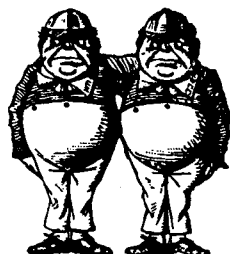


Of Puerile Pedagogy

Richard H. Powers: *The Dilemma of Education in a Democracy*; Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

In a universal referendum, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which predicts the universe's eventual dissolution, would not win approval. But few people are qualified to evaluate the laws of physics. Science cannot proceed on the democratic principle of one man, one vote. The 19th-century promoters of public education argued eloquently that democracy needed educated voters. What they left unsaid was that academic principles must themselves remain beyond the reach of the public will. Richard H. Powers demonstrates that the triumph of democracy over scholarship has made American public education an expensive fiction. The Second Law of Thermodynamics may



not have been put to a vote, but along with all other concepts likely to expose the inherent inequality among students, it has been expunged from the curriculum. Professor Powers offers few original insights in his argument that egalitarianism has destroyed the nation's schools, but his sanity and candor make his analysis worthwhile. His book did deserve an index and more careful proofreading from the publisher—although most recent high school graduates will never notice the errors. □

Introducing 'The Source' on the interaction of religion and society...

THE Religion & Society REPORT

The Religion & Society Report is a brand new newsletter from The Rockford Institute's New York Center on Religion & Society.

Its purpose is bold and frankly controversial: to reaffirm religion's role in shaping the culture of our time — and, through the culture, the ways we live together in public and private.

Introductory offer — you save \$6 to \$16

Each monthly issue will deal vigorously and outspokenly with ideas covering the full spectrum of religious conviction and debate — from left to right, from fundamentalist to liberal — and we invite you to subscribe now at **special introductory rates**.

Our introductory offer: subscribe at \$18 for one year — and save \$6 off the regular \$24 subscription price. Subscribe for two years — 24 issues for \$32, and you'll save \$16.

You'll get on-the-scene, 'inside' information

The **Report** is edited by Richard John Neuhaus, pastor, theologian, author, editor, and one of the most respected figures on the religious scene today. Pastor Neuhaus brings to this newsletter years of leadership in the renewal of religion and society.

Leading off each issue will be a timely analysis, followed by a variety of reports on major issues, events, trends, and personalities in the sphere of religious, ethical, political, and cultural interaction.

You will read on-the-scene (and sometimes behind-the-scenes) accounts of conferences, convocations, and occasional confrontations on the interface of religion and society — giving you the 'inside information' on controversial subjects and developments.

Abortion • The Arms Race • Capital Punishment • Genetic Engineering • Shifting Alliances Between Christians and Jews • Government Threats to Religious Freedom • Euthanasia • Socialist Options • Liberation Theology • Feminism and the Family • South Africa and Disinvestment • The Meanings of Virtue • Nuclear Power and Nuclear War —

these are just a few of the topics you can expect to find in **The Religion & Society Report**.

'Special Reports' bonus for subscribers

As an added bonus, you, as a subscriber will receive 'Special Reports' which will place into perspective the range of ideas and arguments on a specific issue — to assist you in making your own informed judgment.

Now being considered for early issues of the **Report**: *Can the pro-life movement make inroads into the political left? Can the "religious new right" maintain its impact in presidential politics?*

Subscribe to 'the source'

With your help, The Rockford Institute's New York Center on Religion & Society — and **The Religion & Society Report** — can play a pivotal part in a great renewal — a renewal that advances both the integrity of religion and the promise of American democracy. You are invited to subscribe to **The Religion & Society Report** — the inclusive, timely and vigorously independent 'source' on the interaction of religion and society.

Send for your subscription today by mailing us the reader reply card accompanying this advertisement. Or write: **The Religion & Society Report**, P.O. Box 800, Rockford, Illinois 61105.

IN FOCUS

Journey to Nowhere

Lesley Blanch: *Pierre Loti: The Legendary Romantic*;

Helen and Kurt Wolff/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

In the end, nothing is more boring than adventure. Once the newness has worn off, foreign landscapes, forbidden loves, and bizarre rituals prove less stimulating than familiar settings, ordinary people, and well-worn traditions. This is why the greatest writers have consistently been provincialists, in the best sense of the word. Even in the works of the cosmopolitan Henry James, the reader finds the social, geographic, and ethical boundaries of a "province" in which James made his permanent home after moving from America.

