

Diary of a trip to Australia 1897

Evelyn Louise Nicholson

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July 26.

Ink is too valuable, and so is time, so I must put down my impressions of Sydney University in pencil. I do so much wish it were finer, as the view from there must be lovely, but one could only see a few towers & chimneys through the thick haze of rain. They have not had a rainfall like this for many years, & many places which are usually green fields are converted into lakes. We splashed through the streets with Thomas & eventually found a steam train which rushed us through what seemed interminable suburbs, where parks and dust heaps, huge stores & tiny dwelling houses, one storey high, miles of hoardings with advertisements of purely local productions boldly purporting to be in use all over the world — were mixed up in bewildering confusion. The suburbs extend to & beyond the gates of the University gardens, which no longer are in the country. They are well planted & plenty of hibiscus, trumpet ash, laurestinus & other flowering shrubs were out. The older part of the building is by far the best. The medical school, a large separate building in the same style, is a mongrel imitation, the Macleay museum being a terrible edifice in brown brick which is being smothered with ivy as fast as possible. The tin roof, however, nothing can hide. The Schools of Chemistry, Physics & Engineering are in low somewhat shed-like buildings, & at the back there are even wooden & corrugated iron erections (some of them devoted to the lady students) mixed up with tennis-grounds and asphalt paths, which give a very un-scholastic appearance to that part of it. The more temporary ones will however be swept away if Government grants the £30,000 necessary to complete the side of the Quadrangle opposite to the Great Hall. This Mr. Barff the Registrar who took us round & shewed us everything with the greatest kindness told us they had great hopes of commencing next year. I said I hoped they would also complete the cloisters. They allow golden ivy to grow up the buttresses of the hall which give it a more venerable appearance than the rest of the main building, but the coats of arms between each are not going to be covered up. I saw the well-known one, on the right of the big door of the hall outside, and also in one of the windows in the entrance hall, where some of the tapestry, & pictures given by Pater are also hung.

The great hall is very fine indeed, the roof beautiful. The picture at home does not give a good idea of it, as it is very dark, the large windows being all filled with coloured glass. Pater's portrait occupies the left hand side of the end wall, in the place of honour, & there are various prints of it in other parts of the building. It is too much in the dark to be well seen, & though strikingly like Syd, is not an altogether good likeness, the head being so small as to give the impression of a very tall man. We recognised the portrait of Mr. Denison and were shewn that of Sir W. Manning & other people. We saw some of the lecture rooms & then Mr. Barff took us to the museum where every thing seemed to be labelled with Pater's name, & there was a general idea of him pervading everything. This beautiful collection is not seen to the best advantage, as it occupies 1 large & two smaller rooms, but the things are beautifully mounted & most carefully arranged. The new buildings will consist of a Museum below & new Library above. For the splendid collection of books they possess the present premises are very much cramped. The Etruscan vases in Pater's collection cannot be seen to advantage being too near together. They are most beautiful & varied, and the Egyptian collection is wonderfully interesting. I do not think two such enthusiastic visitors as ourselves can have surveyed them for a long time. Mr. Barff says the Greek & Roman things are the most interesting to the general visitors. The paintings on the mummy covers are as fresh as possible, & Charlie was delighted with them & little Etruscan ossuary urns and the inscriptions & every thing. We are going again when we return if possible.

They are very proud of them, though I doubt if many people know much about them! We were loth to leave the Museum, but there was so much to see, & we got home very late, as it was. The Macleay museum of Natural History has some good specimens, but is not well arranged. Several huge casts of Egyptian antiquities (waiting for the new buildings) mixed up with the stuffed animals & skeletons give it a somewhat grotesque appearance. While we were here, a violent storm of rain descended with a noise like thunder on the iron roof, and when it has over

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we rushed through mud and puddles to the Medical School. They are very proud of this and the stained glass in the windows thereof. I have no doubt it is a most convenient & suitable building, but it is extremely hideous. There is an excellent pathological museum, with rather too many horrors for my taste, and we also saw the huge lecture rooms, & well fitted laboratories, & declined to go into the dissecting room!. The Engineering School interested me very much, as did that of Chemistry where we were introduced to Professor Liversage & much enjoyed seeing some most beautiful specimens of gold in nuggets, which he brought out for our benefit. When sawn through, the finest of these (about 3 inches across) presented the appearance of crystalline formation, all in the purest gold. He took us to see the furnaces for refining & the gold, & we also saw the Museum, with good specimens of minerals and a quantity of the copper sheathing of a vessel, which the professor told us contained minute particles of gold, & which he was going to test.

Professor Threlfall shewed us the Chemistry School, & described his interview with Pater in London, which seems to have much amused him — and then last of all we inspected the Biology school, which I think pleased me most of all the new part. It is only a tiny low building with a creeper covered verandah, but is most compact & well arranged, & the little museum perfect in its way. Mr. Barff kindly promised to get one or two photographs done for me to take to Pater, as I did not see any good ones of the University in Sydney.

August 27.

When we returned to Sydney, we spent another delightful afternoon at the University, this time in fine weather, & in company with Lady Manning. Mr. Barff was away, but had left a proof of his kindheartedness & sympathetic interest, in the shape of a lovely book of photographs for Pater. We spent a long time in the Great Hall, & wondered more than ever at the bad taste of the present Sydneyites with such an example before them. In the Nicholson Museum we made one or two little sketches of some of the beautiful things, but our time was too short. We were extremely glad to have the opportunity of refreshing our remembrance of what interested us most there, and in fact of what we shall always remember as the pleasantest of our experiences in Sydney.

September 6 97.

The approach to Sydney by the railway is not imposing, but we were most delighted & thankful to get there about 11 — after passing through about 10 miles of beadvertisemented suburbs. It was pouring with rain, much needed after a terrible drought. We settled ourselves in at the Grosvenor, Charlie went out to see Thomas & send off telegrams about the luggage, & I wrote letters & rested. Not much could I see of Sydney through the haze of rain. Thomas Fenn came about 2 o'clock, & as he was most anxious to take us out, out we went, regardless of the pouring rain. We had only our journey clothes on, so did not care. I had various small purchases to make, owing to the lack of luggage, & we found only one shop still open, it being Saturday afternoon. Some of the warehouses & public buildings in Sydney are fine & solid looking, & the whole place has a much more established, & not such a mushroom look as Melbourne. The streets are not wide, they are paved with cabbles, omnibuses rattle over these, in some streets your life is imperilled by steam trams, in others you find great comfort in the cable or electric trams. The traffic is not regulated by the police, but where the steam trams cross the cable ones there is a signal post which is some slight comfort. Except for the corrugated iron verandahs to the shops, Sydney is an English looking place. Sunday July 25. We woke early to find heavy rain still falling, & we puddled through the wet streets to the Cathedral to Early Service. We liked the Cathedral very much, though it is not such an imposing building as Melbourne & the windows are bad. There is also a dado of most terrible tiles, but it all felt homelike. The service was performed in a somewhat slovenly manner, a good deal by the clerk! but we were too glad to be in a Church again to mind. We managed to get a cab coming home. In the afternoon we energetically started for Ashfield (about 10 miles out) to see the Corlettes. We got an omnibus to the station at Sydney, but there was no cab at Ashfield Station & apparently no one knew where the Corlettes lived. One peculiarity of Australians is that if they can't answer a question they don't say so, but simply stare, & go on. After some wandering & many enquiries we saw the house in the distance & rushed up the path in a pouring shower of rain, certain that we were right by the appearance of an unmistakable Corlette in the door way. They received us very kindly and we

promised to come & stay with them on Tuesday if they would excuse our travelling clothes. We saw the whole family except the eldest son who had gone to England. Miss Corlette drove us back in the buggy to the Station. It still rained. We did some telephoning for the first time in our lives that evening to Lady Manning, to whom I had written, & she promised to come to lunch on Tuesday -- no, I remember it was Monday evening we telephoned. It is a strange sensation hearing a voice from 5 miles away you last heard in England. On Monday morning C. went to see Pater's old House, now a convent, & other places with Thomas, & in the afternoon he took us to the University where we spent a most pleasant afternoon, in spite of the rain. A good deal of our time in Sydney was spent in various offices, re tickets, steamers, luggage etc, also we presented all the letters of introduction we brought. On Monday morning C. also went by steamer to Manly, & saw the harbour & brought me back some lovely wild flowers which I painted. He also called on Mr Knox which he returned, finding me in.

Tuesday morning we went to the Bank etc, & then looked up Mr. Statham, who was most kind & jolly. He took us in a little electric launch across the Harbour to the Pastoral Produce Co's Warehouse & Refrigerating works, of which he is, I think, Consulting Engineer. It is a huge building. We went up in the lift to the top, passing floor after floor, some empty, some full of huge bales of "dumped" wool. Mr. Statham shewed us the machinery where this was done, also the engine rooms where the ammonia freezing process causes the engines to be covered with snow. In several places a valve causes one side to be covered with snow, while the other is so hot you could not bear your hand on it. We saw the huge condensers, & entered a small & Arctic chamber where the snow lay in heaps and the temperature was about 26 degrees below freezing point. There is a huge store, where the sheep are frozen, after being run in along a rail at a certain height above the floor. There were about 1000 carcasses there as hard as iron, & giving back much the same sound when struck. The view from the roof of the building is very fine, & I got a better idea of Sydney harbour than I ever did in any of our journeys up & down it. It was a brilliantly fine day, the water blue, and enough clouds to make effective shadows on the more distant hills. The shipping was most picturesque, several fine boats, a P & O, N.G.Lloyd, & other big liners lay outside Circular Quay.

Sydney Harbour has a most wonderful number of small bays & inlets, & could, I should think, accommodate all the fleets in the world. The effects at sunset are lovely, especially as the features one could dispense with, such as the numbers of villas that spoil the appearance of some of the most beautiful bays -- are then veiled in a mysterious golden light. We were a little disappointed after Hobart, in finding all the hills round Sydney Harbour so low, & no one striking feature, but possibly we had expected more than the beauties we did find in it, from the exaggerated accounts one reads, which are hardly applicable to any place on earth -- certainly not to any place where there is a large population, & Nature is by no means left to herself.

Lady Manning came to lunch, & was very kind. She had not got into her house yet, but wanted us to come there on our return. She deprecated our going to the Corlettes, as she said we should not be comfortable, however we were, in an Australian way. They are most kind, & we liked them very much. Isabelle does wonders, but one sees the result of the real mistress of the house being "feckless" in the general muddle & impunctuality of everything. Mr. Corlette is very fond of drawing & took a great interest in my efforts.

Dr. Corlette took Charlie a ruridecanal round, in the buggy, & I stayed at Ashfield & lazed, & in the afternoon helped to entertain various ladies who came to tea. Dr. Corlette & Charlie, who mutually liked each other, stayed out so long that the good ladies only had a momentary glimpse of my better half, & I had to be extra amiable to make up. As a punishment poor Charlie got bitten by the Corlettes's horse "Charlie", a whaler of uncertain temper. It did not graze the skin, but was a bad bruise for nearly a fortnight & needed a lot of rubbing & bandaging & commiseration on my part, as the poor dear could not use his arm. At the Corlettes, as in most Australian houses, you are drinking some hot beverage or other all day long -- viz 7 times. Tea before breakfast, tea or coffee at breakfast, cocoa in the middle of the morning, tea at lunch, tea at tea, tea at dinner, & cocoa before going to bed. Isabelle drove us to the Station next morning & we had a certain amount of business to do before going to tea with Mrs. Tregarthen Lady Manning's daughter, with whom she was staying in Rose Bay. In answer to telephone news had come that the luggage had been sent on by ship & would be at Sydney on Friday, for which piece of calm stingyness Charlie sent the Shaw Savill Co at Melbourne a letter which must have been rather

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unpleasant to receive. By their carelessness & delay we had missed the fast boat to Rockhampton & had to put up with a little coasting boat (A.U.S.N. Co) the "Eurimbla" leaving on Saturday at 2 p.m. Rose Bay is a very pretty part of Sydney, & we saw from Mrs. Tregarthen's, Pater's old House "Lindsay" in a lovely position with garden down to the water's edge. There are houses all the way to Rose Bay, now. Friday the 30th — the luggage arrived early, & we spent nearly all the morning repacking it. Mr. Thomas Knox came to call, & was very kind, giving us 2 letters of introduction, one, to Mr. Walsh at Brisbane, & one to Mr. Hamilton Turner at Rockhampton, both also in Dalgettys (n.b. Mr. Moore is the head of the Shaw Savill Dept. of Dalgetty's in Sydney). After lunch we went out & did a great deal of business. In the morning we had gone to a little opal shop where I bought four, and also plunged in the way of being photographed at the celebrated Crown Studios. We got our tickets, money, letters etc, also bought some charming toys for Thomas' children, & then started, somewhat late, by the 4 o'clock steamer for Coogee. So I saw the harbour with the advantage of the sunset light, & did some little sketches of the Heads etc on the way.

Coogee is a small place with a big House belonging to the Cardinal, a large number of provision shops and — the Ocean Beach, a sandy shore where we sat and watched the sea as long as we dared. We then patronized the Chief industry of the place (viz, the providing of teas), & just caught our steamer back nicely. We were very happy, sitting in the half darkness, watching the numberless lights reflected in the water, especially so, as the next day we would really be off and near the end of our long journey.

We had unpacked the presents for Thomas & took them with the toys to his house after dinner, where we spent the evening with him, his wife & little boy (the other 2 children were in bed) to their great satisfaction. He has most excellent quarters, a large airy flat, the top Storey of the Bank of N.S.W.

Saturday morning was spent in going to say good bye to Mr. Forsythe (of "Burns Phillips" etc) and finishing up one or two little things & getting the luggage on board. Miss Corlette & the youngest girl, Jean, came to lunch & kindly accompanied us through a heavy shower of rain to the wharf, where we found Thomas awaiting us with a large bunch of violets for me.

The "Eurimbla" did not take very long getting under way, & we were soon steaming down the harbour, I, trying to draw everything as we passed.

We made great friends with Capt Grahl, & were quite sorry to leave him at Sydney which we reached about 8.30 on Thursday evening. The faithful Thomas was awaiting us with a pile of letters, among others a note from Lady Manning begging us to come or not, just as suited us best. We thought it the only chance of seeing her, so depositing some of our luggage at the Bank we drove straight to 111 Macleay Street, where we met with a warm welcome. We had a very pleasant time with her & Clara, but every minute was full. I went out with Charlie after breakfast, and brought back the letters from the Bank. There were 3 lots & they took me nearly an hour to read. I answered as many as I could. The news from home was delightful to get: little Harry having a Winchester scholarship, and everything as happy as possible. It quite cheered me up, we had been so long without news. Mrs. Tregarthen & Dr Corlette were at lunch. We both like him so much. In the afternoon we went with Lady M. to the University, and Miss Woolley came in later to see us. C. also called on Mr. Mitchell. In the evening we dined with Knoxes. Clara went too. Mr. Knox is a most dear old gentleman, & his daughters are very clever.

Saturday the 28th

We left our kind hostess early & went down to the Bank where I repacked my luggage. It was all done at last and taken on board our ship the "Monowai". Mr. Corlette & Isabelle kindly came & saw us off, but Thomas was the last friend we saw as at 1.30 we swung round & steamed off quickly, leaving him waving a pocket handkerchief pathetically to the last.