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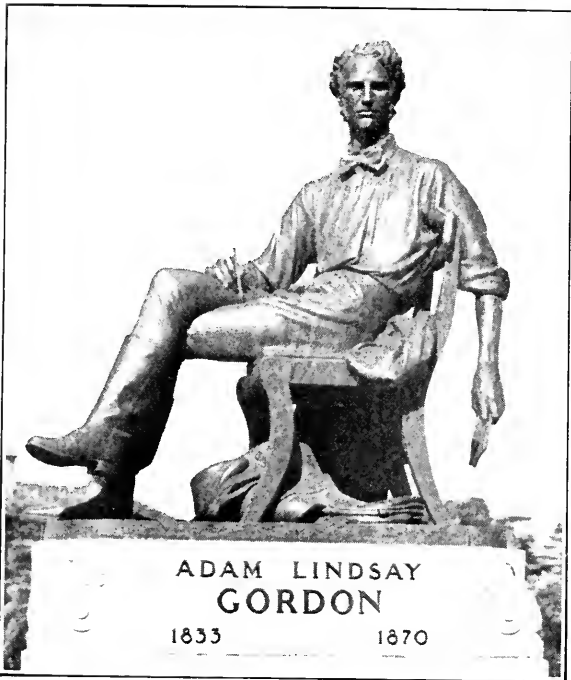
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Gordon
Australian Poems



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Adam Lindsay Gordon's
Australian
Poems





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*Adam Lindsay Gordon's
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.

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.

WHITCOMBE & TOMBS LIMITED

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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 leg - or you will not be
able to read it, Best Love to
* Adam & Pick & Family
I am dear Uncle
Yr affect. nephew
Henry James

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.

Biographical

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."

Gordon's Australian Poems

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.

A Dedication

A DEDICATION

[The following stanzas are from those addressed to the author of *Holmby House*, the English novelist, Whyte-Melville. They come first in Gordon's last book, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870). Whyte-Melville had contributed to *Baily's Magazine* a favourable article on Gordon's verse, which the poet had read. "Whyte-Melville was," states Douglas Sladen, "one of the first persons in the Old Country to recognize the genius of Adam Lindsay Gordon." In his letter acknowledging the receipt of *Bush Ballads* occurs the significant words: "Here and there, one comes upon a couplet or stanza which will be quoted when most of us are forgotten."]

They are rhymes rudely strung with intent less
Of sound than of words,
In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,
And songless bright birds;
Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,
Insatiable summer oppresses
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,
And faint flocks and herds;

Where in dreariest days, when all dews end,
And all winds are warm,
Wild winter's large floodgates are loosen'd,
And floods, freed by storm,
From broken-up fountain heads, dash on
Dry deserts with long pent-up passion—
Here rhyme was first framed without fashion,
Song shaped without form.

Whence gather'd? The locust's glad chirrup
May furnish a stave,
The ring of a rowel and stirrup,
The wash of a wave,

Gordon's Australian Poems

The chant of the marsh frog in rushes
That chimes through the pauses and hushes
Of nightfall, the torrent that gushes,
 The tempests that rave;

In the deep'ning of dawn, when it dapples
 The dusk of the sky
With streaks like the redd'ning of apples,
 The ripening of rye,
To eastward, when, cluster by cluster,
Dim stars and dull planets that muster
Wax wan in a world of white lustre
 That spreads far and high;

In the gathering of night-gloom o'erhead, in
 The still, silent change,
All fire-flush'd when forest trees redden
 On slopes of the range,
When the gnarl'd, knotted trunks eucalyptian
Seemed carved, like weird columns Egyptian,
With curious device—quaint inscription,
 And hieroglyph strange;

In the spring, when the wattle-gold trembles
 'Twixt shadow and shine,
When each dew-laden air-draught resembles
 A long draught of wine,
When the skyline's blue burnish'd resistance
Makes deeper the dreamiest distance,
Some song in all hearts hath existence,—
 Such songs have been mine.

A Dedication

They came in all guises, some vivid
 To clasp and to keep;
Some sudden and swift as the livid
 Blue thunder-flame's leap.
This swept through the first breath of clover
With memories renew'd to the rover;
That flash'd while the black horse turn'd over
 Before the long sleep.

* * * * *

Yet rhyme had not fail'd me for reason,
 Nor reason for rhyme;
Sweet Song! had I sought you in season,
 And found you in time.
You beckon in your bright beauty yonder,
And I, waxing fainter yet fonder,
Now weary too soon when I wander—
 Now fall when I climb.

BY WOOD AND WOLD

[These melodious and truly Australian verses form the introduction to a series entitled *Ye Wearie Wayfarer*, the publication of which began in October, '65, in *Bell's Life in Victoria*. Though they appeared when the poet was a member of the South Australian Parliament, some of them were inspired by his life in the Mt. Gambier District. It was, in a cottage called "Dingley Dell," not far from Port McDonnell, that he and his wife lived for two or three years before they went to Adelaide.]

Lightly the breath of the spring wind blows,
 Though laden with faint perfume,
'Tis the fragrance rare that the bushman knows,
 The scent of the wattle-bloom.
Two-thirds of our journey at least are done,
 Old horse! let us take a spell
In the shade from the glare of the noonday sun,
 Thus far we have travell'd well;
Your bridle I'll slip, your saddle ungirth,
 And lay them beside this log,
For you'll roll in that track of reddish earth,
 And shake like a water-dog.

