

The Freethinker - Vol 99 No. 1979

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SEXUAL EXPERIENCE BETWEEN MEN AND BOYS by Parker Rossman. Temple Smith, £6.95.

Dr Rossman, an American clergyman, presents his survey of pederasty, which he defines as sexual involvement by a male over eighteen (the pederast) with a younger male between twelve and sixteen. No term of art is suggested for the latter. Some might term him the pederast's victim, but Rossman shows that if anything he is society's victim. The book records the views of many pederasts, and of rather fewer boys. Let us begin with the pederasts.

The most distinguished of them, a Nobel prize winner, is Andre Gide. His first sexual experience with another person occurred in North Africa when he was 23. A boy whose bare knees were enchanting carried Gide's rug to the beach, spread it out, and threw himself upon it with a laugh, raising his arms in clear invitation.

"I sat watching him, wondering what this charming youngster would do next, my heart pounding at the realization that he and I had the same desires. When disappointment clouded his face, and he stood pouting, I seized his hand to tumble him back on to the rug, whereupon he threw off his clothes that were fastened with no more than a string. The touch of his naked body pressed against -me was as exhilarating as the

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.....lovely splendour of the sunlight on the sand."

One suspects it was rather more exhilarating even than that. Gide, who believed that we crush the human spirit by failing to allow each child to follow the call of his own senses, explains that death would find him in a state of ecstasy:

" . . . for the green and blue water of the river at the end of life has been known by me from the beginning; and the boy who waits there to guide me has eyes as blue as a sea of ice, skin like lilies, hair as a cloud coloured by the sun at dawn. He is mysterious, waiting there, sketching his dreams in the sand. Is he the angel I have sought through life's voyage? Or is he the child I was, born of two stars?"

It seems from the evidence of this book that the latter description is likely to be the correct one. The other pederasts cited by Dr Rossman are mostly anonymous. One after another they rhapsodise on the nature of the attraction. "It is the rhythm of bare legs that is so erotic, so irresistible to me." "His skin was blond and downy, and with his snub nose and saucy face at fifteen he looked like a fawn." "His body was over-powering because of what it drew out of me from when I was his age." "I have a good marriage, but these inclinations continue to pop up once in a while, especially when I meet the kind of lovely, well bred younger kid I slept with when I was seventeen. My spine still tingles to remember the magic of that experience." "I confess my idea of heaven is an eternity of soaping off boys in a warm shower." "Girls are like sunshine that warms my days, whereas a boy to

me is like an occasional bolt of lightning-illuminating my sky for a delightful moment and then gone forever."

The pederast sees his addiction as natural. "Why should society blame me or punish me for having a nature and overpowering desire which developed so young?" It is good for the boy. "I think pederasty is a good thing, that such affection can spring up between man and boy to stir affectionate friendship wherein each can find exaltation, protection and challenge." The boy enjoys it. "Do I seduce kids? Never! I have to fight them off." It may save the boy from delinquency induced by sex-starvation. "Kids love sex and become joyous when they are sexually happy. I'm not just rationalising when I say that 90 per cent of the trouble we have with teenagers is the result of sexual frustrations."

The boys see pederasty from a different stand point. For some it is exciting. "The first time I went with a man my spine prickled and my hair nearly stood on end. It was like swinging out from a cliff on a rope and looking down at the rocks in the sea." It is a bargaining counter. "When I was fourteen my eighteen-year-old friend got a car and he wouldn't let me drive it until-well, I guess you could say I was really seduced by the car!" There is titillation in being treated as a love-object by an adult, who in normal situations is dominant. "When I first met Joe, even though I was thirteen and he was twenty six, he treated me like an equal, like an adult. I thought to myself, I'd do anything to have a friend like that." Usually boys begin with their contemporaries. "It seemed wrong to fantasize about girls, who were supposed to be kept pure, so we made up jokes and imagined sex play with boys. Soon we were ready to try things we had joked about. My chum and I decided that there was nothing wrong with masturbation, that it was more fun with someone else, and that it was unhealthy and selfish for me to make love to myself." Boys rarely do things with men that they have not already done with each other.

Although Dr Rossman tells us that his survey is not intended as a defence of man-boy sexual involvements, he gives no proof that they are harmful. There is evidence to suggest that one man in eight has pederastic inclinations. These, says Rossman, may be intended by nature to stimulate men to carry out their function of tutoring adolescent boys in sex. A society which denies coitus with females to developing boys should not be surprised at their fantasies and substitute experiences. Unable to make sense of adult attitudes to his rising sexuality, the boy becomes restless and rebellious. Often he is compulsively fascinated by sex, since society has made it a problem for him. It should be no problem. Subject to the freedom of others, he should be able to act out what he thinks right, expressing his sexual emotions as his heart and body tell him to do. As it is, he may well become society's victim, first as a pederast's boy and later as a pederast himself. "I am sure," says one of them, "I would not be a pederast today if society had permitted me to follow my natural inclinations when I was a young teenager."

FRANCIS BENNION