

# **AUSTRALIAN POEMS**

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Australian poems by Adam Lindsay Gordon

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**ADAM LINDSAY GORDON**

**AUSTRALIAN  
POEMS**





*Adam Lindsay Gordon*

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*Adam Lindsay Gordon's*  
*Australian Poems*

*Edited by*

**CHARLES R. LONG, M.A.**

*President, The Gordon Memorial Committee.*

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In the spring, when the wattle-gold trembles  
Twixt shadow and shine,

\* \* \* \* \*

Some song in all hearts hath existence,—  
Such songs have been mine.

—Gordon.

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and London

The doctor told me that I should  
get all right in time but that it was  
an awkward place to get hurt & down  
indeed I found it, I must not  
cross this to? or you will not be  
able to read it, Best love to  
\* Adam & Mike & Family  
I am dear M. M. M.  
Yr affec. nephew

From a letter written June, 1863

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## FOREWORD

Though there are several biographies of Adam Lindsay Gordon and editions of his poetry, yet this book supplies a need—a biographical outline; a collection of those poems that are distinctively Australian, accompanied by notes to help to a fuller understanding and appreciation of them; and photographs of the principal monuments to him in Australia.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Statue : A School Paper photo., by courtesy of the Government Printer and the Director of Education, Victoria.

(Paul R. Montford, Sculptor)

Handwriting : Part of a letter, reproduced in *Adam Lindsay Gordon and His Friends in England and Australia*, by Edith Humphris and Douglas Sladen.

Dingley Dell : Government Photograph, South Australia.

Obelisk : Tourist Bureau, South Australia. The obelisk is situated on the Memorial Drive near the spot where Gordon caused his horse to jump over a fence on to a narrow ledge some hundreds of feet above the Blue Lake.

Monument : Photo., by courtesy of Mr. J. K. Moir, Melbourne.

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*Biographical*

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ADAM LINDSAY GORDON

October 19th, 1833—June 24th, 1870

Henry Kendall, Australia's first native-born poet of eminence, after the death of Gordon, whose poems he had read as they appeared, wrote of him as

"A shining soul with syllables of fire,  
Who sang the first great songs these lands can claim  
To be their own."

These "first great songs" are not many, but they have become well-known and have exercised a strong influence.

Gordon came of cultured and well-to-do parents, but, being nearly twenty and without satisfactory prospects, though educated at Cheltenham College, Woolwich Military Academy, and Worcester Grammar School, he left England for Adelaide in 1853, and, soon after landing, joined the mounted-police force of South Australia.

After about two years' service he resigned, and, having an exceptional liking for horses, entered upon the occupation of horse-breaker, travelling from station to station in the south-eastern part of South Australia. In '62, he married Maggie Park, and they made their home near Port McDonnell, occupying a cottage, called "Dingley Dell," which, some years ago, was bought by the Government of South Australia to serve as a memorial to the poet's memory.

Having inherited several thousands of pounds in '64, Gordon consented to stand for the South Australian Parliament, and was elected in March, '65. He continued to keep horses, ride steeplechases, and make unprofitable investments. Tiring of his parliamentary duties, he resigned in November, '66. Having endeavoured without success to form a sheep-run in Western Australia, and his funds being at a low ebb, he, in October, '67, went to Ballarat (where he had ridden steeplechases), and leased a livery-stable. As the business did not pay, he gave it up after a year's effort.

Gordon's ability to compose verse had shown itself, before he left England, in rhyming descriptions of the doings of himself and his companions, many of whom were addicted to hunting, racing, and boxing. A song for a convivial meeting begins thus:—

"Here's a health to every sportsman, be he stableman or lord,  
If his heart be true, I care not what his pocket may afford."

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*Gordon's Australian Poems*

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In '66, some of his racing rhymes appeared in *Bell's Life in Victoria*, a Melbourne paper whose editor was perhaps the first to recognize Gordon's poetic ability. In parts, these rhymes rise to a poetic level, as the following shows:—

"In their own generation the wise may sneer—  
They hold our sport in derision;  
Perchance to sophist, or sage, or seer  
Was allotted a graver vision.  
Yet, if man, of all the Creator planned,  
His noblest work is reckoned,  
Of the works of His hand, by sea or by land,  
The horse may at least rank second."

In the June of the following year ('67), Gordon published in the same city a lyrical drama *Ashtaroth*, and, a week or so later, a small book of poems, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*.

He made many friends in Melbourne after his removal there from Ballarat towards the end of '68. He trained horses, and, as a gentleman rider, rode them in steeplechases. He also occasionally contributed poems to *The Colonial Monthly* (edited by the novelist, Marcus Clarke) and *The Australasian* (edited by F. W. Haddon). About this time, he learnt from an uncle in England that he was, in all probability, heir to a fine property in Scotland; but, early in June, 1870, after incurring considerable expense in getting legal advice, there came the news that his claim could not be made good.

On June 24th, owing to the disappointment, his inability to pay his debts, and the sufferings caused by heavy falls when riding, his mind became unhinged, and he took his own life. The day before his death, a volume of his poems, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, had been published. Though his literary friends highly appreciated his poetry, he was well aware, from his previous experience, that the public would be slow in buying his book.

Gordon's poems have become popular—popular with all classes, the learned and the unlearned. This is due, in great part, to their melodious rhythms, vigorous expression, and an interest that attaches to persons. In them are revealed an admiration for courage, manliness, and honest dealing; a love of adventure and independence; a passion for the horse; and an appreciation of natural beauty—qualities and tastes dear to the Briton in whatever land he may be.