

## 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.*



**20<sup>th</sup> May** (4<sup>th</sup> day in Lourdes)

Unfortunately my Mass in the Rosary Church was my last in Lourdes. Not the last in my life I hope, for I cherish a desire to be permitted to return there at least again, as everyone does who has ever been blessed in visiting this famous sanctuary. Again, after Mass I make one more visit to the Grotto and then returned to the Hotel Moderne to prepare for our departure, which was at an early hour. I left the Bishop with his brother and had the satisfaction of knowing that his heart was no worse as a result of his exertion in going to the Baths.

Leaving Lourdes is not an easy matter; one feels so drawn to remain in the blest spot. Still we had to make a start and at the hour appointed we saw the graceful spire of the Basilica disappearing from sight, and soon we were amongst the heights of the Pyrenees on our way back to Tarbes, where we joined the main line again. We passed over the very same ground as on the former journey, but we did not make any halt. Toulouse was passed through again and Carcassone. This latter town is some distance from the Railway, but it is seen all the better for the fact that as it is situated on the top of a hill. It is remarkable as being the most perfect example remaining of a medieval fortified town. All its walls and towers and gates are still standing. Not far from it was born St Peter Nolasco, who was one of the great adversaries of the Albigensean heresy. About midday we passed through Cette, which is an important railway town, and not long after it reached Marseilles, and the tower of Notre Dame de la Garde rising above the town. Tradition tells us that Lazarus with Mary and Martha came after the death of Our Lord, and there preached His Gospel before they suffered martyrdom under the Roman persecutions.

Our train did not stop, but steamed on to Toulon, France's naval base on the Mediterranean. We did not stop here either but continued our way on. The country was not now as beautiful as it had been before we reached Marseilles. There it had been the beautiful vineyards and wheat fields. Now, it was more rugged and barren. Indeed one would hardly believe it was one and the same country.

It was late in the evening when we pulled into the station at Avignon, which was to be our next stopping place. Its name is familiar to all Catholics as the home of several Popes for most of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, so that it stands second to Rome as the home of the successors of St Peter. I found myself again in the same hotel as Dr Mannix and Dr Dwyer. It was a fine new building and was called the "Dominion". From its top windows could be seen the old walls and towers of the city, and just beyond the Rhone which has played no small part in the history of this famous old French city. Of all the rooms I occupied that of the "Dominion" is the one that remains best in my mind. The reason is because it has wall paper exactly like that which Robert Louis Stevenson describes in the nursery of his childhood:-

"and pleasant there to lie in bed and see the pictures overhead. The wars in Sebastopol, the grinning guns along the wall, the daring escalade, the plunging ships, the bleating sheep, the happy children ankle deep, and laughing as they wade".

These were some of the scenes that decorated my room in Avignon, but after such a long train journey that day I did not wait too long to admire them that night.