

# Poems in a Time of Coronavirus - Issue No. 5



This anthology contains prose and poems chosen by a group of friends from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick on the theme of 'Travel / Faraway Places', read to each other via Zoom on 30 April 2020.

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## **Hope by Anthony Horowitz**

The town of Hope, near Aberdeen  
Is somewhere I have seldom been  
But then it's not a tourist trap –  
It isn't even on the map!

There's certainly not much to see  
They've closed the local library  
Because they said there is no need  
When no-one in the town can read  
They've got a pub and a hotel  
But neither of them's doing well  
The hotel isn't quite the Ritz  
The beds have fleas: the staff have nits  
The only pub, "The Rose and Crown"  
Is easily the worst in town

The one theatre's sadly gone  
It burned down while a play was on  
(The critics thought the play so dire  
That all of them preferred the fire.)  
The cinema is second rate  
The films are always out of date  
The last James Bond film that I saw  
Had Bond still played by Roger Moore.

The pavements are never clean  
Because the council's far too mean  
To pay for cleaners – and the park  
Is only open after dark  
The grass is lumpy, full of weeds  
And dogs can only walk on leads  
There is a children's playground but  
When school is finished, it is shut

**Chosen and read by Simon Surtees**

The Chief of Police is eighty-two  
He can't catch crooks. He can't catch flu!  
The vicar surely won't be missed  
Since he's become an atheist  
The mayor sold his golden chain  
And then was never seen again  
The local paper isn't bought  
Because there's nothing to report.  
The school is like a concrete bunker  
Matron's drunk. The head is drunker.

Now, living here must really stink  
At least, that is what you might think  
But that is simply not the case  
There is no more delightful place  
The fun and laughter never ends  
Everyone is best of friends.  
And all the residents agree  
There's nowhere else they'd rather be.

So if you're feeling uninspired,  
Sleeping badly, waking tired  
If everything is going wrong.  
The day feels dark, the night's too long  
Remember all the people who  
Have found the following is true:

**It's so much easier to cope  
If you decide to live in Hope.**

## ***Cargoes* by John Masefield**

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir  
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,  
With a cargo of ivory,  
And apes and peacocks,  
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,  
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,  
With a cargo of diamonds,  
Emeralds, amethysts,  
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road-rail, pig-lead,  
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

**Chosen and read by Shelagh Allsop**

## ***Wind On The Hill* by A A Milne**

No one can tell me,  
Nobody knows,  
Where the wind comes from,  
Where the wind goes.

It's flying from somewhere  
As fast as it can,  
I couldn't keep up with it,  
Not if I ran.

But if I stopped holding  
The string of my kite,  
It would blow with the wind  
For a day and a night.

And then when I found it,  
Wherever it blew,  
I should know that the wind  
Had been going there too.

So then I could tell them  
Where the wind goes...  
But where the wind comes from  
Nobody knows.

**Chosen and read by Victoria Lynch**

## ***Three Men in a Boat – an excerpt by Jerome K. Jerome***

I said I'd pack.

I rather pride myself on my packing. Packing is one of those many things that I feel I know more about than any other person living. (It surprises me myself, sometimes, how many of these subjects there are.) I impressed the fact upon George and Harris, and told them that they had better leave the whole matter entirely to me. They fell into the suggestion with a readiness that had something uncanny about it. George put on a pipe and spread himself over the easy-chair, and Harris cocked his legs on the table and lit a cigar.

This was hardly what I intended. What I had meant, of course, was, that I should boss the job, and that Harris and George should potter about under my directions, I pushing them aside every now and then with, "Oh, you—!" "Here, let me do it." "There you are, simple enough!"—really teaching them, as you might say. Their taking it in the way they did irritated me. There is nothing does irritate me more than seeing other people sitting about doing nothing when I'm working.

I lived with a man once who used to make me mad that way. He would loll on the sofa and watch me doing things by the hour together, following me round the room with his eyes, wherever I went. He said it did him real good to look on at me, messing about. He said it made him feel that life was not an idle dream to be gaped and yawned through, but a noble task, full of duty and stern work. He said he often wondered now how he could have gone on before he met me, never having anybody to look at while they worked.

Now, I'm not like that. I can't sit still and see another man slaving and working. I want to get up and superintend, and walk round with my hands in my pockets, and tell him what to do. It is my energetic nature. I can't help it.

However, I did not say anything, but started the packing. It seemed a longer job than I had thought it was going to be; but I got the bag finished at last, and I sat on it and strapped it.

"Ain't you going to put the boots in?" said Harris.

