

God's Grandeur (G.M Hopkins)

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A critical appreciation of 'God's Grandeur'

God's Grandeur is one of the finest sonnets composed by the Victorian poet G.M Hopkins. He is a contemporary of Robert Bridges and pupil of Walter Pater at Oxford. But his writings gained popularity nearly fifty years later. He wrote them in 1867-77, but they were understood and appreciated only after 1918. It was due to the fact that he was a great revolutionary in poetry. He invented sprung rhythm, a variety of stressed poetry.

Hopkins was a Jesuit Priest. He was therefore, of a very religious temperament. He was the most gifted Englishman of his generation, but he was not understood like Swinburne and Rossetti who were almost his contemporary. Hopkins primary quality was 'energy' which Victorian Poetry lacked. He loved Nature as a lover loves his beloved. Nature - all created things - was Hopkins what the sacraments are to all Christians. It was an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. Only

man can see this sign and understand its meaning.

In the poem 'God's Grandeur', the poet maintains how God and his nature are full of all beauty. He also tells us how the industrial age has reduced the whole earth to a dull and drab place. The poem opens with an appreciation of God's grandeur. This grandeur, as he says, will flame out from shaken foil and will 'gather to greatness' like the 'ooze of oil crushed'. The phrases used are all domestic. But they require an imaginative mind to appreciate them. He wonders why man does not follow the instructions of God. He is surprised like Wordsworth. Why are people running after industrial civilisation by destroying the beauty of Nature?

He deploras man's misuse and abuse of nature. In Wordsworthian phrase, he seems to ask: "What man has made of man"? The following lines are very searching criticism:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with
toil.

And wears man's smudge and shares man's
Smell: the soil

is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod
Industrial civilization has filled the
earth with toil, stinking smell and scared
appearance. The earth is now bare.

But the poet says that nature's
pleasures are never exhausted. Freshness
of Nature still lives deep down things. Though
the nights are dark and fearful, the morn-
ing brings that happy welcome light that
gives life to all. The Holy Ghost broods over
the world with 'warm breast' and with
'bright wings'. God is merciful to man.

This poem has a number of brill-
iant uses characteristic of Hopkins, 'Shining
loom shook foil' has repeated 's' sound, 'gates
to greatness' has alliteration of 'g' sound. The
repeated use of 'have trod' and alliteration
in 'scared, bleared, smeared' — all constitute
a type of music which he alone could create.
There is not the traditional metrical
pattern, but a pattern of its own type.

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