

Turned Out Nice – How the British Isles will Change as the World Heats up by Marek Kohn.

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Facing Catastrophe – Environmental Action for a Post-Katrina World

by Robert R. M. Verchick.

Harvard University Press 2010.

Turned Out Nice is the first book about global warming and the effects of climate change that I have read for a long time which has not left me wanting to slit my wrists! In the course of nine superbly written, highly readable and impeccably researched chapters, Kohn sets out how predicted (or higher) levels of global warming will affect the British Isles, and although there are some significant downsides, including loss of land mass due to rising water levels and the potential for the return of malarial mosquitoes to the South of England, there are plenty of positives too, including exciting potential changes in the ways we heat our buildings and additions to our indigenous wildlife . Indeed from Kohn's projections it seems that these islands of ours will be among the most congenial to inhabit in a changed world. That does not mean for a second to suggest that he takes a 'we're alright jack' attitude, far from it; the chapter on the likely changes to the Cuckmere estuary, where I enjoyed many happy walks as a child, provoke both sadness and concern, and the fact that major parts of the world will be going to hell and their populations fighting to find somewhere agreeable to live, like the British Isles, does not mean we can sleep easy in our beds. Nevertheless Turned Out Nice is a valuable and important contribution to the burgeoning bibliography on climate change and deserves to be widely read.

Facing Catastrophe is concerned with similar overall themes but has a unique and specific focus, New Orleans, the impact upon the city of Hurricane Katrina, and the steps that need to be taken in the future to protect the city, and other parts of the States, from similar cataclysmic natural events. As well as being a native of New Orleans, Robert Verchick is Professor of Environmental Law at Loyola University in New Orleans, and brings both personal knowledge, and feeling, as well as scholarly rigour, to the subject.

Verchick writes with passion about Katrina and its aftermath, and also with an almost desperate urgency about the steps that need to be taken, both locally and by the federal government, to provide suitable protection from future calamities.

The aggressive, and well-funded antipathy towards the concepts of global warming and climate change held by the obdurate and ignorant in the US no doubt are responsible for his very sparse use of either term in the book, but his abiding message, summarised by the mantra – Go Green, Be Fair, Keep Safe, is one which can be applied nationally and internationally, and which only the most myopic or arrogant could dismiss.