

Gerard Manley Hopkins - *The Grandeur of God*



A reading of his poems
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PART 1 - LIGHT

God's Grandeur

The world is charged¹ with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck² his rod³?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared⁴ 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.

And⁵ for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown⁶ brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent⁷

World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings⁸.

¹ A typical Hopkins word with multi-layered meanings: full of electricity; loaded; given responsibility.

² pay attention to

³ God's sceptre, symbolic of his rule, and/or his stick for punishing

⁴ both dried up and made incapable of feeling

⁵ but, and yet

⁶ Hopkins's observant eye notices that after sunset the sky is black, but before sunrise a paler brown.

⁷ curved; warped; worshipping

⁸ Hopkins follows Scripture in picturing the Holy Spirit as a dove.

Inversnaid

This darksome burn¹, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad² roaring down,
In coop³ and in comb⁴ the fleece of his foam⁵
Flutes⁶ and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth⁷
Turns and twindles⁸ over the broth
Of a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning⁹,
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning¹⁰.

Degged¹¹ with dew, dappled with dew
Are the groins of the braes¹² that the brook treads through,
Wiry heathpacks¹³, fitches¹⁴ of fern,
And the beadbonny ash¹⁵ that sits over the burn¹⁶.

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

¹ stream

² the stream bed, like a road made of rocks over which it rolls along

³ In places it is cooped up in standing pools.

⁴ In other places it sweeps vertically over the rocks, like the teeth of a comb.

⁵ Its white foam looks like the coat of a sheep.

⁶ falls in swirling rounded columns like the fluting on a pillar

⁷ The froth looks fawn-coloured when the wind sprays it in the air.

⁸ Hopkins' own word, seemingly combining 'twists' and 'dwindles'

⁹ either darkly threatening, or the hills (fells) on the bank making the river dangerous

¹⁰ The whirlpool is so dark you could imagine Despair itself drowning there.

¹¹ sprinkled

¹² the base of the steep banks

¹³ Hopkins' own word: clusters of heather

¹⁴ tufts

¹⁵ the rowan or mountain ash, with its pretty red berries like beads

¹⁶ stream

Felix Randal

Felix Randal the farrier¹, O he is dead then? my duty all ended,
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome
Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some
Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?²

Sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first, but mended
Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some
Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom³
Tendered⁴ to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended⁵!

This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears⁶.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, tough had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child⁷, Felix, poor Felix Randal;

How far from then forethought of,⁸ all thy more boisterous years,
When thou at the random⁹ grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle¹⁰ for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering¹¹
sandal.

¹ blacksmith

² Four distinct terminal conditions were fighting in his body.

³ the sacrament of Holy Communion, commemorating the cross on which Jesus reprieved and ransomed us

⁴ offered, with associations of both 'tenderly' and the ransom being paid

⁵ however he may have sinned. The Lancashire colloquialism of this phrase, and of 'and all' in line six may echo how Felix himself spoke.

⁶ 'to them' is understood at the end of the line. 'Endears' in both senses: makes us fond of each other, and more aware of our value.

⁷ 'Child' sounds shockingly inappropriate for the strong blacksmith, but it refers both to the invalid he has become, and to his spiritual relationship with the priest.

⁸ How little Felix thought of death when he was fit and strong.

⁹ built of rough, irregularly shaped stones; suggests also the instinctive, carefree work of Felix himself

¹⁰ beat into shape and fix; suggest also that the horse and Felix were 'in fine fettle'

¹¹ clanging and clattering on the road

Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice

The dappled die-away
Cheek and wimpled¹ lip,
The gold-wisp, the airy-grey
Eye, all in fellowship –
This, all this beauty blooming,
This, all this freshness fuming²,
Give God while worth consuming.



Both thought and thew³ now bolder
And told by Nature: Tower;
Head, heart, hand, heel, and shoulder
That beat and breathe in power –
This pride of prime's enjoyment
Take as for tool, not toy meant
And hold at Christ's employment.



