

# A Climate Carol



*A fable for Christmas*

## Cover

### *Massacre of the innocents*

Pieter Brueghal (painted c1566)

¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceeding angry, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

¶ Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

*Matthew 2:16–18*

# A Climate Carol

## A fable for Christmas

The Great Guardian Environment Correspondent sat in his office late at night on Christmas Eve in 201... He was known as ‘Scrooge’ to his colleagues (behind his back of course) after he had once declared that sending Christmas cards caused sea-levels to rise.

Snow was falling, muffling the traffic in the streets. The building was quiet; only the desk light in his office was on, just enough light to see by. A buzzer sounded.

“There are two gentlemen to see you, Sir.” said the night porter.

“Send them up.”

Some minutes later the men arrived. They introduced themselves as working for a charitable Trust, *Fuel for Africa*.

“We are hoping to get the oil and coal in Africa used for generating electricity, for indigenous industry and transport so that they can have clean water, health care and a better standard of living.”

“Stop there!” said Scrooge. “Are there no wind turbines? Are there no solar panels?”

“Yes there are but they hardly...”,

Scrooge interrupted them,

“Climate Deniers! Bah! Humbug! Get out of my office!”

They retreated hurriedly.

Scrooge sat and meditated. The brazen effrontery of the oil industry to sponsor these stooges, didn’t they know that saving the planet was all that mattered?

The buzzer sounded again. It was the night porter. “I’m going home now, Sir.”

“Make sure you turn every light out and walk home - don’t use the bus; think of your carbon footprint.”

“Yes, Sir.” said the porter despondently.

It was quiet again. Scrooge nibbled an organic oat cake and a piece of cheese for his late supper; he would sleep on his office couch tonight, he thought.

Just as he was settling himself, the air was rent with a piercing shriek that set every hair on his body on end and a shiver down his spine.

His desk light flickered and went out, on and out again, the buzzer sounded and sounded, his computer awoke and started flashing strange pictures, then streams of data flowing up the screen with flashes of ‘error’, ‘error’, ‘error’. Scrooge sat bolt upright. Was he dreaming? Was it the cheese?

The sounds now changed to a terrible clanking and banging which seemed to be coming straight towards his room. The door flew open and there stood a spectre looking horribly like Professor —, that great climate scientist, who had recently died from an untreated hyper-active ego. But what was he dragging? Iron objects, tied together with barbed wire trailed behind the spectral figure. Closer inspection showed they were giant hockey sticks made of metal. The Spectre spoke:

“I was once what you are - I too thought people were a disease on the planet. I too believed the planet must be saved from man-made climate change. I too began to lie. I too gained power, money and prestige. But now I am condemned to drag around for ever these chains I built for myself. At midnight three Spirits will visit you.”

With this the spectre turned and, dragging his chain of hockey sticks with him, disappeared through the WWF wall poster showing polar bears drowning.

His desk light came on again, his computer went off, and slowly Scrooge’s heartbeat began to return to normal.

As he tried to collect his jangling nerves he decided that it was some trick played by those two men - typical of the denial industry to try and frighten him like that.

Listening to Big Ben's chimes, he was composing himself for sleep and was just reaching for the light switch when the light extinguished itself, and the door of the room burst open with a blast of warm air followed by a chilly wind carrying snowflakes. A huge figure stood in the room, curiously disfigured because one side was fat and the other thin, one side dressed for summer, the other in furs for winter.

"Who... What are you?" croaked Scrooge, his mouth dry and speaking for the first time since sending the porter home.

"I am the Spirit of Climate Past."

"Oh, I know all about the past climate, as did Prof. ——." (his heart, however, took an fearful leap at this name).

"Quiet!" said the Spirit, raising his arm, and Scrooge fell back on the couch, breathing hard. "You know nothing of the past."

The Spirit's huge arm then reached out and seemingly plucked Scrooge from the couch. "Come! You shall see for yourself."

The room appeared to shrink away and they were floating above the city of London. But the city was changing before his eyes. Canary Wharf vanished and was replaced by ruined warehouses, then flashes and fire, then warehouses again, this time intact. Steamers, then tall masted ships, flickered in their hundreds along the docks; the Thames froze over and melted rapidly many times; St Paul's vanished and there was another brief flash of fire, then their journey seemed to halt.

