

19 August

Fr EDMUND GOETZ 10 November 18645 – 19 August 1933



Born in Meisengott, Alsace, France, Edmund Goetz entered the Society in 1883 and was ordained in 1897. But formation of French Jesuits had to be abroad after the expulsion of the Society from France in 1880 and he spent time in England. In 1897 he went to St Aidan's where he taught Mathematics and Physics.

In 1896, Fr Alphonse Daignault suggested to the prefect, Richard Sykes, that an observatory be established to contribute to the country's knowledge of its climate. Sykes agreed and the government was in favour and gave a site and a building in Bulawayo for the purpose. Sykes selected Edmund Goetz for the work and sent him to Paris and Washington to learn the skills needed. In 1903 Goetz returned and set up the observatory with a five-inch telescope and other instruments. He became an active member of the scientific community in Rhodesia and gave periodic papers on meteorology and astronomy. His first was on 'Variable Stars'.

When Halley's Comet appeared in 1910, he was expected to tell everyone all about it which he did. He was consulted by farmers and even miners 'who wanted to know the exact time of sunrise so that they could rush their claims'.

In 1909 he led a two months expedition to make observations for the building of the railway to the north and in 1914 he was on a further expedition of observations up to the capital of the Barotsi kingdom.

His obituarist records: 'Fr Goetz's reputation as a weather oracle was sometimes a source of annoyance. He was pestered with questions which no one could possibly answer, and credited with prophecies which he never made.'

Besides his work at the observatory, Fr Goetz was ready to help out at St George's to fill a gap. After the college moved to Salisbury, the observatory was taken over by the government and Goetz settled down in the college as spiritual father and teacher of mathematics and French.