Upon yonder rise there's a clump of trees—
 Their shadows look cool and broad—
You can crop the grass as fast as you please,
 While I stretch my limbs on the sward;
'Tis pleasant, I ween, with a leafy screen
 O'er the weary head, to lie
On the mossy carpet of emerald green,
 'Neath the vault of the azure sky;
Thus all alone by the wood and wold,
 I yield myself once again
To the memories old that, like tales fresh told,
 Come flitting across the brain.

Wolf and Hound

WOLF AND HOUND

[This story poem was probably written at the Yallum Park homestead, where Gordon spent most of January and the first half of February, '69, with a friend he had made in Parliament, John Riddoch, and his family. As no evidence has been discovered of the capture of a bushranger by Gordon, though the police records for the period during which he was a member of the South Australian Mounted Police have been searched, the tradition that the poem describes an incident in his own life is most likely not true.]

You'll take my tale with a little salt,
But it needs none, nevertheless,
I was foil'd completely, fairly at fault,
Dishearten'd too, I confess.
At the splitters' tent I had seen the track
Of horse-hoofs fresh on the sward;
And though Darby Lynch and Donovan Jack
(Who could swear through a ten-inch board)
Solemnly swore he had not been there,
I was just as sure that they lied,
For to Darby all that is foul was fair,
And Jack for his life was tried.

We had run him for seven miles and more
As hard as our nags could split,
At the start they were all too weary and sore,
And his was quite fresh and fit.
Young Marsden's pony had had enough
On the plain, where the chase was hot;
We breasted the swell of the Bittern's Bluff,
And Mark couldn't raise a trot.
When the sea, like a splendid silver shield,
To the south-west suddenly lay,
On the brow of the Beetle the chestnut reel'd,

Gordon's Australian Poems

And I bade good-bye to M'Crea;
And I was alone when the mare fell lame
With a pointed flint in her shoe,
On the Stony Flats: I had lost the game,
And what was a man to do?
I turned away with no fixed intent,
And headed for Hawthorndell;
I could neither eat in the splitters' tent
Nor drink at the splitters' well.
I knew that they gloried in my mishap,
And I cursed them between my teeth.
A blood-red sunset through Brayton's Gap
Flung a lurid fire on the heath.

Could I reach the Dell? I had little reck,
And, with scarce a choice of my own,
I threw the reins on Miladi's neck;
I had freed her foot from the stone.
That season most of the swamps were dry;
And, after so hard a burst
In the sultry noon of so hot a sky,
She was keen to appease her thirst;
Or by instinct urged or impelled by fate—
I care not to solve these things—
Certain it is that she took me straight
To the Warrigal water-springs.

I can shut my eyes and recall the ground
As though it were yesterday:
With a shelf of the low, grey rocks girt round,
The springs in their basin lay;
Woods to the east and wolds to the north
In the sundown sullenly bloomed;
Dead black on a curtain of crimson cloth

Wolf and Hound

Large peaks to the westward loomed.
I led Miladi through weed and sedge,
She leisurely drank her fill;
There was something close to the water's edge,
And my heart with one leap stood still,
For a horse's shoe and a rider's boot
Had left clean prints on the clay;
Some one had watered his beast on foot.
'Twas he—he had gone. Which way?
Then the mouth of the cavern faced me fair
As I turned and fronted the rocks;
So, at last, I had press'd the wolf to his lair,
I had run to his earth the fox.

I thought so. Perhaps he was resting. Perhaps
He was waiting, watching, for me.
I examined all my revolver caps,
I hitched my mare to a tree.
I had sworn to have him, alive or dead,
And to give him a chance was loath.
He knew his life had been forfeited—
He had even heard of my oath.
In my stocking'd soles to the shelf I crept,
I crawl'd safe into the cave.
All silent. If he was there, he slept.
Not there. All dark as the grave.

Through the crack I could hear the leaden hiss,
See the livid face through the flame.
How strange it seems that a man should miss
When his life depends on his aim!
There couldn't have been a better light
For him, nor a worse for me.
We were coop'd up, caged, like beasts for a fight,
And dumb as dumb beasts were we.

Gordon's Australian Poems

Flash! flash! bang! bang! and we blazed away,
And the grey roof reddened and rang;
Flash! flash! and I felt his bullet flay
The tip of my ear. Flash! bang!
Bang! flash! and my pistol arm fell broke;
I struck with my left hand then—
Struck at a corpse through a cloud of smoke—
I had shot him dead in his den!

FROM THE WRECK

[This story was probably written at Yallum Park early in '69. It describes an actual occurrence. On August 6th, '59—a date which falls within the period Gordon was occupied in breaking-in horses in the Mt. Gambier District—the s.s. *Admella* was wrecked on the rocky coast near C. Banks. Blackfellows took the news to a station where Gordon was staying. He and a companion set out with it to the nearest telegraph office—Mt. Gambier—between 20 and 30 miles distant. The information was also taken to the C. Northumberland lighthouse by two seamen who had reached the shore on a raft. From there it was sent to Mt. Gambier, a distance of about 20 miles. There are reasons for thinking that Gordon described his own ride. The Portland life-boat was in time to rescue some of the people. "I have no idea," wrote Alex. Sutherland, to whom Gordonians owe much for his diligent study of the poet's life and works, "where to turn in all literature for a poem more admirable after its own kind."]

