

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.*



5th May

We crept along during the night on one turbine and when day dawned we were off the island of Socotra. It is a barren Godforsaken looking place with brown steep cliffs rising sheer from the water. We are a long way off, for sailing in close is very dangerous. We were standing for a while after breakfast and there was a great grey shark cruising round us, with its pilot fish on its snout quite visible. At a safe distance there was also a shoal of other small fish, striped just like Zebras. The sea is dead calm, like oil and not a breeze blowing.

Towards noon, away on the horizon we could see little splashes of white, showing that the 'white horses' are coming. After an hour of intense heat we gradually got into the broken water and we had a breeze once more. Now, as never before, did I realise the truth of the words of the Psalm, "Wonderful are the surges of the sea". After that smooth sea, which seemed to have over it the stillness of death, the snow-capped waves were a blessing indeed. Fortunately too, the wind is on our cabin side and the poor Bishop will not be gasping for breath.

We were amused by the gambols of a school of porpoises on the port side. This is only the second time I have noticed any. Frequently there are flying fish, but they are not very interesting, although it is surprising how little things excite one when at sea. Every week or oftener there is a life boat drill, and all the crew is mustered. They swing the boat out on its davits and make them all ready for sea. This is for us quite an event.