And I looked round, and found I had forgotten them. That's just like Harris. He couldn't have said a word until I'd got the bag shut and strapped, of course. And George laughed - one of those irritating, senseless, chuckle-headed, crack-jawed laughs of his. They do make me so wild.

I opened the bag and packed the boots in; and then, just as I was going to close it, a horrible idea occurred to me. Had I packed my tooth-brush? I don't know how it is, but I never do know whether I've packed my tooth-brush.

My tooth-brush is a thing that haunts me when I'm travelling, and makes my life a misery. I dream that I haven't packed it, and wake up in a cold perspiration, and get out of bed and hunt for it. And, in the morning, I pack it before I have used it, and have to unpack again to get it, and it is always the last thing I turn out of the bag; and then I repack and forget it, and

have to rush upstairs for it at the last moment and carry it to the railway station, wrapped up in my pocket-handkerchief.

Of course I had to turn every mortal thing out now, and, of course, I could not find it. I rummaged the things up into much the same state that they must have been before the world was created, and when chaos reigned. Of course, I found George's and Harris's eighteen times over, but I couldn't find my own. I put the things back one by one, and held everything up and shook it. Then I found it inside a boot. I repacked once more.

When I had finished, George asked if the soap was in. I said I didn't care a hang whether the soap was in or whether it wasn't; and I slammed the bag to and strapped it, and found that I had packed my tobacco-pouch in it, and had to re-open it. It got shut up finally at 10.5 p.m., and then there remained the hampers to do. Harris said that we should be wanting to start in less than twelve hours' time, and thought that he and George had better do the rest; and I agreed and sat down, and they had a go.

They began in a light-hearted spirit, evidently intending to show me how to do it. I made no comment; I only waited. When George is hanged, Harris will be the worst packer in this world; and I looked at the piles of plates and cups, and kettles, and bottles and jars, and pies, and stoves, and cakes, and tomatoes, &c., and felt that the thing would soon become exciting.

It did. They started with breaking a cup. That was the first thing they did. They did that just to show you what they could do, and to get you interested.

Then Harris packed the strawberry jam on top of a tomato and squashed it, and they had to pick out the tomato with a teaspoon.

And then it was George's turn, and he trod on the butter. I didn't say anything, but I came over and sat on the edge of the table and watched them. It irritated them more than anything I could have said. I felt that. It made them nervous and excited, and they stepped on things, and put things behind them, and then couldn't find them when they wanted them; and they packed the pies at the bottom, and put heavy things on top, and smashed the pies in.

They upset salt over everything, and as for the butter! I never saw two men do more with one-and-twopence worth of butter in my whole life than they did. After George had got it off his slipper, they tried to put it in the kettle. It wouldn't go in, and what was in wouldn't come out. They did scrape it out at last, and put it down on a chair, and Harris sat on it, and it stuck to him, and they went looking for it all over the room.

"I'll take my oath I put it down on that chair," said George, staring at the empty seat.

"I saw you do it myself, not a minute ago," said Harris.

Then they started round the room again looking for it; and then they met again in the centre, and stared at one another.

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," said George.

"So mysterious!" said Harris.

Then George got round at the back of Harris and saw it.

"Why, here it is all the time," he exclaimed, indignantly.

"Where?" cried Harris, spinning round.

"Stand still, can't you!" roared George, flying after him.

And they got it off, and packed it in the teapot.

Montmorency was in it all, of course. Montmorency's ambition in life, is to get in the way and be sworn at. If he can squirm in anywhere where he particularly is not wanted, and be a perfect nuisance, and make people mad, and have things thrown at his head, then he feels his day has not been wasted.

To get somebody to stumble over him, and curse him steadily for an hour, is his highest aim and object; and, when he has succeeded in accomplishing this, his conceit becomes quite unbearable.

He came and sat down on things, just when they were wanted to be packed; and he laboured under the fixed belief that, whenever Harris or George reached out their hand for anything, it was his cold, damp nose that they wanted. He put his leg into the jam, and he worried the teaspoons, and he pretended that the lemons were rats, and got into the hamper and killed three of them before Harris could land him with the frying-pan.

