

## HOW THE COLLEGE CAUCUS CAPTURED THE COUNCIL.

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If I had space and to spare—which I have not—I should like at this moment to write an appreciative little Memoir of the understanding work of the late Sir Robert Morant, First Secretary to the Ministry of Health during the period in 1919-1920, when Nurses' Registration was under discussion in the Houses of Parliament. He understood nursing economics, and was largely responsible for moulding the Government Bill into such form that, if justly administered, the Nursing Profession should now have been well satisfied with its provisions. Alas! he died on March 14th, 1920, primarily from overwork, and we lost his commanding and sympathetic influence before the General Nursing Council assembled on May 11th. During the autumn of 1919, when the Central Committee's Bill, owing to the intense animus and jealousy of the Executive of the College of Nursing, Ltd., was wrecked on the Report stage by College advocates, led by Sir Leonard Lyle, M.P.—a base betrayal of the public interest, which in our opinion has never been exceeded—we see the great Morant, indignant with such action, calmly drafting, and working untiringly, to give the nurses a just Act, realising that in the future they must themselves administer it before its full usefulness could be enjoyed.

One thing is quite certain, that if this great Civil Servant had been spared to help the first Council to frame the Rules, and to exercise his beneficent influence, the despicable policy of the Council, with its personal, pettifogging animosities, and its backstairs accusations, would never have been permitted to develop, and flourish like the noisome fungus it is!

As soon as the Act was in force the controllers of the College began their usual wire-pulling tactics at the Ministry of Health, so Sir Robert Morant was entrusted with the task of advising the Minister, Dr. Addison, as to the persons to be nominated by him to form the first Council. All the most ardent "Antis" swallowed their time-honoured "principles" as to the futility and danger of State Registration, and speered for office. They, moreover, sanctimoniously opined that if true harmony was to result the dangerous "agitator" (that's me) for the reform—now law—must be omitted from the Council. I well remember my interview with Sir Robert Morant, when, with apparent solemnity, he reported to me these "conscientious convictions"! "The Ministry," he said, "is not quite sure if it will be wise to include the Registration standard-bearers on the Council."

I smiled.

"I am not a standard-bearer," I replied. "I am the Soul of the Movement."

Then we both enjoyed the joke.

"The other side (College) say that, if you are included, their chief protagonist should also have a seat."

"Sir Cooper Perry," I queried.

Sir Robert nodded.

"I agree that he has for years been the chief "anti," surreptitiously; but how is he thus rendered indispensable to the organisation of the Nursing Profession through a Nurses' Registration Act? He is not a nurse."

We left it at that.

As time passed, with an infinity of pains a list of nominees was selected—lions and lambs. Then came the question of the Chairman of the Council.

The Ministry disapproved of a doctor—and results have proved its wisdom. As Sir Cooper Perry was out of it (a much less distracting and more lucrative post having been secured to him), the College would welcome anyone, I was in for next, excepting the one person who had devoted a lifetime to the question, and who knew most about the State organisation of the Profession of Nursing.

The said "expert" though strongly approving the principle of a Registered Nurse in the Chair of the General Nursing Council, knew of no nurse who was qualified by consistency, knowledge, and experience of public procedure to assume the responsibility.

"How about a lay woman?"

"Intolerable. More ignorant still—a reflection on the status of Professional Nursing."

Ultimately Mr. J. C. Priestley, K.C., was invited to accept the Chairmanship of the General Nursing Council. He accepted, and interviewed by request at the Ministry of Health, representatives of the conflicting interests, and had nice amiable chats with them.

Miss Isabel Macdonald and I attended together. We were received with urbanity; we were equally polite. We were seated on opposite sides of the table to the Chairman, and behind smiling masks were, no doubt, busy sizing one another up.

I wondered if Mr. Priestley, who had so much power entrusted to him, had ever read the celebrated article, "Nurses à la Mode," written by his mother, the late Lady Priestley, which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1897, a damning indictment of the modern nurse, close on a quarter of a century ago; and my "Reply" to it in the following issue, in which I wrote: "In its first sentence we have the keynote of the article forcibly struck; for our minds wander back for a moment to primitive times when . . . the tomahawk was the only true and unerring remedy for sickness. Our minds are not permitted to wander thereafter from the evident belief of the writer (Lady Priestley), that the tomahawk would be the only true and unerring remedy for the modern nurse."

In conversing with Mr. J. C. Priestley, I realised that he would never attempt to govern us with a "tomahawk"; and if permitted to use his own judgment, unpoisoned by "suggestion," we might go further and fare far worse.

As we came out into Whitehall, Miss Macdonald and I agreed that courtesy, modesty, and an evident desire to administer the Act with fairness, might be hoped for, and that it was our duty to help supply expert information, and knowledge, to

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