

From the Diary of Bishop John Francis Norton – 1925

Inscription....

*Diary kept for my dearest Mother
on the P. & O Steamer “Mongolia”
by John F. Norton
With the Australian National
Pilgrimage to Rome & Lourdes 1925.*

20th April

Last night we went to bed within sight of the flashes from the lighthouse that stands on Cape Leeuwin, the south western corner, so to speak, of the Australian Continent. This morning we awoke to find that the “Mongolia” was just off Rottneest, and placed just at the mouth of the Swan River. By nine a tug had us in tow and it was not long before we were beside the jetty of Freemantle - the harbour of Perth. The last stage of the berthing was done by two tugs that got their heavily padded prows into the side of the “Mongolia” and pushed her into place. It was amazing to see a dog on one of these piles of matting that made a buffer for the tug’s prow. He stood there in a very dangerous position, jaws well apart, one ear lifted, watching the whole proceeding with great interest, and showing that he felt that he had no small part in getting this great liner into a secure position.

The next thing that attracted our attention was a gaily decorated launch in the river, showing the Papal and Irish flags. Later we found that this had been chartered by the Reception Committee in Perth, and that full of welcomers, it had left Perth early that morning, fearing they would be late for our arrival. Meanwhile, a great gathering had assembled on the wharf and were singing hymns, and cheering vigorously. The launch I mentioned already had by this time drawn in close to our starboard side and the gangway let down to her. We were all soon on board the “Zephyr” as the launch was named, and there we found the Archbishop of Perth, his Vicar General - Mgr Verling, and a large number of priests and men and women. To the music of an Irish Pipers Band, in Irish Kilts, we were soon steaming up the Swan to Perth. When it had played some selections, a girls’ band began. These were big, well dressed girls, and I thought they were from some of the boarding schools, but, you can imagine my surprise when I found out from one of the priests that they were from St Joseph’s Orphanage, Subiaco. They are a credit to it, and to the Catholics of Perth.

As the “Zephyr” made its way up the “Swan” we were very touched to see assembled, at various advantage points on the river bank, groups of children from the different Catholic suburban schools of the neighbourhood. They had flags and streamers, and they cheered and waved to us as we passed. The Swan is a very beautiful river, its sides well clad in trees and vegetation. Nice residences have been built along it, and here and there, with the usual keenness of vision of the Catholic Church builder, we were glad to see that the best sites had been secured for Convents and Churches. After twelve miles run we finally got to Perth, and there the major part of our welcome awaited us. The jetty was thronged and as we proceeded up to the streets to the Cathedral, one could scarcely realize that it was a working day, for the Catholics had turned out in multitudes to greet us. When we came to the Cathedral we had no hope of gaining an entrance, for it had been packed long since. However, there Archbishop Clune spoke his words of welcome, and Archbishop Mannix replied for us. The laity were brought to the Catholic Club and the Clergy to the Redemptorist Monastery for lunch. We were well provided for. I met at lunch several priests whom I knew. Some had been students at All Hallows’. To be an All Hallows’ man is a great passport in these parts of the world. Like the magic words in the “Arabian Night’s tale”, the name “All Hallows’” opens the door to clerical hospitality when united by that common bond. When lunch was over, one of the priests motored us to the Hospital of the Sisters of St John of God at Subiaco. I was most anxious to get there, so that I could pay the Bishop’s respects to Dr Gidney, the former bishop of Perth, who is now living in retirement, at a very advanced age.



His long Episcopacy of more than twenty years were full of great things for the advancement of religion in West Australia. I found the dear old man sitting out on the hospital verandah and gave him the Bishop's message. He was very pleased and sent kind messages back. I did not stay long, fearing to distress him for he had had many other clerical visitors that day and must have been feeling the strain very much. Still it was a great privilege to see him at all. In another part of the hospital, which is a very fine building, I met Mgr Graber, the Vicar General of the Geraldton Diocese. I had seen him before at Malvern when Dr Ryan was consecrated. He was now recovering from a severe illness. Poor man, after his long years of toil in the heat and hardship of Geraldton, he would not have much strength left on which to fall back.

These visits over, Fr Hayes motored us back to Fremantle and the "Mongolia". We set sail a little after six, and once more we were given a great send off by the people. It was the final word from Australia, for we were now about to face the long nine days stretch between Fremantle and Colombo.