"'Turn out, boys!' What's up with our super. to-night?

The man's mad. Two hours to daybreak I'd swear!
Stark mad—why, there isn't a glimmer of light."

"Take Bolingbroke, Alec, give Jack the young mare;
Look sharp. A large vessel lies jam'd on the reef,

And many on board still, and some wash'd on shore.
Ride straight with the news—they may send some relief

From the township; and we—we can do little more.
You, Alec, you know the near cuts; you can cross

The Sugarloaf ford with a scramble, I think;
Don't spare the blood filly, nor yet the black horse;

Should the wind rise, God help them! the ship will soon
sink.

Old Peter's away down the paddock, to drive

The nags to the stockyard as fast as he can—
A life and death matter; so, lads, look alive."

Half-dress'd, in the dark to the stockyard we ran.

Gordon's Australian Poems

There was bridling with hurry, and saddling with haste,
Confusion and cursing for lack of a moon.

"Be quick with these buckles, we've no time to waste."

"Mind the mare, she can use her hind legs to some tune."

"Make sure of the crossing-place; strike the new track,
They've fenced off the old one; look out for the holes
On the Wombat Hills." "Down with the slip-rails; stand
back!"

"And ride, boys, the pair of you, ride for your souls."

In the low branches heavily laden with dew,
In the long grasses spoiling with deadwood that day,
Where the blackwood, the box, and the bastard-oak grew,
Between the tall gum-trees we gallop'd away.
We crash'd through a brush fence, we splash'd through a
swamp;

We steered for the north near the Eaglehawk's Nest;
We bore to the left just beyond the Red Camp,
And round the black tea-tree belt wheel'd to the west;
We cross'd a low range sickly scented with musk
From wattle-tree blossom; we skirted a marsh.
Then the dawn faintly dappled with orange the dusk,
And peal'd overhead the jay's laughter-note harsh,
And shot the first sunstreak behind us, and soon
The dim, dewy uplands were dreamy with light;
And full on our left flash'd the Reedy Lagoon;
And sharply the Sugarloaf rear'd on our right.
A smother'd curse broke through the bushman's brown beard,
He turn'd in his saddle, his brick-colour'd cheek
Flush'd feebly with sundawn, said, "Just what I fear'd;
Last fortnight's late rainfall has flooded the creek."

Black Bolingbroke snorted, and stood on the brink
One instant, then deep in the dark, sluggish swirl
Plunged headlong. I saw the horse suddenly sink
Till round the man's armpits the waves seem'd to curl.

From the Wreck

We follow'd,—one cold shock, and deeper we sank
Than they did, and twice tried the landing in vain.
The third struggle won it; straight up the steep bank
We stagger'd, then out on the skirts of the plain.

The stockrider, Alec, at starting had got
The lead, and had kept it throughout; 'twas his boast
That through thickest of scrub he could steer like a shot,
And the black horse was counted the best on the coast.
The mare had been awkward enough in the dark,
She was eager and headstrong, and barely half-broke;
She had had me too close to a big stringy-bark,
And had made a near thing of a crooked sheoak.

But now on the open, lit up by the morn,
She flung the white foam-flakes from nostril to neck,
And chased him—I hatless, with shirtsleeves all torn
(For he may ride ragged who rides from a wreck)—
And faster and faster across the wide heath
We rode till we raced. Then I gave her her head,
And she, stretching out with the bit in her teeth,
She caught him, outpaced him, and passed him, and led.

We neared the new fence; we were wide of the track.
I look'd right and left—she had never been tried
At a stiff leap. 'Twas little he cared on the black.
"You're more than a mile from the gateway," he cried.
I hung to her head, touched her flank with the spurs
(In the red streak of rail not the ghost of a gap);
She shortened her long stroke, she pricked her sharp ears,
She flung it behind her with hardly a rap.
I saw the post quiver where Bolingbroke struck,
And guessed that the pace we had come the last mile
Had blown him a bit (he could jump like a buck).
We galloped more steadily then for a while.

The heath was soon pass'd; in the dim distance lay
The mountain. The sun was just clearing the tips
Of the ranges to eastward. The mare—could she stay?
She was bred very nearly as clean as Eclipse.
She led; and, as oft as he came to her side,
She took the bit free and untiring as yet,
Her neck was arched double, her nostrils were wide,
And the tips of her tapering ears nearly met.
“You're lighter than I am,” said Alec at last;
“The horse is dead beat and the mare isn't blown.
She must be a good one—ride on and ride fast,
You know your way now.” So I rode on alone.

Still galloping forward we pass'd the two flocks
At Macintyre's hut and Macallister's hill.
She was galloping strong at the Warrigal Rocks;
On the Wallaby Range she was galloping still.
And over the wasteland and under the wood,
By down and by dale, and by fell and by flat,
She gallop'd; and here in the stirrups I stood
To ease her, and there in the saddle I sat
To steer her. We suddenly struck the red loam
Of the track near the troughs; then she reeled on the rise—
From her crest to her croup covered over with foam,
And blood-red her nostrils and bloodshot her eyes.
A dip in the dell where the wattle-fire bloomed—
A bend round a bank that had shut out the view—
Large framed in the mild light the mountain had loomed
With a tall, purple peak bursting out from the blue.