It was bitterly cold, the snow lashed his face. The Thames was frozen over and a few black figures were picking their way across it. Glancing around, the people he saw were weary, pinched; they looked ill-fed; one person, huddled in a ragged cloak, tripped, fell, vomited and then lay motionless. Was this the Plague? thought Scrooge with a shudder.

"Yes." said the Spirit. "After three centuries of cold the ordinary man is weak and malnourished, crops are poor, food is scarce and expensive. This is the Little Ice Age which both Prof. —— and you dismissed as fiction. Come! We must go further back."

The ships got smaller and the docks shrank, bridges familiar to

Scrooge had long vanished leaving only one bridge crowded with houses, then the Thames flowed free of ice through a diminished London of mostly wooden houses with just a few landmarks, such as Westminster Abbey, smaller and starker in outline.

The dizziness stopped and he found himself standing on a hill overlooking the Thames with London nestling mostly on its northern bank. The breeze was balmy and he immediately regretted that he was still wearing his longjohns. It was warm. He looked about him. What he took for peasants were going about their daily business; there was a cart trundling down the road towards London laden with barrels. Salted fish? thought Scrooge; it was clearly a medieval scene. Just then the cart hit a rut and a barrel bounced off and, crashing to the ground, burst open; the peasants cursed. Its contents spilled red along the ground - wine! Going *to* London? thought Scrooge in great surprise. "Yes, from Yorkshire." said the Spirit, answering his thoughts. To Scrooge's left was a building site - it looked like the beginnings of a church or perhaps an abbey with a merry gang of masons and builders at work. He was surprised to see how well fed most people looked.

"Come, there is more to see in the past." said the Spirit. Once again the sense of dizziness began, as they spun back in time. The warm verdant landscape flickered more and more between green and white and then the white appeared less frequently and faded: just green and brown. They stopped and again Scrooge beheld the valley of the Thames. A yet smaller London, laid out in a more geometric pattern lay before him. The road beside which they stood was paved and with a surprising amount of traffic: carts and people, even some soldiers - whose appearance immediately told him that this was Roman Britain. Scrooge was now really regretting his longjohns as it was warmer than their previous stop. Scrooge noticed one of the carts was carrying amphora with the letter V on them. "Five what?" he thought. "No, *VNUM*, wine" said the Spirit, "from the south lands of the Picts beyond the Wall."

"We must go yet further back." said the Spirit. Onward they went with the uncomfortable sense of dizziness assailing Scrooge.

Green and brown, green and brown, as the years slipped back, seldom broken by more than an occasional touch of white, then almost suddenly the green and brown changed to green and white then brown and white and then white and, even at the speed they were travelling, Scrooge became glad of his longjohns. There was one more brief flicker of green before the white seemed permanent. And he felt himself being pushed upwards by the very ground beneath his feet: but it wasn't ground, it was ice and snow.

The Spirit spoke again, "When it is warm, people are happier and wealthier - they eat better and have time and energy for great projects; churches, abbeys and cathedrals. Yet you, Scrooge, make your money by telling people to fear warmth and you urge them to try and stop it. Look around you now. What do you see?"

"Ice and snow as far as the horizon." said Scrooge.

"Do you see any people?"

"No." said Scrooge.

"Think on what you have seen, and learn." said the Spirit.

Then there was a starburst in his head and sound like a hurdy-gurdy and he found himself lying on his couch - soaked to his knees. Big Ben was striking the hour. He started to count the bongs, if only to calm himself; one, two, three, four. Suddenly the door swung open and a second spectre stepped into the room. Scrooge's heart leapt into his mouth, "What now?"

"I have come!" said a voice with an antipodean flavour to it, Scrooge trembled as somehow the voice was familiar and it unnerved him.

"Who are you?"

"I am the Spirit of Climate Present."

They appeared to be in a board room belonging to some multinational. A couple of men in smart suits were talking. One clearly the boss, one equally clearly a young pink junior.

“Listen and learn.” said the Spirit.

Scrooge concentrated.

“Well, how’s the campaign going?” said the boss.

“Pretty well boss, but..”, said the pink young man.

“But what?” snapped the boss.

“Well, some ordinary people don’t seem to be buying it.”

“What do you expect? They don’t know anything.”

“But the deniers seem to be getting their message over, at least to the ordinary people. And, er, some of them do seem to know some real science.”

