

Ignorance and Bliss

Although ultimately an empiricist, Hewitt Craversham allowed some unscientific conjecture, only once, sitting in a small white office.

When his doctor asked whether it was more likely that he take or reject chemotherapy if he had cancer? he replied that it depended on whether it was palliative or whether it would change the outcome. Well, said the doctor, suppose the cancer was one of the lung (inoperable). Hewitt, who had coughed incessantly for days, replied that he would have to ask his wife. The doctor asked what if the Mrs. had already been asked and replied that it didn't sit well with her conscience to play around with God's will? Hewitt replied that he would ... toss a coin.

"Would you choose tails for doing nothing about it, or heads?"

"Well—tails."

Then the doctor grimly produced a coin, a scratched quarter, and prepared to give it a toss.

Hewitt's life flashed before his eyes. He realized what the doctor had been implying. "How long do I have?" he moaned, his voice barely above a whisper. Suddenly he knew his cough was fatal, instinctively.

The coin flew up, spun glinting, and landed on the floor. The doctor bent, squinting.

"Tails," he announced. He stood up. " ... You don't have cancer, Mr. Craversham. Next, please."