

**THE BEGINNINGS OF
AN AUSTRALIAN
LITERATURE**

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The Beginnings of an Australian Literature by A. Patchett Martin

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BY
Arthur
A. PATCHETT MARTIN

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THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF ROBERT LOWE
VISCOUNT SHERBROOKE
ETC. ETC.

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1898

TO MY FRIEND
PHILIP MENNELL
WITH ALL GOOD WISHES AND GOOD-WILL
I INSCRIBE THESE PAGES

PREFACE

THIS discourse on *The Beginnings of an Australian Literature* was delivered at South Place Institute, London, on Sunday afternoon, March 27th, as one of a series of lectures on 'Greater Britain' subjects. An excellent and almost verbatim report appeared in the *British Australasian* of March 31st, but numbers of persons interested in the development of colonial culture have been kind enough to suggest to me that a separate publication might be helpful as a means of familiarising the British public with the names and work of the 'few writers who reflect the life, describe the scenery, and reveal the social conditions of Australia.'

In consenting to the publication of this lecture, I wish distinctly to state that it is in no sense an exhaustive (and, I trust, not an exhausting) exposition of the subject. Much might have been added on the more serious and philosophical writers, such as the late Dr. Hearn and Professor Pearson, whose speculations were largely influenced by their colonial environment and experiences. But my

PREFACE

object was to deal merely with the *belles-lettres*—with the little, scanty band of prose-writers and verse-men who, preserving the literary traditions and culture of the mother-land, under novel conditions and circumstances, have been laying the foundations of a fresh branch of English literature in this far-off Austral world.

As the publicist who first introduced Adam Lindsay Gordon to the knowledge of English readers, I hope I am not presumptuous in claiming for the most popular of Australian verse-writers a distinct place among the poets of our time. There is, at all events, every sign of his growing fame and ever-widening popularity. Gordon would now appear to occupy an envied place in the affections not only of Australians, but of those poetry-loving Britons, who are at the same time men of adventure and travel, and whose hearts throb with pride of race and true patriotism. I venture to hope that the estimate here given of Adam Lindsay Gordon, and the view taken of his sad, but not ignoble career, may prove acceptable to all who have grown to love the *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*.

A. P. M.

REFORM CLUB, PALL MALL.

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

IN the strict logical sense of the words, there is—and there can be—no such thing as Australian literature; any more than there can be a South African, a Canadian, or even an American literature. Should some free and enlightened citizen of the United States feel outraged by this assertion, let him calmly consider for a moment the case of the Ancient Greeks. That wonderful race, it will be admitted, were our supreme guides as well as fore-runners in civilisation, our superiors in the science of colonisation, and our masters in the art of literature and all other arts.

From a small centre about the size of Yorkshire, or the Scottish Lowlands, the Greek spread his exquisite language, his beautiful creeds, his arts, his commerce, and his warlike arms from the Pillars of Hercules to the Sea of Azof. He converted the Mediterranean into a Greek lake, and his colonies extended from Massilia—the modern French city of Marseilles—and from the coasts of Africa on the west, to those extensive and troubled lands which we call Asia Minor on the east.