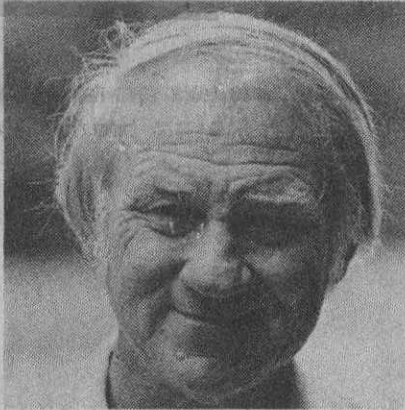


## Country Philosopher



I have loved the practice of medicine, and the practioner of medicine, for as long as I can remember.

I can look back almost fifty years ago to the time that old Dr. Montgomery came to our house. I was so tiny, and so sick, and just his entrance into my room erased a great deal of my discomfort. He would smile and sit beside my bed. He would place his cool hand upon my fevered brow and then solemnly reach into his littly black bag and extract the magic that was forever there. Lordy, there wasn't much in that black bag that could be labeled "miracle drug." It was simply filled with compassion and caring, tenderness and love, and it made me well every time.

Since my childhood I have been unusually lucky in warding off those

evil spirits that congest and pain. My body has functioned rather perfectly and my association with the medical profession has been non-existent.

But last week I went to the doctor because I was having trouble with a sinus infection. During the course of the doctor's examination he found out that I hadn't had a physical, a complete physical, since World War Two. This upset him and he ordered me through a series of tests. I was handed over to a nurse who immediately weighed me and took my blood-pressure. She then handed me this tiny, tiny cup, and said, "Mr. Holmes, would you please go into this room and give me a specimen."

I went into the room and I tried to comply with the nurse's order. I really, really tried. Surely I could fill up that tiny cup. But I stood there, struggling and turning blue in the face, and I just wasn't accomplishing anything. I ran the water from the faucet. I jumped up and down. I banged my head on the wall. I thought of waterfalls, surf fishing, and running rapids, but to no avail. And then, just as I felt the beginning of success, the door to the room opened and a strange lady, with a tiny cup in her

## The completed physical

hand, stood looking at me with a horrified expression on her face. "I'm terribly sorry" she blushed. By golly...she wasn't any more sorry than I was. I threw the tiny cup in the wastebasket and told the nurse that I was giving up on what was apparently a gross impossibility.

The nurse then made me sit down beside a small table. She took a needle (it was the size of a lance) and inserted the needle into my right arm. I sat there watching my blood flow into this huge jar. The nurse was talking to another nurse about the bacterial count found in day-old doughnuts, and all the time they were talking, my blood was flowing. When the jar was registering just a trifle over six gallons, and while the nurses were still talking, I shouted, "Nurse, does the body turning blue signify anything special?" The nurse immediately withdrew the needle and my life was saved.

I next went into a room to have an x-ray taken. The nurse said, "Mr. Holmes, just hold your breath until I tell you to release it." She then went behind this wall and started talking to this other nurse. Something about the bacterial count found in day-old

doughnuts. And their talk would have been just fine except for the fact that I was still holding my breath. Ten minutes went by (this is an awfully long time to hold one's breath) when, with a great gulping for air, I wheezed, "Nurse, does the body turning blue signify anything special?"

I WANTED OUT OF THAT PLACE. I had experienced a great embarrassment, lost practically all of my blood, and probably would die very soon from an overdose of radium. I hurriedly put my shirt back on and went out into the office. I asked the girl to prepare my bill and she figured and ~~calculated~~ for about ten minutes. She finally handed me my ~~bill~~ ~~figure~~ and ~~calculated~~ for about ten minutes. At first I didn't connect the total figure with the medical examination I had just gone through. I thought of it more as the total number of hamburgers sold at McDonald's in the past three years. It was a very heavy figure. An astronomical figure. And while I stood there looking at that bill, I was finally able to accomplish what I couldn't do before. I gave my specimen.

And I didn't even use that tiny, tiny cup.