

Youth Adoring

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **23 (1955)**

Heft 7

PDF erstellt am: **17.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-570065>

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Youth Adoring

«Ernst Haeckel, that dry German professor who writes as if he had discovered Veligama in Ceylon, thus describes one of its inhabitants:

'It really seemed as though I should be pursued by the familiar aspects of classical antiquity from the first moment of my arrival at my idyllic home. For, as Socrates (the rest-house keeper) led me up the steps into open central hall of the rest-house, I saw before me, with uplifted arms in an attitude of prayer, a beautiful naked, brown figure, which could be nothing else than the famous statue of the «Youth Adoring». How surprised I was when the graceful bronze statue suddenly came to life, and dropping his arms fell on his knees, and after raising his black eyes imploringly to my face bowed his handsome face so low that his long black hair fell on the floor! Socrates informed me that this boy was a Pariah, a member of the lowest caste, the Rodiyas, who had lost his parents at an early age, so he had taken pity on him. He was told off to my exclusive service, had nothing to do the livelong day but to obey my wishes, and was a good boy, sure to do his duty punctually. In answer to the question what I was to call my new body-servant, the old man informed me that his name was Gamameda (from Gama, a village, and Meda-middle). Of course, I immediately thought of Ganymede, for the favourite of Jove himself could not have been more finely made, or have had limbs more beautifully proportioned and moulded . . .

. . . Among the many beautiful figures which move in the foreground of my memories of the paradise of Ceylon, Ganymede remains one of my dearest favourites. Not only did he fulfil his duties with the greatest attention and conscientiousness, but he developed a personal attachment and devotion to me which touched me deeply. The poor boy, as a miserable outcast of the Rodiya caste, had been from his birth the object of the deepest contempt of his fellow-men, and subjected to every sort of brutality and ill-treatment. With the single exception of old Socrates, who was not too gentle with him either, no one perhaps had ever cared for him in any way . . . After this the grateful Ganymede followed me like a shadow, and tried to read my wishes in my eyes. Hardly was I out of bed in the morning when he was standing before me with a freshly-opened cocoa-nut, out of which he poured and offered me a cool morning draught of the milk. At dinner he never took his eyes off me, and always knew beforehand what I should want.

. . . On my return to Teligama I had to face one of the hardest duties I had to fulfil during the whole of my stay in Ceylon: to tear myself away from this lovely spot of earth, where I had spent six of the happiest and most interesting weeks of my life . . . Hardest of all was the parting from my faithful Ganymede; the poor lad wept bitterly, and implored me to take him with me to Europe. In vain had I assured him many times before that it was impossible, and told him of our chill climate and dull skies. He clung to my knees and declared that he would follow me unhesitatingly wherever I might take him. I was at last almost obliged to use force to free myself from his embrace . . .'

From „Good-bye to Western Culture“ Some Footnotes on East and West, by Norman Douglas. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York and London, 1903.