

# Miscellaneous Poems

Adam Lindsay Gordon



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# Miscellaneous Poems

**Adam Lindsay Gordon**

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## To My Sister

Lines written by the late A. L. Gordon  
On 4th August, 1853,  
Being three days before he sailed for Australia.

Across the trackless seas I go,  
No matter when or where,  
And few my future lot will know,  
And fewer still will care.  
My hopes are gone, my time is spent,  
I little heed their loss,  
And if I cannot feel content,  
I cannot feel remorse.

My parents bid me cross the flood,  
My kindred frowned at me;  
They say I have belied my blood,  
And stained my pedigree.  
But I must turn from those who chide,  
And laugh at those who frown;  
I cannot quench my stubborn pride,  
Nor keep my spirits down.

I once had talents fit to win  
Success in life's career,  
And if I chose a part of sin,  
My choice has cost me dear.  
But those who brand me with disgrace  
Will scarcely dare to say  
They spoke the taunt before my face,  
And went unscathed away.

My friends will miss a comrade's face,  
And pledge me on the seas,  
Who shared the wine-cup or the chase,  
Or follies worse than these.  
A careless smile, a parting glass,  
A hand that waves adieu,  
And from my sight they soon will pass,  
And from my memory too.

I loved a girl not long ago,  
And, till my suit was told,  
I thought her breast as fair as snow,  
'Twas very near as cold;

## Miscellaneous Poems

And yet I spoke, with feelings more  
Of recklessness than pain,  
Those words I never spoke before,  
Nor never shall again.

Her cheek grew pale, in her dark eye  
I saw the tear-drop shine;  
Her red lips faltered in reply,  
And then were pressed to mine.  
A quick pulsation of the heart!  
A flutter of the breath!  
A smothered sob — and thus we part,  
To meet no more till death.

And yet I may at times recall  
Her memory with a sigh;  
At times for me the tears may fall  
And dim her sparkling eye.  
But absent friends are soon forgot,  
And in a year or less  
'Twill doubtless be another's lot  
Those very lips to press!

With adverse fate we best can cope  
When all we prize has fled;  
And where there's little left to hope,  
There's little left to dread!  
Oh, time glides ever quickly by!  
Destroying all that's dear;  
On earth there's little worth a sigh,  
And nothing worth a tear!

What fears have I? What hopes in life?  
What joys can I command?  
A few short years of toil and strife  
In a strange and distant land!  
When green grass sprouts above this clay  
(And that might be ere long),  
Some friends may read these lines and say,  
The world has judged him wrong.

There is a spot not far away  
Where my young sister sleeps,  
Who seems alive but yesterday,  
So fresh her memory keeps;  
For we have played in childhood there  
Beneath the hawthorn's bough,  
And bent our knee in childish prayer  
I cannot utter now!

Of late so reckless and so wild,

To My Sister

## Miscellaneous Poems

That spot recalls to me  
That I was once a laughing child,  
As innocent as she;  
And there, while August's wild flow'rs wave,  
I wandered all alone,  
Strewed blossoms on her little grave,  
And knelt beside the stone.

I seem to have a load to bear,  
A heavy, choking grief;  
Could I have forced a single tear  
I might have felt relief.  
I think my hot and restless heart  
Has scorched the channels dry,  
From which those sighs of sorrow start  
To moisten cheek and eye.

Sister, farewell! farewell once more  
To every youthful tie!  
Friends! parents! kinsmen! native shore!  
To each and all good-bye!  
And thoughts which for the moment seem  
To bind me with a spell,  
Ambitious hope! love's boyish dream!  
To you a last farewell!



"The Old Leaven"

A Dialogue

Mark:

So, Maurice, you sail to-morrow, you say?  
And you may or may not return?  
Be sociable, man! for once in a way,  
Unless you're too old to learn.  
The shadows are cool by the water side  
Where the willows grow by the pond,  
And the yellow laburnum's drooping pride  
Sheds a golden gleam beyond.  
For the blended tints of the summer flowers,  
For the scents of the summer air,  
For all nature's charms in this world of ours,  
'Tis little or naught you care.  
Yet I know for certain you haven't stirred  
Since noon from your chosen spot;  
And you've hardly spoken a single word —  
Are you tired, or cross, or what?  
You're fretting about those shares you bought,  
They were to have gone up fast;  
But I heard how they fell to nothing — in short,  
They were given away at last.

Maurice:

No, Mark, I'm not so easily cross'd;  
'Tis true that I've had a run  
Of bad luck lately; indeed, I've lost;  
Well! somebody else has won.

