

There are, alas, people in this world—and they are more to be pitied than censured—who keep for their bedtime reading the latest Russian tragedy in three acts. But there are also a few cheerful souls who are well posted with the latest from the Wodehouse world. This piece, as we author chaps are prone to calling our literary efforts, is an exclusive, classified item for the latter category of people, and I take it therefore that those who read this are well-up on the Wooster-front. As we know, in matters of propriety and chivalry, he is a gentleman *parfait*. In fact, I believe that the angel would have been in a predicament had he to choose between Bertie and Abou Ben Adhem for topping the second list. But, as Bertie himself would be willing to admit, his name will never appear even in the runners-up list of the world's intellectuals. In fact, as Jeeves once rightly remarked, Bertram Wooster is a man with a heart of gold, but mentally negligible.

This inadequacy of the grey matter in the Wooster makeup must have been a source of deep concern and sorrow to his lady friends and short-term fiancées. It is no wonder, therefore, that Florence Craye, the most intellectual, purposeful and dominating among Bertie's ex-fiancées, insisted, as soon as she got engaged to him, that their wedding bells would not ring unless Bertie turned from a mere wastrel to someone worthwhile. She naturally wished to prescribe some work of erudition for his premarital reading. While a natural choice for such an intellectual initiation should certainly have been either the "latest of Spinoza" or some of the lesser-known works of Nietzsche, being fully aware of Bertie's intellectual limitations, she thoughtfully substituted for these, an eminently readable book with *Types of Ethical Theory* as its attractive title. (We have the authority of Jeeves, who got the information from the servants' quarters, to conclude that had Florence succeeded in making Bertie take the first few but decisive steps in the intellectual approach to Ethics, she would have bombarded him next with a heavy dose of Nietzsche but it need not concern us here.) Through Bertie's article *Jeeves Takes Charge*

we do know that he gave *Types of Ethical Theory* an honest try; in fact, he was so impressed by the depth and what-do-you-call-it of this learned work that he quotes twice from it. But finally, he did give up assimilating the latest on the theory of ethics thus retaining his bachelorhood. This is how his article ends. But one is a little surprised when one reads in his later chronicle entitled *Joy in the Morning* that Bertie has this book on his shelves and he is still so

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fascinated by it that he quotes one of the passages. What does this point to? Either the book was so popular that it was a must in every right thinking household (a book-of-the-month club's choice?) or that Bertie took away Florence's copy with him when he parted company with her and treasured it as a souvenir. (The avid readers of the romantic

novels of Rosie M Banks would agree that the latter is a definite possibility. Don't they remember the missing rose in *Mervyn Keene, Clubman?*)

For mortals like us, what is more natural than to have an intense desire to know more about *Types of Ethical Theory*—to learn its authorship (about which Bertie is so strangely silent), its publisher (Popgood and Grooly)? Is it not but natural to be curious to know whether Bertie quoted rightly, is it not pardonable to have an urge to possess a copy of a book which played a crucial role in Bertie's decision to retain his bachelorhood? I, for example, would say yes. In fact, I was so caught up with these aspirations that I was prepared to undertake



Plum in the middle of Bombay

by R SRIDHARAN

This PG Wodehouse fan scoured the seven seas to find a copy of Types of Ethical Theory—the same tome that Bertie Wooster's fiancée Florence Craye had prescribed as necessary pre-nuptial reading—only to find it finally in...you guessed it!

any hardship to obtain a copy of this book. Remember the crusading chaps of the Middle Ages who went on a large-scale search of the Holy Grail? Let the cynics laugh, let them remind me superciliously of the sad fate of the curious cat. But I shall retort by pointing out that we are not cats (at least not all of us.)

One of the first books that I consulted eagerly, expecting more details about *Types of Ethical Theory*, (I know it was not a very original idea—even Watson on one of his less bright days might have done it, much to the relief of

Sherlock) was to look in to *Wooster's World*—a delightful book by Geoffrey Jaggard, published originally by Macdonald and co. in 1967 and reprinted by Coronet in 1979 as a paperback edition. I found, to my disappointment, that Geoffrey Jaggard's treatment of *Types of Ethical Theory* is step-motherly and his attitude is one of indifference and nonchalance. Jaggard gives this excellent book a rather low status by casually mentioning under the entry 'Craye, Lady Florence' that "Bertie in his premarital education was locked in combat with

this book with special reference to the chapter on..." I trust the reader will understand my asperity and agree that what Jaggard says of *Types of Ethical Theory* is neither wise as a church door nor deep as a well.