I pull'd her together, I press'd her, and she
Shot down the decline to the Company's yard
And on by the paddocks; yet under my knee
I could feel her heart thumping the saddle-flaps hard.

From the Wreck

Yet a mile and another, and now we were near
The goal, and the fields and the farms flitted past;
And 'twixt the two fences I turned with a cheer.
For a green grass-fed mare 'twas a far thing and fast.
And labourers, roused by her galloping hoofs,
Saw bare-headed rider and foam-sheeted steed;
And shone the white walls and the slate-covered roofs
Of the township. I steadied her then—I had need—
Where stood the old chapel (where stands the new church,
Since chapels to churches have changed in that town).
A short sidelong stagger, a long forward lurch,
A slight choking sob, and the mare had gone down.
I slipp'd off the bridle, I slackened the girth,
I ran on and left her and told them my news;
I saw her soon afterwards. What was she worth?
How much for her hide? She had never worn shoes.

GONE

[The tragic fate of Robert O'Hara Burke, an inspector of police, who was selected as the leader of a party equipped by a committee in Melbourne to explore Central Australia, very much interested Gordon. He greatly admired Burke. About the middle of November, '60, Burke reached Cooper's Creek with some of his party, and a depot was formed. Impatient of delay, he soon set out with Wills, Gray, and King to cross to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Gray died on the way back; and, when the others arrived at the depot, they found it deserted. Burke and Wills perished from starvation towards the end of June, '61, but King was rescued not long afterwards. The laying down of a tramway in Collins Street necessitated the removal of the bronze statue that had been unveiled in '65. It now stands in Spring Street near Parliament House and within sight of the statue of the poet.]

In Collins Street standeth a statue tall—

A statue tall on a pillar of stone,
Telling its story, to great and small,

Of the dust reclaimed from the sand-waste lone.
Weary and wasted, and worn and wan,

Feeble and faint, and languid and low,
He lay on the desert a dying man,

Who has gone, my friends, where we all must go.

There are perils by land, and perils by water,
Short, I ween, are the obsequies

Of the landsman lost, but they may be shorter

With the mariner lost in the trackless seas;
And well for him, when the timbers start,

And the stout ship reels and settles below,
Who goes to his doom with as bold a heart

As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Gone

Man is stubborn his rights to yield,
And redder than dews at eventide
Are the dews of battle, shed on the field
By a nation's wrath or a despot's pride;
But few who have heard their death-knell roll
From the cannon's lips where they faced the foe
Have fallen as stout and steady of soul
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Traverse yon spacious burial-ground.
Many are sleeping soundly there
Who pass'd with mourners standing round,
Kindred, and friends, and children fair.
Did he envy such ending? 'Twere hard to say.
Had he cause to envy such ending? No.
Can the spirit feel for the senseless clay
When it once has gone where we all must go?

What matters the sand or the whitening chalk,
The blighted herbage, the black'ning log,
The crooked beak of the eagle-hawk,
Or the hot red tongue of the native dog?
That couch was rugged, those sextons rude,
Yet, in spite of a leaden shroud, we know
That the bravest and fairest are earth-worms' food,
When once they've gone where we all must go.

With the pistol clenched in his failing hand,
With the death mist spread o'er his fading eyes,
He saw the sun go down on the sand,
And he slept, and never saw it rise.
'Twas well; he toil'd till his task was done,
Constant and calm in his latest throe,
The storm was weathered, the battle was won,
When he went, my friends, where we all must go.

WHISPERINGS IN WATTLE-BOUGHS

[Of this lyric, Alex. Sutherland, in *The Development of Australian Literature*, wrote as follows:—"One of the finest poems in the volume (*Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*) is entitled 'Whisperings in Wattle-Boughs.' It gives us a glimpse of Gordon's mind as, in those days, he pondered over a reckless past and the hearts estranged, then lost for ever. It is one of the three most musical and most pathetic poems ever written in Australia." One might add that the poem exhibits in itself the sources of Gordon's popularity as a poet—personality, subject, style.]

Oh, gaily sings the bird, and the wattle-boughs are stirr'd
And rustled by the scented breath of spring!
Oh, the dreary, wistful longing! Oh, the faces that are
thronging!

Oh, the voices that are vaguely whispering!

Oh! tell me, father mine, ere the good ship cross'd the brine,
On the gangway one mute hand-grip we exchanged,
Do you, past the grave, employ for your stubborn, reckless
boy

Those petitions that in life were ne'er estranged?

Oh! tell me, sister dear—parting word and parting tear
Never pass'd between us; let me bear the blame—
Are you living, girl, or dead? Bitter tears since then I've
shed

For the lips that lisp'd with mine a mother's name.

Oh! tell me, ancient friend, ever ready to defend
In our boyhood at the base of life's long hill,
Are you waking yet or sleeping? Have you left this vale
of weeping?

Or do you, like your comrade, linger still?