Mark:

The glass has fallen, perhaps you fear  
A return of your ancient stitch —  
That souvenir of the Lady's Mere,  
Park palings and double ditch.

Maurice:

You're wrong. I'm not in the least afraid  
Of that. If the truth be told,  
When the stiffness visits my shoulder-blade,  
I think on the days of old;  
It recalls the rush of the freshening wind,  
The strain of the chestnut springing,  
And the rolling thunder of hoofs behind,  
Like the Rataplan chorus ringing.

## Miscellaneous Poems

Mark:

Are you bound to borrow, or loth to lend?  
Have you purchased another screw?  
Or backed a bill for another friend?  
Or had a bad night at loo?

Maurice:

Not one of those, you're all in the dark,  
If you choose you can guess again;  
But you'd better give over guessing, Mark,  
It's only labour in vain.

Mark:

I'll try once more; does it plague you still,  
That trifle of lead you carry?  
A guest that lingers against your will,  
Unwelcome, yet bound to tarry.

Maurice:

Not so! That burden I'm used to bear,  
'Tis seldom it gives me trouble;  
And to earn it as I did then and there,  
I'd carry a dead weight double.  
A shock like that for a splintered rib  
Can a thousand-fold repay —  
As the swallow skims through the spider's web,  
We rode through their ranks that day!

Mark:

Come, Maurice, you sha'n't escape me so!  
I'll hazard another guess:  
That girl that jilted you long ago,  
You're thinking of her, confess!

Maurice:

Tho' the blue lake flush'd with a rosy light,  
Reflected from yonder sky,  
Might conjure a vision of Aphrodite  
To a poet's or painter's eye;  
Tho' the golden drop, with its drooping curl,  
Between the water and wood,  
Hangs down like the tress of a wayward girl  
In her dreamy maidenhood:  
Such boyish fancies seem out of date  
To one half inclined to censure  
Their folly, and yet — your shaft flew straight,  
Though you drew your bow at a venture.  
I saw my lady the other night  
In the crowded opera hall,  
When the boxes sparkled with faces bright,

"The Old Leaven"

## Miscellaneous Poems

I knew her amongst them all.  
Tho' little for these things now I reckon,  
I singled her from the throng  
By the queenly curves of her head and neck,  
By the droop of her eyelash long.  
Oh! passionless, placid, and calm, and cold,  
Does the fire still lurk within  
That lit her magnificent eyes of old,  
And coloured her marble skin?  
For a weary look on the proud face hung,  
While the music clash'd and swell'd,  
And the restless child to the silk skirt clung  
Unnoticed tho' unrepelled.  
They've paled, those rosebud lips that I kist,  
That slim waist has thickened rather,  
And the cub has the sprawling mutton fist,  
And the great splay foot of the father.  
May the blight —

Mark: Hold hard there, Maurice, my son,  
Let her rest, since her spell is broken;  
We can neither recall deeds rashly done,  
Nor retract words hastily spoken.

Maurice:  
Time was when to pleasure her girlish whim,  
In my blind infatuation,  
I've freely endangered life and limb;  
Aye, perilled my soul's salvation.

Mark:  
With the best intentions we all must work  
But little good and much harm;  
Be a Christian for once, not a Pagan Turk,  
Nursing wrath and keeping it warm.

Maurice:  
If our best intentions pave the way  
To a place that is somewhat hot,  
Can our worst intentions lead us, say,  
To a still more sultry spot?

Mark:  
'Tis said that charity makes amends  
For a multitude of transgressions.

Maurice:  
But our perjured loves and our faithless friends  
Are entitled to no concessions.

Mark:

"The Old Leaven"

## Miscellaneous Poems

Old man, these many years side by side  
Our parallel paths have lain;  
Now, in life's long journey, diverging wide,  
They can scarcely unite again;  
And tho', from all that I've seen and heard,  
You're prone to chafe and to fret  
At the least restraint, not one angry word  
Have we two exchanged as yet.  
We've shared our peril, we've shared our sport,  
Our sunshine and gloomy weather,  
Feasted and flirted, and fenced and fought,  
Struggled and toiled together;  
In happier moments lighter of heart,  
Stouter of heart in sorrow;  
We've met and we've parted, and now we part  
For ever, perchance, to-morrow.  
She's a matron now; when you knew her first  
She was but a child, and your hate,  
Fostered and cherished, nourished and nursed,  
Will it never evaporate?  
Your grievance is known to yourself alone,  
But, Maurice, I say, for shame,  
If in ten long years you haven't outgrown  
Ill-will to an ancient flame.