“Hey! Look! Forget them, they’re history, they’re dinosaurs; we’ve got the politicians by the short hairs; we’ve got the media, the UN, the EU, the BBC and even the mainstream churches in our pocket - except for a few crazy journalists whom we call deniers anyway - along with any scientists who claim there’s no problem with the climate. We’ve said they’re in the pay of the big oil companies, and old Scrooge and the others in the chattering classes believe it.”

“But boss, we *are* big oil aren’t we? I mean we sell oil and gas.”

“Hey kid, you’d better wise up here! Get this. Yeah, of course we’re big oil; we drill the stuff, pump the stuff, refine the stuff and sell the stuff. But there’s a problem, and has been for a fair while. There’s too much of it. And what happens when there’s too much product?”

“More people can have it?” said the pink guy hopefully, getting even pinker.

“No!” yelled the boss, “A thousand times, No! What happens is that it gets cheaper, you idiot; and if it gets cheaper, we make less profit, and that’s bad for business, my business, that is.”

“But...”

“Do try and keep up!”

The pink guy wilted.

“Why do you think we logged onto this ‘climate’ scare in the first place?”



“Because it was true?” hazarded the pink guy.

“Of course not! What do you take me for? I learned real science when I was younger, when it was still being taught, and it can’t possibly be true unless the laws of physics can change overnight. No, because of profits. Why do you think diamonds are valuable?”

The pink guy looked puzzled for a moment and then said,

“Because they’re rare?”

“No, they’re not particularly rare, but de Beers know that by restricting supply you can demand a very high price. Hence their mines are carefully controlled with very high security. It works a treat and diamond merchants are very rich men.”

“But oil isn’t like diamonds.”

“Why not? It can be made to be. People must have it (which is more than can be said for diamonds) and we can restrict it - well, we can *now*. Before the climate change scare public pressure would probably have broken any attempt at a cartel, but now we have grabbed the moral high ground - thanks to Mrs Thatcher. By restricting supply and increasing the price we are ‘saving the planet’ - and getting very rich to boot!”

“But is that being honest, I mean if it isn’t actually true?” said the pink person.

“Who cares about truth? Why, even the climate scientists, who push *our* line on *our* grants (sure - we pay the tax and tell the government to give grants to these guys), don’t bother about honest science. No, they cherry pick their data, fiddle their computer models and call it ‘post normal science’ and the Scrooges of this world fall at their feet and worship!”

“But aren’t they good scientists? Surely they wouldn’t behave like that?”

“Ha! Look, these guys were always mediocre scientists scratching around for research grants to pay their mortgages and feed their families. Some third rate universities saw a market niche with climate in the 1980s and essentially cornered the research by giving their political masters the kind of answers they wanted; this brought more funding as alarm was spread among the population who

expected their politicians to ‘save’ them.”

“You know when ‘Global Warming’ become an issue?” went on the boss.

“No. It must have been before I was born.”

“Around 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell and the ‘Red menace’ evaporated. Leaders always need hobgoblins to frighten the populace. The Reds were gone, so Climate Change was seized on.”

“But what about places like Africa? Don’t they need cheap energy?”

“I am sure they do, but let me tell you a secret. World leaders don’t want Africa to develop.”

“What? Why not?”

“A number of reasons. Firstly, look at China and India; their economies are burgeoning and they already pose a huge threat to the wealth of the West in particular. They now make most of the things we want but we have very little that they want. For Mike’s sake, pretty well all America’s credit is Chinese money - they *own* America! If another continent got its act together the threat would seriously intensify. Now the West could do little about China and India - they are too big, but Africa is divided and can be more easily suppressed.

“Secondly a surprising number of greens and leaders of opinion want the population of the planet greatly reduced.”

“But aren’t there too many people?”

“Oh yes, that’s been the message for some years now: we put out the ‘five planets’ myth which has been very successful. But the truth is that the planet can support the current population and more - if countries are allowed to develop. Development tends to naturally reduce population growth in the long term anyway. Look at Europe: its population is falling. Look at the USA: its has become static. But many think it might be quicker to see large areas depopulated through war, disease and famine. So NGOs and governments give ‘aid’ to Africa, but ensure that the aid cripples their ability to self determination and development; banning DDT and frustrating their use of fossil fuels has most certainly helped.”

