

CRUISING to a NEW NORMAL

(A reflection in the middle of a pandemic on the historic impact on the poor and the role of ships)

“My ship has come in!” – a triumphant phrase
doesn’t always describe what it seems.
Sea craft have brought wealth through the ages for some,
while nature’s planned other sad schemes.

The first century launched a great age of ships,
when two million vessels plied trade.
Olive oil by the ton crossed the azure seas
and for Romans great profits were made.

The boats bringing goods had a stowaway hidden,
with ebola and smallpox aboard.
Plebeians and emperors died in the wake ¹
of disembarked germs when they moored.

As centuries passed, more plagues came and went
and trade routes now covered more miles.
The thirteen and sixteen hundreds would bring
fresh threats from ports then defiled.

From barques bringing spices and exotic delights
and some sadly with holds full of slaves;
The black death appears (or bubonic plague)
to crush civilizations in waves.

Thence 19th and 20th centuries;
ages of high-tech breakthroughs.
Most people were paid much more money,
in comfort with nothing to lose.

Out of sight are the many not lucky
to escape from the realm of the poor.
While the streets of the better attired
seek to add to their comforts with more.

Into this world sails an icon,
a symbol of wealth versus broke.
An icy encounter proves tragic
with the drowning of so many folk.

¹ 1st century plagues killed a million Romans, including 2 emperors

“Titanic” could shine fresh light on the poor
 and a search for a kinder direction.
 But circumstances around at the time
 allowed no time for reflection.

A great war enveloped the nations
 until treaties at Versailles are signed.
 And the troops could set off on their journeys
 back to loved ones for whom they have pined

But their travels are not unaccompanied;
 a new enemy shadows their lives.
 A wrongly named virus is rampant ²
 and favoured are those that survived.

We could rest on our laurels by 2019
 passe are the plagues and the wars.
 But a basilisk lands unannounced ³
 to breathe death on our unready shores.

Cruise liners abound and they circle the globe,
 with passengers crammed into cabins.
 No one could have known or even predict,
 the part tourists would play in what happens.

A viral disaster called Covid19
 puts globalisation on pause.
 And as staggering death tolls attack humankind,
 many hunt for a clear latent cause.

Social gatherings, incomes, leisure and sport,
 and things that are loved, are just banished.
 All want more rides on the merry-go-round
 but traditional lifestyles have vanished.

When new normal arrives, as hope says it must,
 we’ll look at our planet, more wary.
 And when new ships appear on the seaway of life
 let’s vet any cargo that’s scary.

Graeme Payne (2020)

² The Spanish flu did not come from Spain

³ A basilisk is a mythical lizard that kills anyone it breathes on