Maurice:

Well, Mark, you're right; if I spoke in spite,  
Let the shame and the blame be mine;  
At the risk of a headache we'll drain this night  
Her health in a flask of wine;  
For a castle in Spain, tho' it never was built;  
For a dream, tho' it never came true;  
For a cup, just tasted, tho' rudely spilt,  
At least she can hold me due.  
Those hours of pleasure she dealt of yore,  
As well as those hours of pain,  
I ween they would flit as they flitted before,  
If I had them over again.  
Against her no word from my lips shall pass,  
Betraying the grudge I've cherished,  
Till the sand runs down in my hour-glass,  
And the gift of my speech has perished.  
Say! why is the spirit of peace so weak,  
And the spirit of wrath so strong,  
That the right we must steadily search and seek,  
Tho' we readily find the wrong?

Mark:

Our parents of old entailed the curse  
Which must to our children cling;  
Let us hope, at least, that we're not much worse

## Miscellaneous Poems

Than the founder from whom we spring.  
Fit sire was he of a selfish race,  
Who first to temptation yielded,  
Then to mend his case tried to heap disgrace  
On the woman he should have shielded.  
Say! comrade mine, the forbidden fruit  
We'd have plucked, that I well believe,  
But I trust we'd rather have suffered mute  
Than have laid the blame upon Eve.

Maurice (yawning):  
Who knows? not I; I can hardly vouch  
For the truth of what little I see;  
And now, if you've any weed in your pouch,  
Just hand it over to me.

## An Exile's Farewell

The ocean heaves around us still  
With long and measured swell,  
The autumn gales our canvas fill,  
Our ship rides smooth and well.  
The broad Atlantic's bed of foam  
Still breaks against our prow;  
I shed no tears at quitting home,  
Nor will I shed them now!

Against the bulwarks on the poop  
I lean, and watch the sun  
Behind the red horizon stoop —  
His race is nearly run.  
Those waves will never quench his light,  
O'er which they seem to close,  
To-morrow he will rise as bright  
As he this morning rose.

How brightly gleams the orb of day  
Across the trackless sea!  
How lightly dance the waves that play  
Like dolphins in our lee!  
The restless waters seem to say,  
In smothered tones to me,  
How many thousand miles away  
My native land must be!

Speak, Ocean! is my Home the same  
Now all is new to me? —  
The tropic sky's resplendent flame,  
The vast expanse of sea?  
Does all around her, yet unchanged,  
The well-known aspect wear?  
Oh! can the leagues that I have ranged  
Have made no difference there?

How vivid Recollection's hand  
Recalls the scene once more!  
I see the same tall poplars stand  
Beside the garden door;  
I see the bird-cage hanging still;  
And where my sister set  
The flowers in the window-sill —  
Can they be living yet?

## Miscellaneous Poems

Let woman's nature cherish grief,  
I rarely heave a sigh  
Before emotion takes relief  
In listless apathy;  
While from my pipe the vapours curl  
Towards the evening sky,  
And 'neath my feet the billows whirl  
In dull monotony!

The sky still wears the crimson streak  
Of Sol's departing ray,  
Some briny drops are on my cheek,  
'Tis but the salt sea spray!  
Then let our barque the ocean roam,  
Our keel the billows plough;  
I shed no tears at quitting home,  
Nor will I shed them now!

**"Early Adieux"**

Adieu to kindred hearts and home,  
To pleasure, joy, and mirth,  
A fitter foot than mine to roam  
Could scarcely tread the earth;  
For they are now so few indeed  
(Not more than three in all),  
Who e'er will think of me or heed  
What fate may me befall.

For I through pleasure's paths have run  
My headlong goal to win,  
Nor pleasure's snares have cared to shun  
When pleasure sweetened sin.  
Let those who will their failings mask,  
To mine I frankly own;  
But for them pardon will I ask  
Of none — save Heaven alone.

From carping friends I turn aside;  
At foes defiance frown;  
Yet time may tame my stubborn pride,  
And break my spirit down.  
Still, if to error I incline,  
Truth whispers comfort strong,  
That never reckless act of mine  
E'er worked a comrade wrong.

My mother is a stately dame,  
Who oft would chide with me;  
She saith my riot bringeth shame,  
And stains my pedigree.  
I'd reck not what my friends might know,  
Or what the world might say,  
Did I but think some tears would flow  
When I am far away.

Perchance my mother will recall  
My mem'ry with a sigh;  
My gentle sister's tears may fall,  
And dim her laughing eye;  
Perhaps a loving thought may gleam,  
And fringe its saddened ray,  
When, like a nightmare's troubled dream,  
I, outcast, pass away.