I shall not dwell too much on the various attempts I made to acquire a copy of this excellent book. My quest took me across the seven seas. The old bookshop owners of Vienna and Lausanne are still possibly tearing their hair in exasperation when they remember the man with a determined look, who insisted on

Types of Ethical Theory and would not be contented with *My Life and Adventures among the Head Hunters of Borneo* as a fair substitute.

But every voyage has an end. In fact, to make a long story short, with a pavement bookseller of Bombay, I found Volume II of a book entitled *Types of Ethical Theory* (a slender volume of 596 pages) written by James Martineau, DD, STD, DCL, LLD, late principal of Manchester New College, London, published by Oxford at the Clarendon press in 1901 (third edition revised). I bought the volume for an absurd-

ly low price—the best things of life are free or at least not too expensive. Many were the anxious hours that I spent poring over the volume in the hope of finding either or both the quotations culled out by Bertie. When I could not trace them, I began to have grave doubts (I am ashamed to admit now) whether the quotations were indeed genuine at all: the mystics tell us of the darkness the soul finds itself in before the dawn of supreme bliss. The dawn

The old bookshop owners of Vienna are still possibly tearing their hair when they remember the man who insisted on Types of Ethical Theory

came at last. I had the good fortune to come upon an 1891 edition of Volume I of *Types of Ethical Theory* (526 pages) in another secondhand bookshop in Bombay. I went through this volume with great trepidation. Believe me or not, I found in Chapter I (entitled *Descartes 1—From Monism to Dualism*) of this volume on page 124, the following lines:

"Of the two antithetic terms in Greek philosophy, only one was real and self-subsisting; and that one was *Ideal Thought* as opposed to that which it has to penetrate and mould. The other, corresponding to our 'Nature' was in itself phenomenal, unreal, without any permanent footing, having no predicates that held true for two moments together; in short, redeemed from negation only by including indwelling realities appearing through. Nothing in itself, it was the mere condition of manifestation to that which alone is real but else were latent. Hence the Greek has no power of resting in the conception either of mind without visible organism, or of matter without mental expression."

The well-informed reader need not be told that part of this quotation already occurs in Bertie's *Jeeves Takes Charge* and also in his *Joy in the Morning*. Some of these fateful lines, no wonder, made him decide against matrimony with Florence, which decision we agree, in retrospect, was the best for all concerned since Wooster could never have coped up intellectually with the author of *Spindrift*—a novel spoken of highly in the Bloomsbury circles. (That *Spindrift* when offered to the public as a play by Percy Goring turned out to be a flop is yet another pointer that the theatre-going public is totally unprepared for things of pure intellect.)

Once one of the quotations was found to be genuine, there was no difficulty in tracing the other in Volume II, Chapter VI (entitled *Spring of Action Classified: Moral order 6 Veracity*) page 260. The quotation runs as follows:

"The postulate or 'common understanding' (as it is called) involved in speech is certainly coextensive, in the obligation which it carries, with the social organism of which language is the instrument and the ends of which it is an effort to subserve."

I don't know how I had missed it in my first reading. One possible explanation is that I had lacked faith earlier and it was now fully restored. The fascinating quotation given above occurs as the first in Bertie's article and it is not unreasonable to suppose (in view of the fact that this quotation is from the present Volume II) that at the time of Bertie's writing, *Types of Ethical Theory* had been published as a single volume or at least that Bertie had a two-in-one bound volume. The book then would have had more than 1100 pages—not an easy one to read in bed.

As is well-known, the great master had the knack of quoting right from the Bible and Shakespeare to the latest thriller. Yet, it is a joy to discover that pure gems like the quotes above are indeed real. We should be thankful to him for making us aware of some of the immortal lines of the language. Our life becomes thus nobler and richer.

Post Script (1991): I did find an old copy of *Types of Ethical Theory* published as a single volume in an antique book shop in Chicago.