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Report From Britain, 1 October 1949

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REPORT FROM BRITAIN

James W. Silver

Aberdeen, Scotland
October 1, 1949

According to the Official Guide, "Aberdeen is one of the most impressive of British cities. Immediately on leaving the Joint Station, the visitor is struck with amazement by the multiplicity of massive grey buildings." The present visitor was certain, about thirty seconds after taking off from the station that he had been struck, not with amazement but with one of the granite buildings itself.

My taxi driver had been a shade slow in an imaginative dash across a thoroughfare and the next thing I could remember was crawling out through a broken side window which at the time happened to be on top. Blood was flowing considerably faster than Scotch does in these parts. The crowd from the Tivoli Theater furnished a proper dramatic backdrop for my entrance into the land of kilts and bagpipes.

After a passing medical student had practised his trade, the police carted me off to the Royal Infirmary, a magnificent structure opened about 1935 by the present king of Britain. In the emergency room an obviously young female M.D. with a soothing burr in her voice took nine delicate stitches in what she described as an unusually thick-skinned head.

We had some vague conversation regarding the need for international cooperation which, at the time, I viewed in a favorable light. The body was then whisked off to a partnership in Ward Nine with four other "victims" of National Health.

Some little throbbing of the head kept me from sleeping until about three in the morning and promptly at six A.M. I was awakened for a cup of TEA. Long may Britannia rule! At eight my breakfast included an egg donated by Mr. Duncan who occupied the next bed.

The four patients, with only a slight bit of prodding from me, launched into a heated two-hour discussion of the Labor Party and nationalized medicine. One, a bartender, denounced everything that has happened since 1945, but agreed with the others that Labor would be returned with a reduced majority at the next election. All four beneficiaries of the new health program agreed

that medical service today is as good as it has ever been.

The half dozen doctors I questioned in the hospital appeared more interested in their work than in nationalization, but, on the whole, the young M. D.'s and their assistants seemed favorably inclined toward the new scheme. This is natural as youth is more amenable to change and as it is must easier today for a young physician to get started in a paying practise.

For one thing the salaries of internes (Dr. Budge who sewed me up recently had her annual pay raised from 150 to 350 pounds) and medical assistants have been increased and new doctors no longer have to pay enormous fees for established practises.

I was told that before nationalization it was not unusual for a retiring physician to sell his practise for as much as his total "take" for from twelve to eighteen months -- sometimes 25 to 30 thousand dollars. The buyer normally would pay his debt on the instalment plan, backed by personal insurance made out to his creditor. (State medicine provides a similar retirement plan, but the new practitioner does not foot the bill.)

Since this first contact with British medicine I have been back to the hospital for X-Rays, removal of stitches and general check-up. The total expense has been twenty-four cents for tram fare. My treatment was courteous, kind, and efficient. From all of this I draw no conclusion except that the medical service rendered me was in every way comparable to the best I could have received in the United States.