## Miscellaneous Poems

Then once again farewell to those  
Whoe'er for me have sighed;  
For pleasures melt away like snows,  
And hopes like shadows glide.  
Adieu, my mother! if no more  
Thy son's face thou may'st see,  
At least those many cares are o'er  
So oft-times caused by me.

My lot is fixed! The die is cast!  
For me home hath no joy!  
Oh, pardon then all follies past,  
And bless your wayward boy!  
And thou, from whom for aye to part  
Grieves more than tongue can tell,  
May Heaven preserve thy guileless heart,  
Sweet sister, fare thee well!

Thou, too, whose loving-kindness makes  
My resolution less,  
While from the bitter past it takes  
One half its bitterness,  
If e'er you held my mem'ry dear,  
Grant this request, I pray —  
Give to that mem'ry one bright tear,  
And let it pass away.

## A Hunting Song

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;  
And may he ever pleasantly each gallant sport pursue,  
If he takes his liquor fairly, and his fences fairly, too.

He cares not for the bubbles of Fortune's fickle tide,  
Who like Bendigo can battle, and like Olliver can ride.  
He laughs at those who caution, at those who chide he'll frown,  
As he clears a five-foot paling, or he knocks a peeler down.

The dull, cold world may blame us, boys! but what care we the while,  
If coral lips will cheer us, and bright eyes on us smile?  
For beauty's fond caresses can most tenderly repay  
The weariness and trouble of many an anxious day.

Then fill your glass, and drain it, too, with all your heart and soul,  
To the best of sports — The Fox-hunt, The Fair Ones, and The Bowl,  
To a stout heart in adversity through every ill to steer,  
And when Fortune smiles a score of friends like those around us here.

## To a Proud Beauty

"A Valentine"

Though I have loved you well, I ween,  
And you, too, fancied me,  
Your heart hath too divided been  
A constant heart to be.  
And like the gay and youthful knight,  
Who loved and rode away,  
Your fleeting fancy takes a flight  
With every fleeting day.

So let it be as you propose,  
Tho' hard the struggle be;  
'Tis fitter far — that goodness knows! —  
Since we cannot agree.  
Let's quarrel once for all, my sweet,  
Forget the past — and then  
I'll kiss each pretty girl I meet,  
While you'll flirt with the men.

## Thick-headed Thoughts

No. I

I've something of the bull-dog in my breed,  
The spaniel is developed somewhat less;  
While life is in me I can fight and bleed,  
But never the chastising hand caress.  
You say the stroke was well intended. "True."  
You mention "It was meant to do me good."  
"That may be." "You deserve it." "Granted, too."  
"Then take it kindly." "No — I never could."

\* \* \* \* \*

How many a resolution to amend  
Is made, and broken, as the years run round!  
And how can others on your word depend,  
When faithless to ourselves we're often found?  
I've often swore — "Henceforward I'll reform,  
And bid my vices, follies, all take wing."  
To keep my promise, 'mid temptation's storm,  
I've always found was quite another thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw a donkey going down the road  
The other day; a boy was on his back,  
Who on the long-eared quadruped bestowed,  
With a stout cudgel, many a hearty thwack;  
But lazier and lazier grew the beast,  
Until he dwindled to a step so slow  
That I felt sure 'twould take him, at the least,  
Full half-an-hour one blessed mile to go.

Soliloquising on this state of things,  
"That moke's like me," I muttered, with a sigh;  
"He might go faster if he'd got some wings,  
But Nature's made him better off than I;  
For though I've all his obstinacy — aye! all —  
His sullen spirit, and his dogged ways,  
I've not one particle, however small,  
Of that praiseworthy patience he displays."

## Miscellaneous Poems

### No. II

A man is independent of the world,  
And little recks of strife or angry brawl,  
If 'gainst a host his banner be unfurled,  
Be his heart stout, it matters not at all.  
With woman 'tis not so; for she seems hurled  
From hand to hand, as is a tennis ball.  
How queer that such a difference should be  
Between a human he and human she.

### No. III

'Tis a wicked world we live in;  
Wrong in reason, wrong in rhyme;  
But no matter: we'll not give in  
While we still can come to time.

Strength's a shadow; Hope is madness,  
Love, delusion; Friendship, sham;  
Pleasure fades away to sadness,  
None of these are worth a d——n.

There is naught on earth to please us;  
All things at the crisis fail.  
Friends desert us, bailiffs tease us —  
(To such foes we give leg-bail).

But a stout heart still maintaining,  
Quells the ills we all must meet,  
And a spirit fear disdaining  
Lays our troubles at our feet.

So we'll ne'er surrender tamely  
To the ills that throng us fast.  
If we must die, let's die gamely;  
Luck may take a turn at last.