

Dr. P. J. D. Heaf
University College Hospital
London, W.C.1

Dear Dr. Heaf,

This letter is about Mr. Harry Robson, who has University College Hospital casualty card No. CC 76398. However, before I tell you about him, let me briefly bring you up to date about what became of me since you last heard from me. (in late April) or ~~early~~ ~~May~~ ~~considerable~~ surprise, the Medical Research Council offered me a generous grant for a theoretical investigation of genetic polymorphism. (This was in response to an application made some months earlier, which I had been sure would be rejected.) After much thinking and praying I decided to abandon the book about which I'd written you, pay back everything I had borrowed for writing it, and accept the grant. So here I am, still working as a scientist. In fact, I had a lead article in Nature a few weeks ago (written in collaboration with John Maynard Smith of the University of Sussex -- but not about genetic polymorphism). However, though I gave up the plan of writing a book about Jesus, I didn't give up trying to be a Christian. After a while I left my flat, to become what the British police describe as "a person of no fixed abode", and learned to live very cheaply and give away most of what I earn.

Now about Harry Robson (who is incorrectly listed on UCH records as "Harold Robson"). He is sixty-one or sixty-two. He suffers from what has been diagnosed as chronic bronchitis, but I suspect that there must be something additional the matter with him because most foods seem to disagree with him and he vomits very frequently, perhaps approximately daily. Since I have been living in the same house with him for about a month, I am able to say positively that he is not an alcoholic and the vomiting is not the result of drinking. He has (or had) a shadow on his chest X-ray. Two years ago Dr. J. C. Hewetson (S.E.1) sent him to St. Gile's Hospital, where he stayed seven weeks. Then Harry transferred to the list of Dr. H. M. Lipman, with offices at Harley Street and Hampstead Road. A year ago, when he was living in a 'squat house' on Euston Street operated by University College students, one girl became alarmed at his coughing and took him to UCH, which is when he got the casualty card. For about two years he has been classified as unable to work, and he is now receiving about £5-50 a week from Social Security. I have heard him coughing and retching and I feel that clearly he ought to be in hospital. A week ago Dr. Lipman (who possibly assumes that a poor man who vomits does so because he drinks) said to Harry, "I'm classifying you as fit for work as of next Monday." The Social Security clerk called Dr. Lipman "a bastard", said that he could see himself that Harry was ill, and said that he should go and get another doctor, and they would continue paying him until he had a new report.

Of course it isn't the matter of the disability pension that makes me write to you. He can easily get that through almost any doctor. What I'm concerned about is diagnosis and treatment.

I remember you as an excellent, conscientious and sympathetic doctor, so I wish that Harry could go to your clinic and receive examination and treatment under your supervision.

Would it be possible for you to see him this week? He has many friends in this area, and if he were in University College Hospital he would not be left to be lonely over Christmas. He is living now in 102 Drummond Street, N.W.L. This is the headquarters building of the Tolmers Village Association, a community association run mostly by University College architecture and environment studies students. The telephone number of the Tolmers Village Association is 387-4004. Harry is likely to be out Monday, but a message could be left giving him an appointment on any other day of the week. (The TVA office is empty about forty per cent of the time, so it may be necessary to call twice to find someone in.)

I am concerned about Harry because he is kind and generous. He worked for years in the Tolmers Square area as a junk dealer, and he is respected by the merchants in the area. Also the students like him. It is unusual nowadays for young people to welcome an old, ill person to live with them, but Harry, after living in Euston Street and then going away during the summer, was invited to come back and live again in one of the student houses.

I very much hope that you can do something for Harry, and if possible get him seen by you (preferably) or someone else this week. He is a good man who has unfortunately had very inadequate treatment by a doctor who no doubts dislikes him. I have a suspicion that he probably has cancer, but I'm often wrong and hopefully I'm wrong still another time. If his health could be improved he would very much like to return to his old work. Furthermore, there is a young woman in one of the Drummond Street houses who enjoys buying and selling and would like to go into business with him. I think that that would be great, and hope that there is something that can be done to help him.

Sincerely,

George Price

P.S. My paper in Nature was called "The Logic of Animal Conflict". I don't have a copy at hand but I think it is in the November 2nd issue. To get the cover illustration as well as being the lead article in the issue.