Whisperings in Wattle-boughs

Oh, whisper, buried love, is there rest and peace above?—
There is little hope or comfort here below;—
On your sweet face lies the mould, and your bed is strait
and cold
Near the harbour where the sea-tides ebb and flow.

All silent. They are dumb. And the breezes go and come
With an apathy that mocks at man's distress.
Laugh, scoffer, while you may! I could bow me down and
pray
For an answer that might stay my bitterness.

Oh, harshly screams the bird, and the wattle-bloom is stirr'd!
There's a sullen, weird-like whisper in the bough;
"Ay, kneel, and pray, and weep; but his beloved sleep
Can never be disturb'd by such as thou!"

THE SWIMMER

[The following stanzas are descriptive of the coast scenery near C. Northumberland, in the vicinity of Port McDonnell. At no great distance from the port was the home to which Gordon took his bride not long after their marriage. From it he moved to the cottage called "Dingley Dell," on the road between the port and the town of Mt. Gambier. He lived there till it became necessary for him, after his election to Parliament, to reside near Adelaide. The place has been purchased by the Government of South Australia, and is now a museum of Gordon relics, visited by the poet's admirers, and the scene of an annual pilgrimage. Like his remote ancestor Byron, Gordon was passionately fond of the sea, and, when living at Dingley Dell, it became a source of inspiration to him, along with the wattles that grow so plentifully in what is now "The Gordon Country."]

With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam,
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb;
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
And waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, grey coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men,
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie—
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love! when we wander'd here together,
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The Swimmer

The skies were fairer and shores were firmer,
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold;
And the sunset bath'd in the gulf to lend her
A garland of pinks and of purples tender,
A tinge of the sun-god's rosy splendour,
A tithe of his glories manifold.

* * * * *

See! girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder,
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
The strong winds treading the swift waves sunder
The flying rollers with frothy feet.
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The skyline, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun
That strikes through his stormy winding-sheet.

Oh, brave white horses! you gather and gallop;
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, or your high arch'd manes.
I would ride as never a man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden,
To gulfs foreshadow'd through straits forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

THE SICK STOCKRIDER

[Douglas Sladen, in his edition of *The Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon* (Constable), gives pride of place to "The Sick Stockrider," and speaks of it as a masterpiece that no poet but Gordon could have written, and the best poem of its kind in the language. "It was necessary," he asserts, "that poetical genius, ringing, spirited, rhythmical writing, manfulness, experience of the 'old colonial days,' and intimate, loving acquaintance with the bush should unite in one man before a poem like 'The Sick Stockrider' could be born." Though the poem is dramatic—a sick stockrider's review of the excitements and pleasures of a careless bush life and his pathetic self-satisfaction—some of the incidents are believed to have happened to Gordon himself, and some of the reflections to be applicable to him. The poem first appeared in *The Colonial Monthly Magazine*, Melbourne, in '69. It was at once reprinted in *The Australasian*, and achieved a decided popularity.]

Hold hard, Ned! Lift me down once more, and lay me in
the shade.

Old man, you've had your work cut out to guide
Both horses, and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd
All through the hot, slow, sleepy, silent ride.

The dawn at Moorabinda was a mist-rack dull and dense,
The sunrise was a sullen, sluggish lamp;
I was dozing in the gateway at Arbutnot's bound'ry fence,
I was dreaming on the Limestone cattle-camp.
We crossed the creek at Carricksford, and sharply through
the haze

And suddenly the sun shot flaming forth;
To southward lay Katâwa with the sandpeaks all ablaze,
And the flush'd fields of Glen Lomond lay to north.
Now westward winds the bridle-path that leads to Lindisfarm,
And yonder looms the double-headed bluff;

The Sick Stockrider

From the far side of the first hill, when the skies are clear
and calm,

You can see Sylvester's woolshed fair enough.
Five miles we used to call it from our homestead to the place
Where the big tree spans the roadway like an arch;
'Twas here we ran the dingo down that gave us such a chase
Eight years ago—or was it nine?—last March.

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass
To wander as we've wander'd many a mile,
And blow the cool tobacco-cloud, and watch the white wreaths
pass,

Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.
'Twas merry mid the blackwoods, when we spied the station
roofs
To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard,
With a running fire of stockwhips and a fiery run of hoofs;
Oh! the hardest day was never then too hard!

Ay! we had a glorious gallop after Starlight and his gang,
When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat;
How the sun-dried reed-beds crackled, how the flint-strewn
ranges rang

To the strokes of Mountaineer and Acrobat!
Hard behind them in the timber, harder still across the heath,
Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd;
And the golden-tinted fern-leaves, how they rustled under-
neath!

And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd!
We led the hunt throughout, Ned, on the chestnut and the
grey,

And the troopers were three hundred yards behind,
While we emptied our six-shooters on the bushrangers at bay
In the creek with stunted box-tree for a blind!

Gordon's Australian Poems

There you grappled with the leader, man to man and horse
to horse,
And you roll'd together when the chestnut rear'd;
He blazed away and missed you in that shallow watercourse—
A narrow shave—his powder singed your beard!

In these hours when life is ebbing, how those days when life
was young
Come back to us; how clearly I recall
Even the yarns Jack Hall invented, and the songs Jem Roper
sung!
And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall?
Ay! nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school,
Our ancient boon companions, Ned, are gone;
Hard livers for the most part, somewhat reckless as a rule,
It seems that you and I are left alone.

