

E.F.C. LUDOWYK, *Those Long Afternoons : Childhood in Colonial Ceylon*. Lake House Bookshop, Colombo 1989, xix + 96 pages, Rs. 150-

E.F.C. Ludowyk is a cult figure in English studies in Sri Lanka. The first Sri Lankan to occupy the position of professor of English, in our one and only university at that time, he achieved distinction both in Sri Lanka, as an inspiring teacher and producer of plays, and abroad, as a Shakespeare scholar (Cambridge University Press published his **Understanding Shakespeare** and his editions of six plays) and historian (Weidenfeld & Nicolson published his **Modern History of Ceylon** and Faber his **Story of Ceylon**). The autobiographical work **Those Long Afternoons** is his last book, issued posthumously by his own wish.

Ludowyk wrote the text in his seventies, but in it he returns to his early years as a child, from age three to thirteen (1909-19), in the small provincial town of Galle during the heyday of British rule. He escapes from the pessimism which dogged his old age - and for which justification was not wanting - as he recalls his childhood. He is both nostalgic and characteristically frank, with a memory that is astonishingly precise. His recollections are seen through the eyes of a child as well as through the eye of experience, and the account is enlivened by his sense of humour and couched in a readable style marred only by occasional traces of the problematic prose of his earliest work, **Marginal Comments**, an introduction to New Criticism for the Sri Lankan reader. **Those Long Afternoons** will certainly appeal to those who value Ludowyk and his important role in our past.

Nostalgia is not something bad in itself, and Proust showed that it could result in great writing; but in Ludowyk's case, it leads to writing that is pallid though readable. The book depends for its effectiveness on the author's presentation of those around him and those whom he encountered : his father, mother, grandmother, and teachers. These individuals, however, possess no reality in the pages of the book, though they may come alive to those who actually knew them. As for the larger scene in Galle, it is sketched in Percy Colin-Thome's "memoir" in the book but is not re-created in Ludowyk's text itself. **Those Long Afternoons** does contain interesting passages of reflection, as at its close, yet such passages are few and far between. To acquire a sense of Ludowyk's achievement, one must look elsewhere.

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke