

EXPLORATIONS

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**“LE PETIT CONDÉ”:
THE DEATH IN SYDNEY IN 1866
OF AUSTRALIA’S FIRST ROYAL VISITOR**

IVAN BARKO

Louis Marie Léopold Philippe d’Orléans, Prince de Condé, was the eldest son of Henri d’Orléans, Duc d’Aumale, himself fourth son of Louis-Philippe, King of the French from 1830 to 1848.¹ The Duc d’Aumale was arguably the most distinguished member of the Orléans family in the nineteenth century.² His great-uncle, the Duc de Bourbon, who was also Prince de Condé,³ died in obscure circumstances in 1830. He left his title and property (including Chantilly) to his great-nephew and godson, who subsequently passed them on to his first-born son, Louis. This is the origin of the latter’s title, Prince de Condé, and his affectionate nickname, “le petit Condé”, a double reference to the youth of the Prince and to his illustrious predecessor, the “grand Condé”, the hero of the *Fronde*, the mid-seventeenth century rebellion against absolute monarchy.

The “petit Condé” was born on 15 November 1845 in Saint-Cloud. In 1848, when his grandfather was overthrown, he went into exile in England with the rest of the royal family. He later spent some time in Edinburgh where he stayed with Professor Lorimer and his family, and was a student in Dr Schmitz’s class at high school. He was known as a kind, gentle and unassuming young man who fitted in well and took an active part in school activities. He was particularly interested in history and more specifically in the French-Scottish connection.

When the Prince was twenty, his father arranged an eighteen-month tour to the East and to Australia. The Prince being in poor health, the Duc d’Aumale believed the overseas travel would improve his general health and strengthen his lungs. He was a young man of middle height with refined features and “an impressionable” character, and tended to be highly strung.

Accompanied by his physician, Dr Paul Gingeot,⁴ and his cousin, the Duc d’Alençon, the Prince embarked on the P&O steamer *Mongolia* on 4 February 1866. They intended to visit Egypt, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Java, China, Japan and India, but in the Prince’s mind the highlight of the tour was to be Australia, because of the “otherness” of its fauna and flora and its physical characteristics, its institutions and its rapidly increasing prosperity. According to Dr Gingeot,

L’Australie surtout piquait la curiosité du jeune prince; l’étrangeté de cette terre si différente de la nôtre au point de vue de l’histoire naturelle, les institutions et l’avenir politique de colonies dont la prospérité s’accroît tous les jours, formaient autant d’aiguillons pour son esprit investigateur.

The rest of the trip seems to have been of secondary importance to the Prince compared with Australia. As it happened, however, their itinerary was cut short in Sydney, and even their planned visit to Melbourne did not take place.

In 1866 the Suez Canal was still under construction, so the royal party had to disembark in Alexandria. The Prince and his retinue travelled to Cairo and then Suez by train and a smaller boat in order to embark on another P&O steamer, the *Bengal*. The Duc d’Alençon parted company with them in Egypt, as he was travelling to Manila.

After a brief stay in Ceylon, the Prince’s party boarded their third P&O steamer, the *Bombay*, for the next stage of their trip. Whilst both the *Mongolia* and the *Bengal* had provided the travellers with a wealth of opportunities for social interaction and other forms of entertainment, the *Bombay* offered a less stimulating environment, and the Prince spent most of his time reading. He had brought with him an impressive library of English and French works on geography and history, and books of creative literature.

On 8 April the *Bombay* reached Western Australia at King George’s Sound. The Prince visited Albany, in the company of a wealthy Queensland businessman, Mr Hood, and was received by the local Chief Magistrate, Sir Alexander Campbell. On 13 April the *Bombay* put in at Melbourne, but the Prince was anxious to reach Sydney as soon as possible and did not stop there: his intention was to visit Melbourne at leisure on the return trip. From the *Bombay* he admired Cape Howe and the outline of the mountains in the background (“the peaks of the Australian Alps”).

The *Bombay* went through the Heads at 6 a.m. on 16 April 1866. The Prince commented that Sydney Harbour was one of the most impressive natural harbours, easily capable of containing all the fleets of the world. Sydney Town impressed him with its “air of advanced civilisation” and its similarity to some of the oldest cities in the world, a remarkable feat for an 80-year-old settlement. He commented that the only difference between London and Sydney was the greater cleanliness of the latter and the greater purity of its air. Whether he was right or not is beside the point: the Prince de Condé was obviously won over by Port Jackson. He particularly liked the

mixture of careful planning and natural, organic growth in Sydney's urban landscape. He thought that the need to import a large range of products made Sydney an expensive city, but he believed there was comparatively little poverty.

Although they were offered more luxurious accommodation by the Governor, Sir John Young, and some of their private hosts, the Prince and his party chose to stay at Petty's Hotel, on Church Hill, near St Philip's, on the site of what is now 1 York Street. Their suite on the north side of the hotel was pleasant but not particularly grandiose. The Prince, however, liked the location and the view,⁵ and the friendly attitude of the management, and he resisted attempts to move them to a more prestigious location. Petty's Hotel was to be his last residence.

The Prince obviously enjoyed his stay and his health also appeared to be improving. He had many outings during his five weeks in Sydney, as well as countless invitations to balls, receptions, dinners and other forms of entertainment. Early during his stay he attended a performance of *Faust* put on in his honour, and sat in the Governor's box.

A visit to the University was arranged for him. He was shown around by the Chancellor, and admired the zoological specimens and the archeological collection. He was particularly interested in the non-denominational character of the University, whilst fully aware of the religious affiliations of the two colleges he visited, St John's and St Paul's. He noted, not without regret, that the University's growth would be slow,⁶ as, notwithstanding the distinction of the new institution, Sydney's notables were inclined to send their offspring to Oxford and Cambridge.

In other respects, however, the Prince thought the links between the Australian colonies and the mother country were weak,⁷ and concluded that for all practical purposes Australia was a republic except in name. He was looking forward to its future transformation into a federal state. He particularly admired Sir John Young's impartiality, especially in religious matters, noting that one-third of the population of New South Wales was Catholic.

He paid a visit to the Australian Museum and commented on the heaviness of the style of the building, reminiscent of a Greek temple. At the Museum he was particularly intrigued by the platypus.

The Prince was also shown around the Botanical Gardens by its Director, Charles Moore, and visited the Sydney Infirmary, with its 200 beds and 70 physicians and surgeons. He was surprised that the medical profession did not have its own association or any scientific publications specific to it, and thought both were overdue.

Further outings included a visit to the South Head lighthouse, the La Pérouse monument and the races. The Prince also made an excursion to Parramatta with Captain Goss, reaching it by boat; he inspected the orphanage as well as the Benedictine convent and boarding school, returning to Sydney by road. On another occasion he was driven to Windsor and Kurrajong in the Governor's coach, in the company of young landowner John de V. Lamb, who acted as his host and guide. One regret he expressed was that he was not able to see Aborigines, as there were so few of them around Sydney.

On 12 May the Prince learnt of Queen Marie-Amélie's death through the papers. Having been deeply attached to his grandmother, this news item, together with a bad cold following a fishing expedition to Manly, caused the immediate deterioration of his health. Dr Gingeot ordered rest, but the Prince continued his visits and sightseeing.

The last outings included an inspection in John de V. Lamb's company of Dr James C. Cox's renowned collection of molluscs and arthropoda and a visit to Chief Justice Sir Alfred Stephen, for whom the Prince developed a particular esteem and affection.

After an ostensible short improvement in his condition, there was a serious relapse. The Prince was ordered to stay in bed. He had high fever, loss of appetite and severe headaches, followed by extreme nervous agitation. Seeking another opinion, Dr Gingeot brought in Dr Nathan S. Alloway, the Governor's physician, who came to visit the patient every morning. They thought he would pull through.

Haemorrhage, however, soon set in,⁸ first in the form of excessive nose bleeding. Dr Gingeot discreetly called in Archdeacon McEncroe, on the pretext of a friendly visit but in fact to administer the last rites. By 6 p.m. on 24 May the Prince grew paler, his pulse weakened, he was covered in cold sweat, his eyes were dull and his understanding diminished. Intestinal bleeding followed and his body was covered in blood. Dr Gingeot and Geyer, his valet, attended to him.

The “petit Condé” died at 10.30 p.m. on 24 May 1866 at Petty's Hotel, in the presence of his confessor. Less than six months later he would have turned twenty-one.

During the next few days a host of officials and leading citizens came to Petty's to pay their respects to the dead Prince. They included the Governor, the Chief Justice, the Premier (James Martin), Commodore Sir William Wiseman, Lord John Taylour, and the Consuls of the United States of America, the Netherlands, Belgium and Brazil. Louis Sentis, the French

Consul, attended in his private capacity, as his Government (Napoleon III's Second Empire) did not recognize the deceased's royal status. (Dr Gingeot made a special point of paying tribute to the Consul's tact, helpfulness and sense of humanity during and after the Prince's stay in Sydney.)