The vault and scope and schooling
And mastery in the mind⁴,
In silk-ash kept from cooling⁵,
And ripest under rind⁶ –
What life half lifts the latch of⁷,
What hell stalks towards the snatch of,
Your offering, with despatch, of!⁸



¹ He sees the baby's upper lip as having the same shape as a nun's wimple or head-dress. An original image!

² passing / drifting away like the smoke of incense

³ muscle

⁴ Four words to suggest the wisdom of age and experience

⁵ Line 3: 'I meant to compare grey hairs to the flakes of silky ash which may be seen round wood embers...and covering a core of heat' – GMH

⁶ Like cheese, old age develops a crusty and mouldy appearance, but the mature flavour underneath is at its best!

⁷ When life half opens the door to death

⁸ 'Come, your offer of all this (the matured mind), and without delay either!' – GMH

Spring

Nothing is so beautiful as spring –
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring¹
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy² peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush³
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling⁴.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning⁵.



¹ The purity of the sound seems almost to wash the ear out.

² shining in the sunlight

³ The sky seems closer than at other times of year.

⁴ It is a delight to see the lambs leaping into the air.

⁵ O Jesus, this is what you want most and it is most worth getting.

The Windhover: ***To Christ Our Lord***

I caught¹ this morning's minion², king-
dom of daylight's dauphin³, dapple-dawn-drawn⁴ Falcon,
in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung⁵ upon the rein of a wimpling⁶ wing
In his ecstasy ! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend⁷: the hurl
and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind⁸. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, - the achieve⁹ of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute¹⁰ beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume¹¹, here
Buckle¹²! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier¹³!

No wonder of it¹⁴: shéer plod¹⁵ makes plough down sillion¹⁶
Shine, and blue-bleak¹⁷ embers, ah my dear¹⁸,
Fall, gall themselves¹⁹, and gash²⁰ gold-vermilion.

¹ I caught sight of, all unawares

² favourite / darling. The first of several words of French origin, suggesting something courtly and chivalric about the hawk, and about Christ.

³ French: crown prince

⁴ led out by the half-light of sunrise

⁵ 2 technical terms: In falconry, 'ring' = rise in spirals; in horse-riding, 'ring on the rein' = circle at the end of a long rein held by the trainer.

⁶ having the shape and intricate pleating of a nun's head-dress

⁷ cutting a figure of eight on the ice

⁸ the bird's perfect control and ease as it rides the air-currents and thermals

⁹ compression of 'achievement'

¹⁰ animal and savage

¹¹ its air of arrogance at the beauty and skill of its feathers

¹² fasten together as armour; and bend and break under pressure

¹³ French: knight, chief – title for Christ

¹⁴ This is no surprise; it has parallels.

¹⁵ the repeated routine of everyday use

¹⁶ an old word for furrow, strip of arable land

¹⁷ the dull glow of a fire almost out and cold

¹⁸ An echo (perhaps conscious?) of how George Herbert addressed Christ in his poem *Love III*

¹⁹ split apart

²⁰ show themselves through the gaping hole thus made

Pied¹ Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things -
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded² cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple³ upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal⁴ chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough⁵;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter⁶, original, spare⁷, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.



¹ Pied and dappled both mean multi-coloured.

² brindled = brown / tawny with streaks of other colour

³ pink markings (that look like moles on skin) spotted with black

⁴ the colour of burning coal

⁵ a patchwork of fields: some filled with sheep, some empty, some ploughed up.

⁶ contrary, opposed to what is normal

⁷ lean/left over

The Lantern Out of Doors



Hurrahing in Harvest

Summer ends now; now, barbarous¹ in beauty, the stooks² arise
Around; up above, what wind-walks³! what lovely behaviour
Of silk-sack⁴ clouds! has wilder, wilful-wavier
Meal-drift moulded ever and melted⁵ across skies?

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour;
And, eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a
Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder⁶ replies?

And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder
Majestic – as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet!⁷ –
These things, these things were here and but the beholder
Wanting⁸, which two when they once meet,
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him⁹ off
under his feet.