As he listened, for the first time Scrooge felt a qualm. Did the

people he supported in his articles really think like this? Worse, did he think like this himself? He had to admit that sometimes he did, but surely not in those cynical terms? With this thought he tried to reassure himself.

“Time is short.” said the Spirit.

Once more a starburst in his head and he found himself on his couch. “Bong!” sounded Big Ben.

He caught his breath just in time, for the door flew open yet again. The third spectre swept into the room.

**T**all, grey, hooded and cloaked, the Spirit looked strangely dignified yet somehow indistinct. A shiver went through Scrooge. He was not having a good night.

Tremulously, after a terrifying silence, Scrooge said,

“Are you the Spirit of Climate yet to Come? Am I to see what will be? Will I see if all those predictions we made of tipping points and runaway warming come to pass? Will the planet be unbearably hot?”

There seemed to be no answer. But a shiver ran through Scrooge as once more he was airborne with this new and frightening Spirit.

In a kind of shock he realised he was looking down on a new London. It seemed dim, few lights glowed in or above the blizzard-swept streets. Huddled figures shuffled through the snow.

Then they were plunging towards a garret; they were inside watching a old lady preparing, it seemed, for bed. The contents of the room were meagre and shoddy. A tin of cocoa and a quarter-full bottle of milk stood on a table near the woman’s chair. The woman was wizen and aged beyond her years, with watery eyes, a rattling chest in which every breath seemed a effort. She was wrapped up in sweaters and a rug, which was hanging about her with a sort of carelessness that betrayed her frailty.

The woman was struggling to rise from her chair. After several

attempts she stood up and, with a pitiful shuffle and a shaking hand, took a mug to a tap and filled it with water. Returning laboriously to the table she added a teaspoon of cocoa and a dribble of milk, as if eking it out, and slowly stirred it. Collapsing into her chair once more she set about trying to arrange the rug around herself. So difficult did she find this that Scrooge felt compelled, out of sheer pity, to try and assist her - but found he was paralysed and unable to help: he had to watch the excruciating slowness of these arrangements until at last they were done and shakily she reached for her cocoa, gasping for each breath and cupping the mug in her mittened hands as if for its warmth. But Scrooge knew it was stone cold.

Then it seemed as if the woman began to speak, her watery eyes seemed fixed on his, her voice, though weak, clear as crystal in Scrooge's head.

"I was still a teacher when they passed the first Climate Bill. We taught our children how bad the grown-ups had been in using coal and oil and how that must be stopped or all the fluffy animals would drown. Too many believed us. Carbon rationing was introduced. Gangs of youths we had taught prowled the streets, smashing windows of shops or of residents who were known 'carbon abusers' - often beating them up.

"Then came the round-ups of the deniers, mostly dissident scientists at first then anyone who expressed doubts. Children would tip the police off if their parents expressed doubts, an idea first sponsored in schools by N-Power. The prisons overflowed, so they had to build the camps to put them in. In some countries they began executing persistent deniers. Many died anyway in the camps as they lost their carbon rations, but the leaders didn't mind - they said they had committed crimes against humanity.

"What fuel there was became very expensive, only the rich could afford it. Electricity doubled in price every year as one by one the coal, gas and oil-fired power stations were closed down. The government said that wind turbines would easily fill the gap. They were wrong.

"Alas! The wind turbine catastrophe. 'Green jobs for British

people' said the government. But there were none. The turbine companies discovered that it was far cheaper to have them built in China and shipped to Britain and even installed by Chinese labour. The Chinese had more or less cornered the market in the rare metals needed for magnets and bearings so there was little choice anyway. The weather deteriorated, winters got progressively colder. The turbines constantly broke down, parts were slow in arriving, and they were breaking down faster than new turbines could be installed or the old ones repaired. As the winters got colder, the turbines failed to work at all: they iced up, the blades broke and before long, on land and sea, there were forests of useless towers, like a scene of shattered trees from a World War One battlefield."

Scrooge seemed to hear the echo of his own voice saying, "Are there no wind turbines? Are there no solar panels?"

The woman continued, "Then China refused Britain any more credit and stopped supplying altogether. Britain's industry had long since evaporated, its infrastructure - drains, trains, water and hospitals, operated, when they operated at all, like in a Third World country.

