GORDON, Adam Lindsay (1833-70), poet, son of Capt. Adam Durnford Gordon, an army officer, and his first cousin, Harriet Gordon, was born at Fayal in the Azores on 19th October 1833. He was educated in England at Cheltenham and in Gloucestershire, and in 1848 entered the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich; there he appears to have been good at sports but not studiously inclined and certainly undisciplined, and in 1851 his father withdrew him. He received some further education at Cheltenham and by private tuition, but began to lead a wild and aimless life and to contract debts. His chief talents were for boxing and horse-riding, in which he indulged with considerable recklessness despite severe shortness of sight.

In 1853 he was sent by his anxious father to start a new life in Australia, and he sailed for Adelaide in August of that year; his departure was clouded for him by an unsuccessful romance with a 17-year-old girl, Jane Bridges, with whom he had fallen impetuously in love. He arrived in Adelaide during the following November, and, scorning to use letters of introduction that would have secured him a commission, enlisted in the South Australian Mounted Police as a trooper.

Gordon served in the mounted police at Mount Gambier and Penola until November 1855, when he resigned to become a horse-breaker. Not long afterwards he made the acquaintance of the Rev. Julian Tenison Woods (q.v.), who lent him books and talked poetry with him. He then had the reputation of being "a good steady lad and a splendid horseman", and was beginning to make a name for himself as a rider over hurdles.

His father died in 1857 and his mother in 1859, and at the end of 1861 he received £7000 from his mother's estate. In October 1862 he married Margaret Park, a girl 12 years his junior, and soon afterwards bought a cottage, Dingley Dell, near Cape Northumberland. His first published verse, a ballad entitled "The Feud", appeared anonymously in 1864; only 30 copies were printed, and Gordon himself bore the cost. In March 1865 he was elected to the South Australian House of Assembly. However, he lacked any gift for public speaking, and in November 1866 resigned his seat. He was contributing verse to the *Australasian* and *Bell's Life in Victoria* at this time, and doing a fair amount of riding. He bought some land in Western Australia, but returned from a visit to it in 1867 and went to live at Mount Gambier. In June of that year he published *Ashtaroth, a Dramatic Lyric*, and a week or two later *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*; the former was a complete failure, and the latter sold barely 100 copies.

In November 1867 he rented Craig's livery stables at Ballarat, Vic., where he worked hard; but he had no business sense and the venture was a failure. In March 1868 he sustained a serious accident, his head being dashed by a horse against a gatepost; and in April of the same year his only child, Annie, died at the age of 11 months. These misfortunes precipitated his departure for Melbourne a few months later. However, his life was not without brighter moments; in September 1868, when he was threatened with insolvency, he received from England a few small legacies and the news that his claim to the Esslemont estate, of which he was the nearest male heir, might be valid; and in the following month he created a record by winning three steeplechase races at Flemington in one afternoon, two of them on his own horses. Moreover, he was hailed in Marcus Clarke's newly-founded *Colonial Monthly* as the leading poetical genius of Australia.

In Melbourne, Gordon made a little money out of his racing and became a member of the Yorick Club, where he was friendly with Marcus Clarke, George Gordon McCrae, and Henry Kendall. But in March 1870 he had a bad fall in a steeplechase at Flemington, and suffered an injury to his head from which he never really recovered; and in the following June he learnt that his attempt to secure the reversion of the Esslemont estate was futile and must be abandoned. These mischances induced in him a form of melancholia (the tendency to which he inherited from his mother), and he became sunk in morbid reflections. On 23rd June 1870 his last book, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, was published, and he was warmly congratulated upon it by both Clarke and Kendall; but he had just asked his publishers what he owed them for printing the book, and realized that he had no money to pay the bill. Next morning he shot himself in the scrub near his home at Brighton, a Melbourne suburb.

Gordon's widow afterwards returned to South Australia, married again, and lived until 1919. A statue to Gordon's memory was unveiled near Parliament House, Melbourne, in 1932, and in 1934 his bust was placed in Westminster Abbey; a replica of the bust was unveiled in the National Library, Canberra, in 1950. Memorials also exist at Coleraine and Brighton, Vic., at Cheltenham, England, and at Mount Gambier, S.A.; it was at Mount Gambier that Gordon once jumped a horse over a fence a few feet from the edge of the precipice above the Blue Lake—an act of recklessness that earned him wide notoriety. A cottage that he had in Ballarat is preserved in the Ballarat botanic gardens as a museum.

Gordon's untimely death drew much attention to his work, which for a time tended to be overrated. He was certainly not a poet of the first importance, but his ballads, with their swinging rhythms and the love of open-air life and of horses that they express, have a permanent place in Australian literature. His work is uneven in quality, and is sometimes marred by carelessness and banality; but the best of it is memorable.