¹ wild and bearded; like a barbarian army

² groups of sheaves placed upright and supporting each other, to let the grain dry and ripen

³ the drifting clouds show the movement of the wind

⁴ like harvest sacks made of silk

⁵ They drift across the sky like white flour, first forming a cloud, then dissolving again.

⁶ full, open, unreserved like the sky

⁷ as strong as a horse, as gentle as a flower – violet partly suggested by the azure colour of the hills

⁸ there was no-one here to see them

⁹ The heart leaps up both for the beholder (Hopkins) and for Christ.

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,
That interests our eyes. And who goes there?
I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where,
With, all down darkness wide, his wading¹ light?

Men go by me whom either beauty bright
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare²:
They rain against our much-thick and marsh air
Rich beams³, till death or distance buys them quite⁴.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may eye after⁵, be in at the end
I cannot⁶, and out of sight is out of mind.

Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There⁷, eyes them, heart wants, care haunts, foot follows kind,
Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast⁸, last friend.

¹ walking as if in a sea of darkness

² who are unique through good looks, good mind or some other quality

³ they brighten up the unhealthy, swamp-like atmosphere of our world

⁴ devours them altogether

⁵ The verb is 'wind eye after', to keep in sight. 'I mean that the eye winds, only in the sense that its focus or point of sight winds. A lantern passing further and further away, and bearing now east now west of one right line is truly and properly described as winding.' - GMH

⁶ However much I look, I can't see what happens in the end.

⁷ what to approve or improve in them

⁸ firm, steadfast

PART 2 - DARKNESS

THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND

The bold line is the first line of each verse. The story of the wreck and what Hopkins is talking about during that verse is in italics below.

'Some find me a sword

Death proclaims the different ways he kills people. We imagine we will live forever, forgetting that the grim reaper must come.

On Saturday sailed from Bremen,

The story: The ship sailed for the US with 200 on board. Most were not Christians, but perhaps God looked after them.

Into the snows she sweeps,

The ship runs into a snowstorm

She drove in the dark to leeward,

She ran aground on a sandbank off the Kent coast.

Hope had grown grey hairs,

Hope began to fade. A night and day passed with no rescue. Some were washed overboard; others climbed in the rigging.

One stirred from the rigging to save

A sailor tried to rescue the women by climbing down from the rigging. In spite of being tied to a rope, he was dashed to death by the gale, and the rope kept him in sight for hours.

They fought with God's cold—

The cold was too much for them: some fell to their death on the deck or in the sea. At last a nun spoke up above the storm and the weeping.

Ah, touched in your bower of bone

Hopkins breaks off to speak to himself: why is he crying tears of happiness?

Sister, a sister calling

The nun is calling to God and the sailors can hear her.

She was first of a five and came

Meditative digression: How ironic the ship is called Deutschland! Name of the country that spawned the anti-Catholic Luther as well as the good St Gertrude.

Loathed for a love men knew in them,

The nuns were driven away by hostile people and elements. But God was in control, like Orion the hunter, preparing them for the blessing of martyrdom.

Five! the finding and sake

There were five nuns, matching the five 'stigmata' or wounds of Christ on the cross.

Joy fall to thee, father Francis,

St Francis was said to have received the stigmata. The nuns are like his daughters in coming to a similar fate\ blessing, as well as belonging to the Franciscan order.

Away in the loveable west,

Back to the story: Hopkins was safe at St Beuno's while the nun called Christ to her aid.

The majesty! what did she mean?

What were her motives? Was she rejoicing – unlike the disciples on Galilee – at being in a similar plight to Jesus? Or was she longing to be in heaven?

For how to the heart's cheering

Meditation on the attraction of heaven

No, but it was not these.

No, not these motives: they occur in more ordinary circumstances. It must have been something else in this crisis.

But how shall I ... make me room there:

The climax of the poem: the nun had suddenly seen that Christ was in the storm to call her to him. Hopkins suddenly sees it too.

Ah! there was a heart right!

The nun was pure in heart and soul – so she interpreted the event aright.

Jesu, heart's light,

It was, appropriately, the eve of the Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Here was the nun, 'conceiving' Jesus afresh in her mind.

