum up therefore, internal evidence indicates that No. 32 was written first because of the anticipation of great suffering and inexperience with that suffering it portrays. No. 40 follows next because it shows Hopkins in the first anguish of the terrible suffering he had anticipated, and it depicts a temporary and too sudden a recovery from that suffering. No. 41 ranks third because of the reference to previous suffering (such as that found in No. 40) and the further development of the suffering anticipated in No. 32. No. 44 stands fourth because it

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., No. 46.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., No. 45.
indicates that Hopkins has suffered a long time, is more mature, and has more control of himself than he had when he wrote No. 41. No. 45 is fifth because, as in No. 44, Hopkins has suffered a long time; but it has this added note of maturity: He is not as baffled by the experience as he was in No. 44. Finally, Nos. 39, 46, and 47 are certainly subsequent to No. 45 because each depicts Hopkins in a more pleasant attitude toward the suffering he is experiencing. He is here able to derive pleasure from the thoughts that Christ watches him, that God's smile will come in time, that God is distilling "delicious kindness" for him. Therefore internal evidence indicates the following chronological order: No. 32, 40, 41, 44, 45, and then in an undetermined order, Nos. 39, 46, and 47.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The problem this thesis has attempted to solve is the determination of the date and sequence of the Terrible Sonnets. The date of the sonnets—as was proved from external evidence in Chapter II—is the period extending from late 1884 to September 1, 1885. Reviewing the evidence for this, we recall that the May and September letters, in which Hopkins speaks of sonnets coming "unbidden and against" his will or as "written in blood," can only refer to sonnets Nos. 40, 41, 44-47, and 39. For, remembering that Hopkins always dated his works at the time of their first draft, we know that those letters could not refer to the sonnets dated after 1885; otherwise he would—in dating Nos. 48, 50, and 51—have departed from his habitual practice. We know, too, that the letters could not refer to other undated sonnets, viz., Nos. 34 and 56, because they do not manifest the suffering spoken of in the letters. We also know that the letters do not refer to sonnets dated earlier than 1885, first, because those letters say that the sonnets were written at sometime recent to the writing of the letters; and secondly, because the latest sonnet written before the 1884-5 period was "Ribblesdale," which
was written in 1882. It is obvious that the letters did not refer to that sonnet or to any written earlier than its date. Therefore, the only sonnets to which the May and September letters could refer are Nos. 40, 41, 44-47, and 39.

Since early drafts of No. 32 were found with Caradoc's _Soliloquy_ in the miscellaneous notes of 1884-5, and since we have House's word that those drafts belong "to the end of 1884 or the beginning of 1885," we know that No. 32 was written before any of the other Terrible Sonnets. Therefore, the period in which the sonnets were written can only be from the latter part of 1884 to September 1, 1885.

We have seen from external evidence that No. 32 is first in the sonnet sequence. Internal evidence agrees with this, for No. 32 shows that Hopkins is anticipating great suffering but still has not yet experienced it.

Next we note that external evidence has put Nos. 40 and 41 ahead of Nos. 44-47, and 39. No. 40 also, in its final draft, is found on the same manuscript as the first version of No. 41. When we refer internal evidence to these facts, we see that No. 40 portrayed Hopkins in the first stages of the trial he had anticipated in No. 32, and secondly, that it represented him as recovering temporarily from that experience. Then No. 41 depicted him in even greater pain than when he wrote No. 40. This pain increased because his pangs were "schooled at forepangs," i.e., he could remember and compare the present suffering with
that which he had experienced in No. 40. Therefore, internal evidence is in harmony with the external evidence which places No. 40 ahead of No. 41 in the sonnet sequence.

We noted that sonnets Nos. 44-47 corresponded to the statements made in the September letter; and we noted, too, that they were on one manuscript unaccompanied by any other poems. Since we are reasonably certain that there were no other drafts of these poems, we can say that they were written in the order in which they were found.

Regarding the sequence of these sonnets, internal evidence shows two points rather clearly. First, these sonnets were written after No. 41. This is true because each poem shows that Hopkins has more control of himself, and that he realizes and resignedly accepts the fact that God is the author of his trials. Whereas in No. 41 he is most impatient, and his motives for bearing his trials are natural, viz., that sleep and death will soon end them for him.

Secondly, internal evidence shows that a definitely greater spiritual maturity is to be found in No. 45 than in No. 44, and a still greater in Nos. 46, 47, and 39 than in No. 45. In No. 45 Hopkins shows that he is no longer baffled, as in No. 44, at the continuance of his suffering. Then in Nos. 46, 47, and 39 we notice that Hopkins is not only content with his lot of suffering, but also that he now experiences some relief and joy. He takes pleasure in the thoughts that God is lovingly
watching him and that God is lovingly preparing a great reward for him. Therefore we can say that the internal evidence of the sonnets again agrees with the external. The sonnets are found uninterrupted in the manuscript, and they show a definite maturing process within the soul of Hopkins.

Finally, since No. 39 has the date of August, 1885, we know that it was written near the time of the writings of Nos. 44-47. Whether it was written before or after these is a question we cannot solve by means of external evidence alone. Internal evidence, however, shows that it was written in much the same spirit as Nos. 46 and 47 and in a different spirit from that of No. 45. But since it is not found after No. 45 in the manuscript, and since it is similar to Nos. 46 and 47, we can say that it most probably was written after those two poems. For that reason it is placed last in the sonnet sequence.

Therefore, the Terrible Sonnets were written during the period extending from late 1884 to September 1, 1885, and most probably were written in the following sequence: Nos. 32, 40, 41, 44-47, and 39. Consequently, it is now possible to know precisely which poems are the Terrible Sonnets. Moreover, it is now possible to observe a definite maturing process in Hopkins's soul and to compare the sufferings of this particular period of his life with that of his last three years. The chronological problem of the Terrible Sonnets has been solved.
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The thesis submitted by Mr. John D. Gerken, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

July 8, 1952

John B. Conklin, S.J.

Date

Signature of Adviser