Sydney's French residents presented their condolences to Dr Gingeot. Amongst them was an old man named Bartélémy, who, as a follower of the Orléans family, used to nurse the Prince as an infant in France.

On the day of the funeral, 29 May 1866, a long procession accompanied the coffin from Petty's Hotel to St Mary's Cathedral. The coffin was covered with a pall of black velvet embroidered with the arms of the Prince. Many shops closed as a mark of respect and flags on the consulates were "hoisted half-mark high".⁹ The procession left Petty's at 10.45 a.m. and the funeral knell was sounded from St James' Church as the procession moved up George Street. It was led by Monseigneur Eloi (the Coadjutor Bishop of Oceania), the Very Reverend S. J. A. Sheehy (the Vicar General), the Very Reverend Father Poupinel, Archdeacon McEncroe and about twenty clergymen. The pall-bearers included the Governor, the Chief Justice, Commodore Sir William Wiseman, the Hon. James Martin, Mr Justice Faucett, Colonel Hutchins, Mr William McNab and the Belgian Consul. "The indistinct and sorrowful sound of a muffled peal was heard issuing from the cathedral tower, interrupted every minute by the loud and sharp clang of the ordinary death knell."

At St Mary's, hung with black, the body was placed on a catafalque in front of the high altar while Gregorian chants were sung. According to the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, "not much less than 2000 persons must have been present". In the absence of the Archbishop, who was in Rome, the officiating prelate was the Right Reverend Dr Eloi, assisted by a large number of clergy. After Matins the Requiem Mass was sung.

A most notable point in the service was the sequence, the grand old Latin Hymn, "Dies irae", which was finely rendered in the solemn canto fermo, or ancient church chant, to which it has been sung for centuries. The effect of this part of the service was deeply impressive.

After the Mortuary Mass a procession was again formed and proceeded to the catafalque. The Archbishop was represented by four senior priests "who each gave the absolution in turn [... and] a final prayer was said for the soul of the departed." The *Post's* reporter commented that the ceremonies were "strange to a large number of those present", but above religious differences

all were “united by the bonds of good feeling in the dread presence of Death”.

After the service the coffin and a small silver box containing the heart of the Prince were moved on board the ship *Sea Star* at Circular Quay. The *Sea Star*, with Dr Gingeot and the Prince’s retinue on board, departed a few days later, on 2 June, taking its precious load to London.

The strange and melancholy combination of youth and death associated with the stay of the first royal visitor in Australia, an unpretentious and highly sympathetic observer of the colony, left a deep impression on Sydneysiders.

In 1871, after the fall of the Second Empire and the Commune, the Prince’s father, the Duc d’Aumale, returned to France with the invaluable books, manuscripts and works of art he had collected during his exile. The General had become a bibliophile and an art collector. On his return he was elected both to the French Parliament and the French Academy. He was also reinstated in the French Army and served until 1886.

The Duke engaged the services of Honoré Daumet to restore Chantilly and in 1884 he donated the property and its treasures to the Institut de France on condition that they were open to the public. The urn containing the hearts of all the princes of the House of Condé was placed in the chapel in Chantilly in 1885. The most recent heart added to this vessel was that of Louis d’Orléans, who died in Sydney in 1866. Louis was the last Prince de Condé.

University of Sydney

Notes

1. I thank Margot Riley, the curator of the State Library of New South Wales exhibition “*Vive la différence! The French in NSW*” (7 June–10 October 2004) for drawing my attention to the Condé story and helping with the research.
2. The Duke defeated Abdu’l-Kadir in 1843 and became Governor General of Algeria four years later. His children are often glossed over. Apart from Louis, his eldest son, he and his wife Marie-Caroline, Princess of the Two Sicilies, had six other children, of whom only one, François Louis Philippe Marie d’Orléans (1854–1872), survived beyond infancy. François was their third son to bear the title Duc de Guise. Neither Louis nor François reached majority.
3. His son the Duc d’Enghien was executed on Napoleon’s orders in 1804.

4. The character of the Prince, the account of the trip and the stay in Sydney are from the pen of Dr Paul Gingeot in *Un voyage en Australie*, Paris, Charles Douniol, 1867, originally published in the periodical *Le Correspondant*. Most of the information on the funeral service is derived from the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, Adelaide Edition, n° 87, June 1866, pp. 283–284.
5. From Petty's balcony he could see four churches of different denominations.
6. Sixty students at the time.
7. As did so many other French visitors to pre-Federation Australia.
8. The physicians diagnosed defibrination syndrome. In his book Dr Gingeot claims the Prince died of typhoid fever.
9. This and the following quotations are from the account published in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*.