

James Marshall Collins

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James Marshall Collins, of Maysville, has been actively engaged in law practice for nearly three decades and enjoys an enviable and well deserved reputation as one of the leading representatives of his profession in Mason county. He was born at Mill Creek, Mason county, Kentucky, on the 11th of May, 1867, his parents being John and Hannah (Glenn) Collins, both of whom were natives of County Galway, Ireland, the former born in 1826 and the latter in 1833. It was in the year 1850 that they emigrated to the United States and took up their abode in Mason county, Kentucky, where they spent the remainder of their lives as farming people. John Collins passed away in 1906, having for six years survived his wife, who died in 1900.

James M. Collins acquired his early education in the country schools of his native county and continued his studies in St. Joseph College, Bardstown, and St. Mary's College of Lebanon, Kentucky, from which he was graduated in 1894 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. In 1910 the same institution conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts. His professional training was received in Georgetown University, of Washington, D. C., from which he was graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1897 and with the degree of Master of Laws in 1898. He was admitted to the bar in 1897 and in the following year began the practice of law in Maysville, which has since remained the scene of his professional labors. His success in a professional way affords the best evidence of his capabilities in this line. It is said that at one term of the Mason circuit court, which ordinarily covers a period of six weeks, he tried nine jury cases and won eight of them. Much of the success which has attended him in his professional career is undoubtedly due to the fact that in no instance will he permit himself to go into court with a case unless he has absolute confidence in the justice of his client's cause. Perhaps the most outstanding case of more than local interest in which he was engaged, was that involving the Kentucky tobacco act of 1908 and the anti-trust laws, which he with other local counsel prosecuted before the supreme court of the United States and won, the court holding these laws wholly illegal, and also the suit of the Liberty Warehouse Company involving the legality of the Sapiro co-operative marketing act of 1922.

Mr. Collins has membership in the Mason County Bar Association, the Kentucky State Bar Association and the American Bar Association. Aside from the work of the courts, he is trustee of Hayswood Hospital of Maysville and a director of the Maysville Land & Fruit Company.

On the 28th day of September, 1898, Mr. Collins was united in marriage to Miss Mary Walton, daughter of Michael and Annie (O'Mara) Walton, of Mason county. They are the parents of four sons and one daughter, namely: John Michael, who was born April 1, 1901; James Marshall, Jr., whose natal day was August 13, 1903; Joseph Thomas, born October 27, 1904; Anna Camilla, whose birth occurred November 7, 1906; and Ignatius Walton, born August 17, 1913.

Fraternally Mr. Collins is affiliated with the Knights of Columbus, while his political allegiance is given to the republican party. He served as city attorney from 1907 until 1912 and again assumed the duties of the office in 1923, being the present incumbent. Modest in demeanor, he is nevertheless recognized as a deep student and a representative member of the bar, respected by his colleagues and contemporaries by reason of his comprehensive knowledge of the law and his close conformity to the highest ethical standards of the profession.

Perhaps the best index of his character is expressed by himself; when casually asked on one occasion what was his rule in life, he humorously replied: "I try to be loyal to my friends and clients, provide for my family, pay my honest debts and attend Mass on Sundays."

As an example of his original wit, this is related. He was once engaged in the trial of an important case in which the defendant was represented by a scholarly gentleman from Knoxville, Tennessee, being an able lawyer and a polished Shakespearean scholar. Counsel for defendant, who preceded Mr. Collins in the argument of the case, quoted Shakespeare profusely and often with great aptness. When Mr. Collins took the floor, he was feeling somewhat the sting of his adversary's jibes, and he began, "Gentlemen, I think I have read everything Shakespeare wrote but I will not quote from him. As a diversion, I will quote you a few lines of Irish and Latin and Greek,"—and then proceeded to do so, and said "William Shakespeare, as we all know, was one of the greatest writers of all time. He is supposed to have written some thirty odd books, among them sixteen tragedies, and it is said he wrote no more tragedies because he ran out of villains. If he had known the defendants in this case, he would have written another tragedy." Defendants' attorney also expatiated with a great deal of force on the cordial relations which had always existed between the people of Kentucky and Tennessee, and particularly of the stalwart honesty and exuberant Christian virtues of the people of Knoxville, the home of his client, to which Mr. Collins commented that one would think from the remarks of defendants' counsel that our Blessed Savior was born in Knoxville and that the Almighty Himself was a natural born citizen of the state of Tennessee. The jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff for all that he asked.

Besides the practice of law, Mr. Collins has been interested in various business enterprises—which it may be said parenthetically were not always profitable—one of which was a company engaged in the construction business. The company had completed a rather large contract in the state of West Virginia, on which the retained percentage was some twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars, and having tried for some time without avail to have this sum paid over, and needing the money—an experience not unknown to contractors—Mr. Collins wired the company's representative at Charleston, the following original verse:

"Can you not with soft appeal, or sip of ancient vintage,

Induce the Board with whom we deal to send us our percentage?"

The representative presented the telegram to the board and the check came next day.

Besides his active law practice and attention to business matters, he has as a diversion written scattering bits of original verse. His "Contractor Bill" is a humorous sketch well worth reading, and his "Kentucky" is a rhythmic classic of its kind and should be set to music. After touching on the scenic grandeur and mild and mellow beauty of Kentucky, he closes with this stanza:

"Twas often told by the folks of old,

And proof of this is legion,

That Eden's bower was but half an hour

From Kentucky's Bluegrass Region."