* * * * *

Ah! those days and nights we squandered at the Logans' in
the glen—
The Logans, man and wife, have long been dead.
Elsie's tallest girl seems taller than your little Elsie then;
And Ethel is a woman grown and wed.

I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.
For good undone, and gifts misspent, and resolutions vain
'Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know—
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again;
And the chances are I go where most men go.

The Sick Stockrider

The deep blue skies wax dusky and the tall green trees grow
dim,

The sward beneath me seems to heave and fall;
And sickly, smoky shadows through the sleepy sunlight swim,
And on the very sun's face weave their pall.

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle-blossoms wave,

With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on
my grave,

I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

HOW WE BEAT THE FAVOURITE
[A Lay of the Loamshire Hunt Cup]

[The poem was published first in *The Australasian* on June 12th, '69. Marcus Clarke, the first of many editors to write a preface to a collection of Gordon's poems, asserted that it was by this piece that the poet's reputation was made. By universal consent it is the best racing poem in the language. It wins inclusion in this collection mainly because, though the scene of the struggle is in England, and the description is that of a cross-country steeplechase in which Gordon had taken part or seen, yet "he wrote it," as Douglas Sladen says, "because he felt Australia in his veins"; and also, as Desmond Byrne asserts, "because it expresses the one taste which, of all those inherited by Australians from their British ancestors, seems never likely to be lost." Gordon was not a professional jockey, and never made a race a means of gambling or cheating. He was the laureate of clean sport, and an out-and-out believer in its efficacy as a means of maintaining the nerve and hardihood of the race.]

"Ay, squire," said Stevens, "they back him at evens;
The race is all over, bar shouting, they say;
The Clown ought to beat her; Dick Neville is sweeter
Than ever: he swears he can win all the way.

"A gentleman rider—well, I'm an outsider,
But if he's a gent who the mischief's a jock?
You swells mostly blunder, Dick rides for the plunder,
He rides, too, like thunder; he sits like a rock.

"He calls 'hunted fairly' a horse that has barely
Been stripp'd for a trot within sight of the hounds,
A horse that at Warwick beat Birdlime and Yorick,
And gave Abd-el-Kader at Aintree nine pounds.

"They say we have no test to warrant a protest;
Dick rides for a lord and stands in with a steward;

How We Beat the Favourite

The light of their faces they show him: his case is
Prejudged and his verdict already secured.

"But none can outlast her, and few travel faster,
She strides in her work clean away from The Drag;
You hold her and sit her; she couldn't be fitter;
Whenever you hit her, she'll spring like a stag.

"And p'rhaps the green jacket, at odds though they back it,
May fall, or there's no knowing what may turn up.
The mare is quite ready; sit still and ride steady;
Keep cool; and I think you may just win the Cup."

Dark-brown with tan muzzle, just stripped for the tussle
Stood Iseult, arching her neck to the curb,
A lean head and fiery, strong quarters and wiry,
A loin rather light, but a shoulder superb.

Some parting injunction, bestow'd with great unction,
I tried to recall, but forgot like a dunce,
When Reginald Murray, full tilt on White Surrey,
Came down in a hurry to start us at once.

"Keep back in the yellow! Come up on Othello!
Hold hard on the chestnut! Turn round on The Drag!
Keep back there on Spartan! Back you, sir, in tartan!
So, steady there, easy!" and down went the flag.

We started; and Kerr made strong running on Mermaid
Through furrows that led to the first stake-and-bound;
The crack, half extended, look'd bloodlike and splendid,
Held wide on the right where the headland was sound.

I pulled hard to baffle her rush with the snaffle.
Before her two-thirds of the field got away;

Gordon's Australian Poems

All through the wet pasture where floods of the last year
Still loitered, they clotted my crimson with clay.

The fourth fence, a wattle, floor'd Monk and Bluebottle;
The Drag came to grief at the blackthorn and ditch;
The rails toppled over Redoubt and Red Rover;
The lane stopped Lycurgus and Leicestershire Witch.

She passed like an arrow Kildare and Cock Sparrow;
And Mantrap and Mermaid refused the stone wall;
And Giles on The Grayling came down at the paling;
And I was left sailing in front of them all.

I took them a burster, nor cased her nor nursed her
Until the black bullfinch led into the plough;
And through the strong bramble we bored with a scramble;
My cap was knocked off by the hazel-tree bough.

Where furrows looked lighter, I drew the rein tighter—
Her dark chest all dappled with flakes of white form,
Her flanks mud-bespattered, a weak rail she shattered—
We landed on turf with our heads turn'd for home.

Then crash'd a low binder, and then close behind her
The sward to the strokes of the favourite shook;
His rush roused her mettle, yet ever so little
She shorten'd her stride as we raced at the brook.

She rose when I hit her. I saw the stream glitter;
A wide scarlet nostril flashed close to my knee;
Between sky and water The Clown came and caught her—
The space that he cleared was a caution to see.

And forcing the running, discarding all cunning,
A length to the front went the rider in green;

How We Beat the Favourite

A long strip of stubble, and then the big double,
Two stiff flights of rails with a quickset between.