Well, she has thee for the pain, for the

The nun is safe in heaven. But what about all the others who were drowned? Perhaps her words caused them to repent at the last moment, and they have become a spiritual harvest.

I admire thee, master of the tides,

Hymn of praise to God, in control behind the storm, invisible but ready to save.

With a mercy that outrides

He saves even those who turn to him at the last gasp.

Now burn, new born to the world,

A prayer to Jesus to shine brightly and save yet more people in his mercy.

Dame, at our door

A prayer to the nun in heaven, in her turn to pray to Jesus to visit Britain with his salvation.

Thou mastering me

Hopkins prays to God: you made me when I was born; then almost unmade me when you called me; now I feel your merciful presence again.

I did say yes

I finally said yes when you called me, but it was terrifying.

The frown of his face

It felt as if I was trapped between the fearsome God and hell, but then my heart fled to his mercy.

I am soft sift

Outwardly I feel like the sand in an hour-glass running out; but inwardly I am steady as the water in a well, sustained by God's grace.

I kiss my hand

I sense God's presence in the world he has made; sometimes I understand better than others.

Not out of his bliss

To find God's presence, we should look not to heaven –

It dates from day

- but to Jesus' life and death on earth. But we only find its full meaning and value in a crisis...

Is out with it! Oh,

...we only come to the overwhelming knowledge of Christ when driven to it in extremity.

Be adored among men,

Hymn of praise to God who reveals his mercy after using storms to bring people to their senses.

With an anvil-ding

Prayer to God to convert everyone, whether suddenly and powerfully as with St Paul, or more gradually and gently, as with St Augustine.

To seem the stranger lies my lot¹, my life
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
And he my peace my parting, sword and strife².

England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife
To my creating thought, would neither hear
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear-
y of idle a being but by where wars are rife³.

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third
Remove⁴. Not but⁵ 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 thwarts⁶. This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.

No worst, there is none¹. Pitched² past pitch of grief³,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs⁴, wilder wring⁵.
Comforter⁶, where, where is your comforting?

Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long⁷; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, world-sorrow⁸; on an age-old anvil wince and sing⁹-
Then lull, then leave off. Fury¹⁰ had shrieked 'No ling-
ering! Let me be fell¹¹: force¹² I must be brief'.

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed¹³. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there¹⁴. Nor does long our small
Durance¹⁵ deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves¹⁶ in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

¹ is my fate

² Jesus, who has given me peace, has also brought separation and conflict (with my family).

³ the Irish struggle for political freedom

⁴ The first 'remove' is lines 2-4; the second, lines 5-7.

⁵ I must in fairness admit...

⁶ The deep thoughts I want to speak or write are blocked, either by some inexplicable prohibition from God or by Satanic opposition.

¹ You can never say you're past the worst, because there is always worse to come.

² hurled; set at a musical pitch

³ whenever you reach what you think is the limit of pain, this goes beyond it

⁴ trained by earlier pain in how to inflict it

⁵ squeeze me out more ferociously than ever; with an echo of the whining pitch 'ringing'

⁶ Holy Spirit

⁷ are like a whole herd of cows, blundering along

⁸ then they huddle together to compress all the sorrows in the world into one

⁹ the pain is like hammer-blows that make you flinch and yell

¹⁰ the characters in Greek mythology who torment the guilty

¹¹ cruel, ruthless, deadly

¹² perforce, of necessity

¹³ cliffs you can fall off, so high that no-one has ever reached the bottom

¹⁴ Only people who have never experienced this can take it lightly.

¹⁵ endurance

¹⁶ Understand 'that/which' between 'comfort' and 'serves'; Hopkins often omits small words like this to achieve greater compression and intensity.

I wake and feel the fell¹ of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hoürs² we³ have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay⁴.

With witness I speak this⁵. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead⁶ 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 sours⁷. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge⁸ to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

¹ the hide of an animal, but suggesting 'cruel, deadly' as well. Darkness is positively palpable and frightening.

² hours pronounced as 2 syllables, to suggest the time long drawn-out

³ He speaks of himself in the plural, referring to himself and his 'heart'.