Though talented, Julien Marie Viaud—known to his readers as Pierre Loti—never became a great writer precisely because in his restlessly romantic search for adventure he never found a people, place, or faith that he could fully call his own. Bearing an assumed name, attired in high heels and makeup, often in Oriental costume, he refused to accept as a "home" even his natural identity. ("I was not my type," he said.) Leaving his provincial birthplace of Rochefort for the French navy as a young man, he circled the globe pursuing scenic diversion and amorous excitement (with both sexes), while neglecting his wife.

By turning his aimless quests into autobiographical fiction, Loti captured a worldwide audience and favorable critical acclaim. "It was reserved for Pierre Loti," declared Anatole

France, "to make us savour—to the point of intoxication, of delirium, of stupor, even—the bitter flavour of exotic loves." But intoxication eventually passes and sobriety returns; consequently, Loti's works are "largely forgotten" today. Lesley Blanch argues that this is so because "the flavour of travel is lost" in our modern jet age. But perhaps the real reason for the current neglect of Loti's work is not that modern transportation has shrunk the world, but rather that the world view with which Loti sailed about was hopelessly contracted and self-centered in the first place. Despite all of his voyaging, despite all of his crossing of boundaries of every sort, Loti failed to escape from the narrowness of his own narrow egotism. The fabric of his art was rich with imported threads, but it was woven on the tiny loom of the self. As a result all of his



traveling now fails to *move* us to any place that satisfies our hearts or minds. Maybe if he had spent more time in Rochefort with his spouse and countrymen, Loti might have reached some place modern readers would still find worth visiting. (BC) □

Venusberg on the Hudson

Lawrence Foster: *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community*; University of Illinois Press; Urbana and Chicago.

There was definitely something strange going on in the U.S. during the 1830's and 1840's. One after another, eccentric social and religious movements seemed to spring up overnight like exotic mushrooms. Spiritualism, women's rights, abolitionism, and bizarre religious sects swept across the Northeast. New experimental communities were set up: Fourierist phalansteries, the Transcendentalist Brook Farm, the Universalist Hopedale, the gathered communities of Shakers, and—most successfully—the Oneida Community of Perfectionists and the Mormon settlements of Nauvoo, Illinois, and the Utah Territory. Despite the apparent diversity there are certain features common to most of these groups. Most basic was their desire to found a new, perfect society, an earthly paradise, in which the troubled individual would be submerged into the greater community. None of the groups was content with any variety of Christian orthodoxy—even the most conservative were liberal interpreters of the Scriptures. Nearly all of them exercised a rigid control over the sexual life of their members. The Shakers simply suppressed it, while the Mormons and Perfectionists experimented with alternate marriage forms. It is this relationship between religion and sexuality that Lawrence Foster explores.

Why did these movements develop when they did and where they did—in western New York State? Foster rejects a simpleminded economic answer in favor of a social explanation: the expansion of America in the

decades after the Revolution "could not help but place special strains on family life and relations between the sexes." Unfortunately, Foster offers little or no evidence to substantiate his modest thesis. What he does provide is a coherent and readable account of three religious movements with a special emphasis on their sexual innova-



tions. The celibacy of the Shakers, the polygamy of the Mormons, and the complex (we should now say open or swinging) marriages at Oneida were all designed to buttress the social stability and solidify the sense of community. The individual was the enemy. By imposing a new form of corporate life which deemphasized ordinary conjugal ties, these religious communes hoped to eliminate the sexual pressures which they believed were the cause of social disruption.

In practice, it was not quite so simple. John Humphrey Noyes, the founder of the Perfectionists, was a complex case. Like many liberal theologians since, the timid Noyes always managed to find religious sanctions for his philandering. Still, there was more to his theory than hypocrisy. His peculiar system of complex marriage, *coitus reservatus*, and selective breeding was aimed at reducing sexual tensions and rivalries. As far as Noyes was concerned, the only two workable systems were his own and the sexual denial of the Shakers. Ordinary life, because of its imperfections, was not good enough. Even Mormon poly-