"Long power cuts became the norm. A new campaign was introduced. It was called 10:10 - ten hours on; ten hours off - if, that is, you could afford it.

"The banning of the airfreighting of food from Africa (or anywhere) and the compulsory introduction of organic farming caused the price of food in Britain to sky-rocket. Farmers had little fuel and were forced back to using horses. Crops failed with increasing frequency as the growing season shortened. Once again the poor were the victims. If they didn't perish from cold, they starved to death.

"It has been getting colder now for thirty years. Still they told us that the bad weather was caused by Man-made Global Warming and yet more carbon cuts were required. Anyone who started having more than one child was forced to have an abortion - to save the carbon footprint - they said. Reports came from Africa that the closure of the farms with the collapse of the export market had been killing them in the hundreds of thousands, anarchy reigned unchecked. But nobody

seemed to care anymore.

“Why had no one prepared us for the cold? Why have so many died before their time?”

Her eyes flashed at Scrooge.

“Because we believed the Climate alarmists; and soon after there was no one else left to challenge them. They had either been imprisoned or were dead.”

The old lady’s eyes seemed to bore into Scrooge. But suddenly her mug slipped from her hands and crashed to the floor, she gave a croaking gasp and light faded from her eyes.

A terrible sob which had been building in Scrooge burst out of him. He wept uncontrollably.

After what seemed an age, he turned to the Spirit of Climate yet to Come, and haltingly said, “O Spirit, who does not speak! Must these things be? Can’t it be stopped?”

The Spirit gave no reply.

But with a flourish of the Spirit’s cloak Scrooge found himself back on his couch. He was shivering, not just from cold but also from the horror and pity of what he just had witnessed.

On the floor by his couch lay an open book which Scrooge did not at first recognise. Closer examination showed it to be an old Bible. He must have had one in his shelves, but he’d never looked at it before tonight. He read the first lines on the open page:

*“And Zacchaeus stood, and said to the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”*

*And Jesus said to him, “This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

Gripped with a strange conviction, Scrooge leapt from the couch. “I can do something!” he said out loud. “Surely the Spirit showed me what might be, not what would be? It can be stopped. It must be stopped. I must get to work.”

He went to his desk, grabbed a pencil and started to make notes:

1. Find out who those men were and see what can be done for their work.
2. My article for the day after Boxing Day? - with editor! - Cancel!
3. Write new article and send to editor - tell him it'll be a headline grabber!

He turned on his computer, opened a page and began to type:

*I have an astonishing story to tell.*

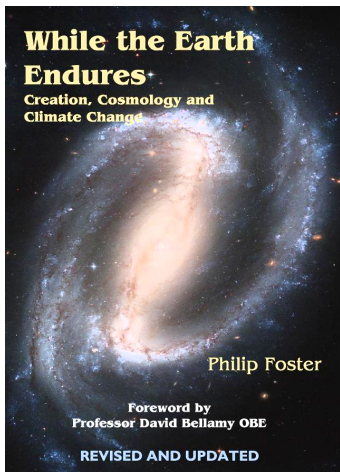
*It was Christmas Eve...*

With apologies to Charles Dickens,  
who must be getting used to this sort of thing by now!

## NOTE

*This story is a fable. But every statement about the climate issue, political or scientific is based on facts. Either the facts of climate and paleoclimate or 'facts' in the sense of public statements, in print or in public speeches, made by politicians, opinion formers, such as the IPCC and others in the public eye. Many of these people seem to live in a curious world where such outrageous statements and views are considered perfectly normal. Most of these people would be faintly surprised if their statements were challenged as being morally repugnant.*

Philip Foster  
author *While the Earth Endures: Creation, Cosmology and Climate Change*



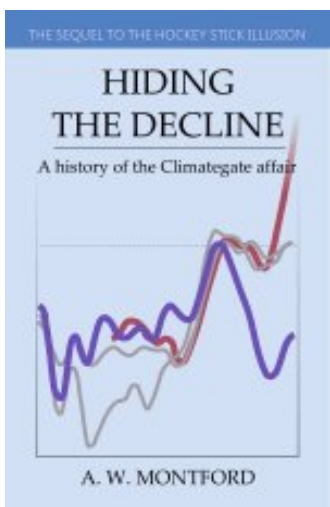
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