**Chosen and read by Mary Barnard**

### ***On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* by John Keats**

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

**Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop**

### ***A ship of Rio* by Walter de la Mare**

There was a ship of Rio  
Sailed out into the blue,  
And nine and ninety monkeys  
Were all her jovial crew.  
From bo'sun to the cabin boy,  
From quarter to caboose,  
There weren't a stitch of calico  
To breech 'em -- tight or loose;  
From spar to deck, from deck to keel,  
From barnacle to shroud,  
There weren't one pair of reach-me-downs  
To all that jabbering crowd.  
But wasn't it a gladsome sight,  
When roared the deep-sea gales,  
To see them reef her fore and aft,  
A-swinging by their tails!  
Oh, wasn't it a gladsome sight,  
When glassy calm did come,  
To see them squatting tailor-wise  
Around a keg of rum!  
Oh, wasn't it a gladsome sight,  
When in she sailed to land,  
To see them all a-scampering skip  
For nuts across the sand!

**Chosen and read by Nan Owen**

## ***Martin Fierro – Travels of a Gaucho* by José Hernandez**

### *1 – Singer and Gaucho.*

Here I begin to sing  
with the company of guitar,  
like a man who is sleepless  
from an extraordinary pain  
that like a solitary bird  
sings to be consoled.

I ask the saints in Heaven  
to help me with my thoughts;  
I ask them during this moment  
that I will sing my history  
to refresh my memory of me  
and clarify my understanding.

Come Holy miracles,  
come all to my aid,  
the language tongue-ties me  
and clouds my vision;  
I ask that God assists me  
in so crude an occasion.

I have seen many singers,  
who obtained good fame,  
and after they acquired it  
did not want to keep it;  
it seems that without realizing  
they got tired of the games.

Further than any gaucho  
has Martín Fierro gone;  
nothing he does is cowardly  
or is he frightened by ghosts,  
and since they all sing  
I also want to sing.

Singing I will die  
singing they will bury me,  
and singing I will arrive  
at the foot of the Eternal Father:  
because from the belly of my mother  
I came into this world to sing.

Because my speech is not perfect  
and words are hard to find:  
through singing my glory shines  
and by setting myself to sing,  
singing they will find me  
even when the Earth chasms.

I am in the plan of a lowly one  
to sing out in protest:  
like when the wind blows  
it makes the grass ripple;  
with all the cards in a deck of tricks  
my thoughts will play there.

I am not a learned singer,  
and when I start to sing  
I do not know when to stop  
so I age while I am singing:  
the songs are flowing from me  
like a water from a spring.

With a guitar in my hand  
the flies do not bother me,  
nobody is above me,  
and when my chest intones,  
I make the strings moan  
and cry with the chords.

I am the bull of my own herd  
but visit other herds;  
I always thought myself quite good,  
but if they want to test me  
in contest with another,  
they will see who is the better.

Do not place me in the ranks  
when they come cutting throats,  
with the friendly I am friendly  
but with the tough I am tougher,  
and none in any confrontation  
have ever seen me walk trembling.

Continued over...

In dangerous situations, Christ Jesus!  
my courage enlarges,  
and because all the world is a battlefield,  
no one can be astonished:  
that who he who is a real man  
stands with his legs splayed wide.

I am gaucho, and understand  
like my language will explain;  
for me the Earth is small  
and should be much larger,  
but the viper never bites me  
and the sun never scorches me.

I was born as a fish is born  
at the bottom of the sea;  
none can take from me  
what God gave to me;  
what the world gives to me  
to the world I will return.

My glory is to live free  
as the bird in the sky:  
I do not make a nest on this ground  
where to walk is to suffer,  
and no one has to follow me  
when I veer in my direction.

I do not have love  
for those that come to quarrel;  
like those beautiful birds  
that jump from branch to branch,  
I make my bed with grasses,  
and the stars are my blanket.

And know when you listen  
in empathy for my pain,  
that I never fight or kill  
except when it is necessary,  
and when I am so badly treated  
I have to give in return.

And they who make the rules  
that persecute a gaucho,  
who though father and husband  
has been loyal and diligent,  
have created for themselves  
a bandit for the people

**Chosen and read by Carolyn Ashford-Russell**

## ***I like Canadians* by Ernest Hemingway**

I like Canadians.  
They are so unlike Americans.  
They go home at night.  
Their cigarettes don't smell bad.  
Their hats fit.  
They really believe that they won the war.  
They don't believe in Literature.  
They think Art has been exaggerated.  
But they are wonderful on ice skates.  
A few of them are very rich.  
But when they are rich they buy more horses  
Than motor cars.  
Chicago calls Toronto a puritan town.  
But both boxing and horse-racing are illegal  
In Chicago.  
Nobody works on Sunday.  
Nobody.  
That doesn't make me mad.  
If you kill somebody with a motor car in Ontario  
You are liable to go to jail.  
So it isn't done.  
There have been over 500 people killed by motor cars  
In Chicago  
So far this year.  
It is hard to get rich in Canada.  
But it is easy to make money.  
There are too many tea rooms.  
But, then, there are no cabarets.  
If you tip a waiter a quarter  
He says "Thank you."  
Instead of calling the bouncer.  
They let women stand up in the street cars.  
Even if they are good-looking.  
They are all in a hurry to get home to supper  
And their radio sets.  
They are a fine people.  
I like them.

