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Water: The Nature, Uses, and Future of Our Most Precious and Abused Resource, Fred Powledge

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WATER: THE NATURE, USES, AND FUTURE OF OUR MOST PRECIOUS AND ABUSED RESOURCE

FRED POWLEDGE

New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 1982. Pp. 423. \$14.95.

This is a book for the general reader, for the most part recounting those events and describing those projects that constitute the “horror stories” (author’s phrase) of the last few decades. Water is given animation of its own—“that substance, inarticulate and unhuman though it may be, has a right to exist, unmolested and untainted . . .” (p. 268).

The sinners in this book are the Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Environmental Protection Agency, a pork-barrelling Congress, and countless bureaucrats of government and the corporate world who are bent on “assaulting” or “exploiting” our water resources, motivated by greed or agency self-interest, and justifying their actions by cost-benefit analyses whose credibility the author rejects.

The saints are the private individuals—housewives, environmentalists—who, themselves or in association with like-minded people, have fought the Goliaths to an occasional standstill or awakened to activity what otherwise was a slothful and negligent public office.

The author believes in free-flowing streams and untainted waters. His main suggestion, apart from not building dams and avoiding pollution, is conservation.

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