She raced at the rasper, I felt my knees grasp her,
I found my hands give to her strain on the bit;
She rose when The Clown did; our silks as we bounded
Brush'd lightly, our stirrups clash'd loud as we lit.

A rise steeply sloping, a fence with stone coping—
The last—we diverged round the base of the hill;
His path was the nearer, his leap was the clearer:
I flogg'd up the straight, and he led sitting still.

She came to his quarter, and on still I brought her,
And up to his girth, to his breastplate she drew;
A short prayer from Neville just reach'd me, "The devil!"
He mutter'd. Lock'd level the hurdles we flew.

A hum of hoarse cheering, a dense crowd careering,
All sights seen obscurely, all shouts vaguely heard;
"The green wins!" "The crimson!" The multitude swims on,
And figures are blended and features are blurr'd.

"The horse is her master!" "The green forges past her!"
"The Clown will outlast her!" "The Clown wins!" "The
Clown!"

The white railing races with all the white faces,
The chestnut outpaces, outstretches the brown.

On still past the gateway she strains in the straightway,
Still struggles, "The Clown by a short neck at most,"
He swerves, the green scourges, the stand rocks and surges,
And flashes, and verges, and flits the white post.

Ay! so ends the tussle. I knew the tan muzzle
Was first, though the ringmen were yelling, "Dead heat!"
A nose I could swear by; but Clarke said, "The mare by
A short head." And that's how the favourite was beat.

A BASKET OF FLOWERS

[From Dawn to Dusk]

[When Gordon's stay at Yallum Park was drawing to an end, Miss Lizzie Riddoch asked him to write a poem to go with "A Basket of Flowers" that were to be sent to an aunt. It was not commenced when he set out on his journey to Casterton. The story goes that, when he rested under a tree, as he did occasionally, for it was very hot, he would write out a verse that he had composed, and, by the time he reached his destination, the poem was complete. It is inscribed "Ad Mariam, Feb. 14th, 1869."]

DAWN

On skies still and starlit
White lustres take hold,
And grey flushes scarlet,
And red flashes gold.
And sun-glories cover
The rose, shed above her;
Like lover and lover
They flame and unfold.

Still bloom in the garden
Green grass-plot, fresh lawn,
Though pasture lands harden,
And drought fissures yawn.
While leaves not a few fall,
Let rose-leaves for you fall—
Leaves pearl-strung with dew-fall,
And gold shot with dawn.

A Basket of Flowers

Does the grass-plot remember
The fall of your feet
In autumn's red ember
When drought leagues with heat,
When the last of the roses
Despairingly closes
In the lull that reposes
Ere storm-winds wax fleet?

* * * * *

Fresh flowers in a basket—
An offering to you—
Though you did not ask it,
Unbidden I strew;
With heat and drought striving
Some blossoms still living
May render thanksgiving
For dawn and for dew.

The garlands I gather,
The rhymes I string fast,
Are hurriedly rather
Than heedlessly cast.
Yon tree's shady awning
Is short'ning and warning,
Far spent is the morning,
And I must ride fast.

Songs empty, yet airy,
I've striven to write;
For failure, dear Mary,
Forgive me—Good-night!
Songs and flowers may beset you,
I can only regret you,
While the soil where I met you
Recedes from my sight.

Gordon's Australian Poems

For the sake of past hours,
For the love of old times,
Take "A Basket of Flowers"
And a bundle of rhymes,
Though all the bloom perish
E'er *your* hand can cherish,
While churlish and bearish
The verse-jingle chimes.

And eastward by nor'ward
Looms sadly *my* track;
And I must ride forward,
And still I look back.
Look back—Ah, how vainly!
For, while I see plainly,
My hands on the reins lie
Uncertain and slack.

The warm wind breathes strong breath,
The dust dims mine eye,
And I draw one long breath
And stifle one sigh.
Green slopes softly shaded
Have flitted and faded.
My dreams flit as they did.
Good-night!—and—Good-bye!

DUSK

Last rose! end my story!
Dead core and dry husk—
Departed thy glory
And tainted thy musk.

Night spreads her dark limbs on
The face of the dim sun;
So flame fades to crimson,
And crimson to dusk.

Finis Exoptatus

FINIS EXOPTATUS

(The End Desired)

[This was the last, as "By Wood and Wold" was the first, of the series of eight poems entitled *Ye Wearie Wayfarer*. It appeared on Nov. 24th, '66, in *Bell's Life in Victoria*, and was certainly a strange production for a sporting newspaper. Gordon puts the questions, What is the meaning of life? Whither does it tend? and, in answering them, gives an insight into his philosophy at its noblest. The poem contains some felicitous passages and arresting thoughts that have remained in the memory to give pleasure and consolation to many thousands of readers. "They show us Gordon before the fearlessness and sturdiness of youth were broken by repeated injuries to his head and by pecuniary disillusionments." Let us take the last four lines with thankfulness as his valediction.]

Boot and saddle! See the slanting
Rays begin to fall,
Flinging lights and colours flaunting
Through the shadows tall.
Onward, onward, must we travel!
When will come the goal?
Riddle I may not unravel,
Cease to vex my soul.

Harshly break those peals of laughter
From the jays aloft.
Can we guess what they cry after?
We have heard them oft.
Perhaps some strain of rude thanksgiving
Mingles in their song.
Are they glad that they are living?
Are they right or wrong?
Right; 'tis joy that makes them call so,
Why should they be sad?

