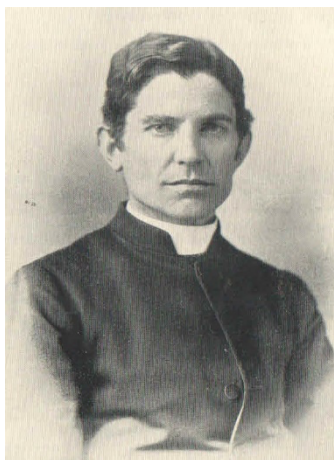


12 February

Fr REGINALD COLLEY 25 May 1848 – 12 February 1904



Reginald Colley was the first English provincial to die in office for more than two centuries. Born of Irish ancestry in London, he was said to have ‘a delicate constitution’ even when in Hodder as a small boy. Yet he took nearly all the prizes available at that Jesuit preparatory school for Stonyhurst. His obituary runs to 13 pages and is heavy with Victorian praise. He seems to have shone in everything he did. The adjectives tumble over each other: diligent, docile, energetic, solid, evenness of temperament, unobtrusive, etc.

He enjoyed riding and hunting as a boy and entered the novitiate in 1870 after overcoming his mother’s misgivings. He soon developed austere ways and would work standing at his desk with the windows open in an English winter. As soon as he finished tertianship he became rector of Stonyhurst for six difficult years during which four boys died of ‘German measles’ leading to pneumonia. He spent many a night at the bedside of sick boys and the anxiety and strain led to a break down in his health. But he also initiated much building at the college: a new boys’ chapel, and an extended library and museum.

He developed asthma and was sent to St Aidan’s to recover. While there he became prefect of studies and worked on developing the curriculum. He was also concerned with discipline. A French Canadian Jesuit on staff advised against striking boys but Colley decided, in a particularly serious case of misbehaviour a thrashing was called for. From then on ‘immunity from a healthy straightforward visitation of correction was no longer pleaded’. But Colley’s health was not improving and he was recalled to England and to Stonyhurst again.

In 1901 he became provincial and used his position to introduce the Oxford Higher Certificate in all Jesuit schools and so providing a ‘distinct stimulus’ to study. He became a leading member of the headmasters’ conference, encouraged the Society’s house of studies in Oxford, made St Mary’s Hall a recognised training school for Jesuit teachers, had all Jesuit schools in England registered and made sure that the majority of Jesuits were certified as teachers.

Yet at the end of his life he felt ‘entirely helpless, almost altogether useless’. As mentioned above, he was highly regarded for his firmness and gentleness. He was also charming and interested in people and kept up a huge correspondence. He was found dead in bed in the middle of winter at Stonyhurst. He had left London in a hurry and forgot to bring an overcoat.