

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

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Spiritual conferences by Henry Collins & Joseph Degen & John Keily

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SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE Rev. Henry Collins, known in religion as Father Austin, was born at Barmingham, in Yorkshire, on April 28, 1827. His father, the Rev. Thomas Collins, went to live at Knaresborough House, Knaresborough, and it was here that Father Austin spent his childhood. He was the youngest of four sons, who all attended a preparatory school at Stamford, in Lincolnshire. In due course Henry was sent to Rugby, under Matthew Arnold. From Rugby he went to Durham, where he read for the bar and was called to the bar. But, it was not long before he felt that it was his vocation to surrender himself wholeheartedly to the service of God and the salvation of souls. He, therefore, gave up the legal profession and took Orders in the Church of England. It was at this time that he composed two hymns by which his name will ever be remembered, viz., "Jesus my Lord, my God, my all," and "Jesus meek and lowly." A fellow-clergyman with whom he worked in the East End of London gives the following description of him: "The Rev. H. Collins was a remarkable man, an enthusiast, and able to excite enthusiasm. A sweet-dispositioned man with winning ways and great readiness of speech. And though with reference to dress he set at nought all conventional

ideas, he did so with such simplicity that, even while tempted to laugh at him, you were drawn more closely to him. He regarded the so-called religious life as indispensably necessary to satisfactory work amongst the neglected people in the East of London, but in the cultivation of that life he sought the aid of the masters of devotion in the Romish rather than the English Church, and his preaching and manner of life exhibited a similar tendency."

In his disregard of the artificial conventionalities of modern civilised life he much resembled his famous brother, "Tom Collins," M.P., a most genial and amusing man, both at home and as a speaker in the House of Commons.

It was the Tractarian or Oxford Movement that landed him into the Catholic Church. He was ordained priest and became chaplain to Mr. Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, at Grace Dieu, in Leicestershire, not far from the Abbey of Our Lady, Mount St. Bernard, of which Mr. de Lisle was the founder. Contact with the Abbey enkindled within him a strong desire for a life of contemplation and seclusion from the world. Accordingly he was admitted into the Abbey as a postulant on April 8, 1861, and received the Cistercian habit twelve days later. He made his simple profession on February 2, 1863, and was solemnly professed on October 11, 1889. He was appointed spiritual director and confessor to the "Trappistines" at Wimborne, in Dorsetshire, where he remained for many years. He returned to the Abbey at Coalville on the arrival there of Father Louis Carew as Superior, follow-

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ing upon the death of Abbot Hipwood. Here he died on January 29, 1919, at the ripe old age of 91. The reader will find many *lacunæ* in this brief sketch, but it has been extremely difficult to gather information about Father Collins, who, as the Bishop of Plymouth truly remarks, did all in his power to efface himself.

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