Gordon's Australian Poems

Certes! we are living also,
Shall not we be glad?
Onward, onward, must we travel!
Is the goal more near?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Why so dark and drear?

Yon small bird his hymn outpouring
On the branch close by
Recks not for the kestrel soaring
In the nether sky,
Though the hawk with wings extended
Poises overhead,
Motionless as though suspended
By a viewless thread.
See! he stoops, nay, shooting forward
With the arrow's flight,
Swift and straight away to nor'ward
Sails he out of sight.
Onward! onward! thus we travel,
Comes the goal more nigh?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Who shall make reply?

* * * * *

Sun and rain and dew from heaven,
Light and shade and air,
Heat and moisture freely given
Thorns and thistles share.
Vegetation rank and rotten
Feels the cheering ray;
Not uncared for, unforgotten,
We, too, have our day.
Unforgotten! though we cumber
Earth, we work His will.

Finis Exoptatus

Shall we sleep through night's long slumber
Unforgotten still?
Onward! onward! toiling ever,
Weary steps and slow,
Doubting oft, despairing never,
To the goal we go!

Hark! the bells on distant cattle
Waft across the range,
Through the golden-tufted wattle,
Music low and strange;
Like the marriage peal of fairies
Comes the tinkling sound,
Or like chimes of sweet St. Mary's
On far English ground.
How my courser champs the snaffle,
And with nostril spread,
Snorts and scarcely seems to ruffle
Fern leaves with his tread;
Cool and pleasant on his haunches
Blows the evening breeze
Through the overhanging branches
Of the wattle-trees.
Onward, to the Southern Ocean
Glides the breath of spring.
Onward, with a dreamy motion,
I, too, glide and sing.
Forward! forward! still we wander—
Tinted hills that lie
In the red horizon yonder—
Is the goal so nigh?

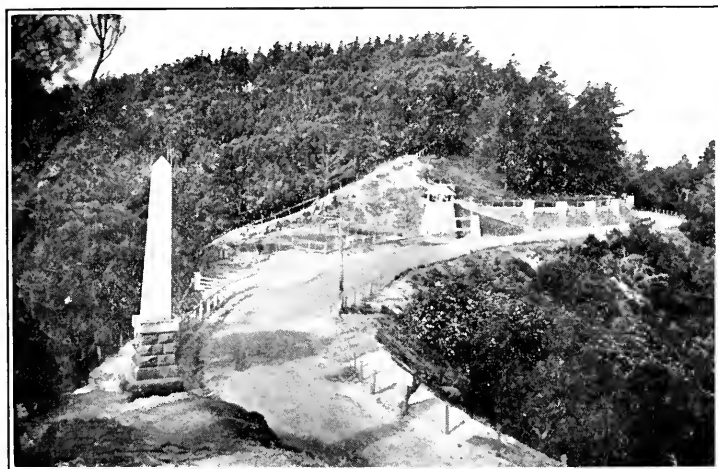
Gordon's Australian Poems

Whisper, spring-wind, sottly singing,
Whisper in my ear;
Respite and nepenthe bringing,
Can the goal be near?
Laden with the dew of vespers
From the fragrant sky,
In my ear the wind that whispers
Seems to make reply—
"Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone—
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own."

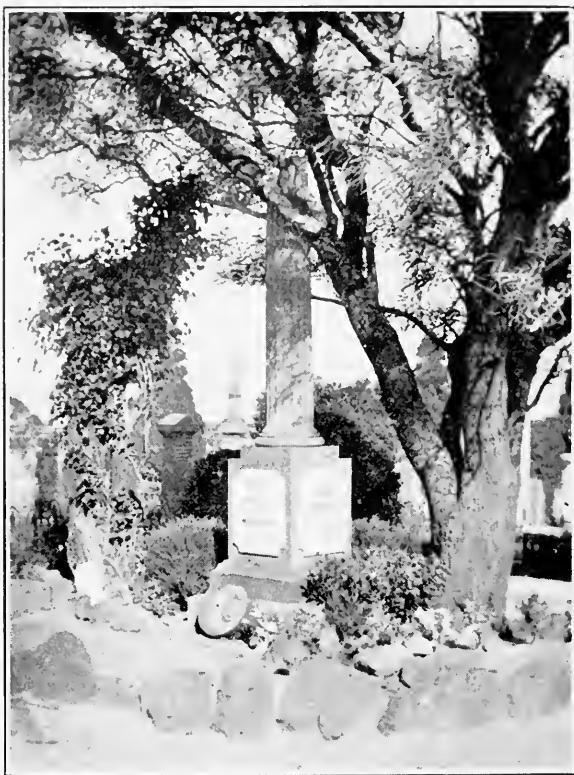
Courage! comrades, this is certain,
All is for the best:
There are lights behind the curtain—
Gentles, let us rest.



*Dingley Dell, near Port McDonnell
(Now a Gordon Museum)*



*Obelisk near "Lindsay Gordon's Leap," Mt. Gambier
(Erected 1887)*



*Monument over Gordon's Grave, Brighton Cemetery
(Erected October, 1870)*

*Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle-blossoms wave,
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my
grave,*

I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

—The Sick Stockrider.



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