**Chosen and read by Peter Capell**

## ***The Rolling English Road* by G K Chesterton**

Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode,  
The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road.  
A reeling road, a rolling road, that rambles round the shire,  
And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire;  
A merry road, a mazy road, and such as we did tread  
The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.

I knew no harm of Bonaparte and plenty of the Squire,  
And for to fight the Frenchman I did not much desire;  
But I did bash their baggonets because they came arrayed  
To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made,  
Where you and I went down the lane with ale-mugs in our hands,  
The night we went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin Sands.

His sins they were forgiven him; or why do flowers run  
Behind him; and the hedges all strengthening in the sun?  
The wild thing went from left to right and knew not which was which,  
But the wild rose was above him when they found him in the ditch.  
God pardon us, nor harden us; we did not see so clear  
The night we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton Pier.

My friends, we will not go again or ape an ancient rage,  
Or stretch the folly of our youth to be the shame of age,  
But walk with clearer eyes and ears this path that wandereth,  
And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death;  
For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen,  
Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.

**Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer**

## ***Travel* by Robert Louis Stevenson**

I should like to rise and go  
Where the golden apples grow;—  
Where below another sky  
Parrot islands anchored lie,  
And, watched by cockatoos and goats,  
Lonely Crusoes building boats;—  
Where in sunshine reaching out  
Eastern cities, miles about,  
Are with mosque and minaret  
Among sandy gardens set,  
And the rich goods from near and far  
Hang for sale in the bazaar,—  
Where the Great Wall round China goes,  
And on one side the desert blows,  
And with bell and voice and drum  
Cities on the other hum;—  
Where are forests, hot as fire,  
Wide as England, tall as a spire,  
Full of apes and cocoa-nuts  
And the negro hunters' huts;—  
Where the knotty crocodile  
Lies and blinks in the Nile,  
And the red flamingo flies  
Hunting fish before his eyes;—

Where in jungles, near and far,  
Man-devouring tigers are,  
Lying close and giving ear  
Lest the hunt be drawing near,  
Or a comer-by be seen  
Swinging in a palanquin;—  
Where among the desert sands  
Some deserted city stands,  
All its children, sweep and prince,  
Grown to manhood ages since,  
Not a foot in street or house,  
Not a stir of child or mouse,  
And when kindly falls the night,  
In all the town no spark of light.  
There I'll come when I'm a man  
With a camel caravan;  
Light a fire in the gloom  
Of some dusty dining-room;  
See the pictures on the walls,  
Heroes, fights and festivals;  
And in a corner find the toys  
Of the old Egyptian boys.

**Chosen and read by Katharine Makower**

## ***Romance* by W J Turner**

When I was but thirteen or so  
I went into a golden land,  
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi  
Took me by the hand.

My father died, my brother too,  
They passed like fleeting dreams,  
I stood where Popocatapetl  
In the sunlight gleams.

I dimly heard the master's voice  
And boys far-off at play,  
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi  
Had stolen me away.

I walked in a great golden dream  
To and fro from school--  
Shining Popocatapetl  
The dusty streets did rule.

**Chosen and read by Sheila White**

## ***Adlestrop* by Edward Thomas**

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—  
The name, because one afternoon  
Of heat the express-train drew up there  
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.  
No one left and no one came  
On the bare platform. What I saw  
Was Adlestrop—only the name

**Chosen and read by Sam Hearn**

I walked home with a gold dark boy,  
And never a word I'd say,  
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi  
Had taken my speech away:

I gazed entranced upon his face  
Fairer than any flower--  
O shining Popocatapetl  
It was thy magic hour:

The houses, people, traffic seemed  
Thin fading dreams by day,  
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi  
They had stolen my soul away!

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,  
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,  
No whit less still and lonely fair  
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang  
Close by, and round him, mistier,  
Farther and farther, all the birds  
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

***Home-Thoughts, from Abroad* by Robert Browning**

Oh, to be in England  
Now that April's there,  
And whoever wakes in England  
Sees, some morning, unaware,  
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf  
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,  
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough  
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,  
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!  
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge  
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover  
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—  
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture!  
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,  
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew  
The buttercups, the little children's dower  
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

**Chosen and read by Sue Hearn**