Vincent S.S. Coles

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Coles, Vincent Stuckey Stratton

(1845–1929)

S. L. Ollard, revised by Leon Litvack

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Coles, Vincent Stuckey Stratton (1845–1929), Church of England clergyman and hymn writer, was born on 27 March 1845 at the rectory, Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset, the only son of the Revd James Stratton Coles (1810–1872), rector of Shepton Beauchamp from 1836 and later rural dean and a prebendary of Wells Cathedral. His mother, from whom Coles imbibed the high-church principles which inspired him throughout his life, was Eliza, daughter of Vincent Stuckey [*see under* Stuckey family] of Langport, banker and shipowner, who had been private secretary at the Treasury to Pitt and Huskisson. The Stuckey and Bagehot families had long dominated Langport; Walter Bagehot, the economist, was Coles's cousin. George Anthony Denison, archdeacon of Taunton, was a neighbour and family friend, and the attack on Denison's exposition of eucharistic doctrine in 1856 made a strong impression on Coles.

In 1858 Coles went to Eton College, where he boarded with the Revd C. C. James. His closest friends were Digby Mackworth Dolben, Robert Bridges, and Archibald Primrose, Lord Dalmeny (afterwards earl of Rosebery). In 1864 he entered Balliol College, Oxford. His Eton contemporary W. R. Anson urged him to enter for an exhibition, which he won, but resigned from conscientious scruples on gaining only a third class in classical moderations in 1866. He obtained a third class in *literae humaniores* in 1868, and proceeded to Cuddesdon Theological College, of which Edward King (afterwards bishop of Lincoln) was principal. Gerard Manley Hopkins was a close associate, and Coles also came to know Henry Parry Liddon, who heard his first confession and became his greatest friend.

Coles was ordained deacon at Winchester by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce at Advent 1869, and licensed to a curacy at Wantage under the Revd William John Butler, later dean of Lincoln. He was ordained priest by Bishop Mackarness of Oxford in 1870. On his father's sudden death in 1872 he succeeded him as rector of Shepton Beauchamp. He resigned the living in October 1884 in order to become one of the librarians of Pusey House, Oxford, together with Charles Gore and Frank Edward Brightman. Coles was widely known as a preacher, missionary, and spiritual guide; he had taken part in the second London Mission in 1874, made a preaching

tour in the United States in 1876, and had been appointed frequently by Dean Church and Liddon to preach in St Paul's Cathedral. During his incumbency Shepton Beauchamp became a model parish of the Anglo-Catholic revival.

After King left Oxford for Lincoln in 1885 Coles carried on his apostolate to young men at the university. His keen sense of fun, his discerning sympathy, and his charismatic holiness attracted undergraduates of every type and class, and his great energies were devoted to helping them appreciate the Catholic revival in Anglicanism. He was appointed principal of Pusey House in 1897 and held the position until 1909, when he resigned due to ill health. In 1903, at the request of Bishop Wilkinson of St Andrews, he undertook a missionary tour through South Africa in preparation for the later 'mission of help'. From 1910 to 1920 Coles was warden of the Community of the Epiphany at Truro, and in 1912 Bishop Gore made him honorary canon of Christ Church and his diocesan chaplain, in which capacity Coles worked indefatigably in the Oxford diocese until Gore resigned in 1919. He lived thereafter with one of his sisters at Shepton Beauchamp, where he died on 9 June 1929 and is buried.

Coles published little: his major works were *Pastoral Work in Country Districts* (1906, being lectures delivered at Cambridge in Lent 1905), which was full of practical experience, *Lenten Meditations* (1899), and *Advent Meditations* (1899). Some of his best hymns, notably 'We pray thee, Heavenly Father', first appeared in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and the *English Hymnal*. Possessed of considerable private means, he distributed them generously, living himself in severe simplicity.

Sources

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