⁴ spending even longer waiting for daylight to come

⁵ God knows I am telling the truth.

⁶ pointless because they fail to communicate

⁷ The selfish human spirit corrodes the whole personality like bad yeast making bread sour and rotten.

⁸ punishment, condemnation

*Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum:
verumtamen justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum
prosperatur? &c.*¹

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend²
With thee; but, sir, so³ what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots⁴ and thralls⁵ of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes⁶
Now leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty⁷ chervil⁸, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build – but not I build; no, but strain⁹,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes¹⁰.
Mine¹¹, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

¹ Jeremiah 12:1

² both 'argue a case'; and 'wrestle'

³ so too, also

⁴ drunkards

⁵ slaves, 'enthralled' by it

⁶ thickets

⁷ finely indented, like fretwork

⁸ cow-parsley

⁹ overwork

¹⁰ lives and has the power to awake the reader

¹¹ my – referring to lord/life/roots, or probably all three

That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows¹ ' flaunt forth, then
chevy² on an air-
built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs ' they throng;
they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast³, down dazzling whitewash, ' wherever an elm
arches,
Shivelights⁴ and shadowtackle⁵ in long ' lashes lace, lance, and pair⁶.
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous ' ropes⁷, wrestles, beats
earth bare
Of yestertempest's creases⁸; in pool and rut peel parches⁹
Squandering ooze to squeezed ' dough, crust, dust; stanches,
starches¹⁰
Squadroned¹¹ masks and manmarks¹² ' treadmire toil there
Footfretted in it¹³. Million-fuelèd, ' nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest ' to her, her clearest-selvèd¹⁴ spark
Man, how fast his firedint, ' his mark on mind¹⁵, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indig ' nation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral¹⁶, a star, ' death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time ' beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion!¹⁷ Away grief's gasping, ' joyless days, dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. ' Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm¹⁸; ' world's wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, ' since he was what I am, and
This Jack¹⁹, joke, poor potsherd²⁰, ' patch²¹, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

¹ all images for clouds

² race

³ plaster and lime covering of the walls of houses

⁴ shafts of light

⁵ the shadows of trees looking like a ship's rigging

⁶ make lace-like patterns, dart light through the trees, and join up like partners in a dance

⁷ pulls like a rope

⁸ blows away yesterday's weather like someone beating the wrinkles out of a table-cloth

⁹ (the wind) dries the muddy edges

¹⁰ (the wind) makes firm, then powdery

¹¹ rows of

¹² the imprint of boots and other man-made tracks

¹³ which men have implanted in the mud as they have walked and worked in the wet ground

¹⁴ the one with the clearest sense of their own individuality

¹⁵ his spark of life and his memory in the mind of others

¹⁶ A Hopkins coinage meaning every human being is different from other creatures and different from other humans.

¹⁷ a trumpet-call to rouse and cheer the heart

¹⁸ let your body be bequeathed to the worms in the ground

¹⁹ everyman, ordinary person

²⁰ piece of broken pottery

²¹ makeshift scrap, fragment

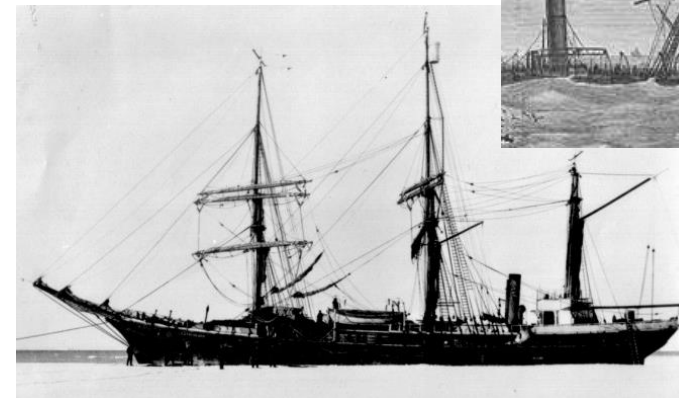
Inversnaid



The Windhover or Kestrel



The Deutschland



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