

HOW THE COLLEGE CAUCUS CAPTURED THE COUNCIL.

(Continued from page 359.)

A DAGGER IN THE BACK.

When, in the Spring of 1920, Mr. J. C. Priestley K.C., was appointed Chairman of the first and nominated General Nursing Council for England and Wales, he was engaged in active practice at the Bar—mostly in the Divorce Court. So far as we could gather he had no experience of professional nursing matters, either educational or economic. We presume, however, that he was "put wise" at the Ministry of Health, and told of the long and terrible struggle of the pioneers of nursing organisation and reform for legal status, and improved educational facilities, and of the unprecedented opposition of the autocratic managers of Nurse Training Schools and their honorary and salaried officials, to any degree of protection by the State for professional nurses. Protection which the State had accorded in successive Acts of Parliament to the men's professions, and in some degree to washerwomen and sweeps!

In accepting office, no doubt Mr. Priestley imagined that he would perform the usual official duties of a Chairman of a Statutory Council, with adequate expert assistance from his Council and officials. I think I may say without contradiction that no such halcyon conditions awaited his supervision, and that during the whole term of his office he had to attend at the Office or Ministry of Health almost daily; and was, in fact, called upon to do routine work which should have been prepared for him. Any way, my conscience is clear on this matter. All the expert knowledge on nursing conditions, educational and economic, which I had for years studied at home and abroad was at the disposal of Mr. Priestley and his Council for the benefit of my profession. In referring to my correspondence files I find generous recognition from the Chairman for information supplied on numerous intricate questions, which naturally cropped up in laying the basis of the Nursing Profession under an Act of Parliament. The Rules, the Constitution, the demand of the Ministry to appoint the Chairman of an elected Council—an unprecedented demand, which I opposed in Council and in Conference with Dr. Addison, the then Minister, and which he conceded. The burning question of Nurses' Hours of work under the proposed Hours of Employment Bill. The demand of the General Nursing Council for Scotland that Fever Nurses certificated by the Scottish Board of Health, should for reciprocal purposes rank as General Nurses; this was prevented. The all-important right of nurses accused of misdemeanours to be judged by the whole Council and not by a sub-committee as suggested; the question of the Chartered Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics to have the right to record Nursing qualifications on its Register of Masseuses; which was prevented, and a dozen other matters of vital importance to Registered Nurses, considered right

up to October 28th, 1921, when the Deprivation of Certificates bomb was thrown into the G.N.C. arena by the College Matrons, in their demand to certificate persons who did not possess them, or deprive every colleague who did of this evidence of tested efficiency! On this outrageous suggestion I compiled a historic "Memo." for Mr. Priestley's benefit, and it is to be regretted that he did not inform the Ministry, and the College Council, members of which were, as usual, tripping up and down the back stairs of more than one Department in Whitehall, that justice, without fear or favour, must be done to the rank and file, as had been done on previous occasions.

I recall these matters to prove that until the few months before the resignation of Mr. Priestley our association was of a most friendly nature, as proved by correspondence. I have no doubt, had not a most treacherous and systematic campaign of mischievous calumny, emanating from jealous and facile colleagues on the Council, who could not bend me to their imperious will, in their betrayal of the rank and file, supplemented by entirely ignorant and bureaucratic officialdom; the unpardonable attempt, by mendacious accusations, made *privately* at the Ministry against me, would never have disgraced the annals of the conduct of business of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

As I reported in full last week, the bold policy of publicity crushed out once and for all the infamous attempt to ruin Existing Certificated Nurses; but, naturally, human nature being what it is, it fanned the flame of animus. For more reasons than one the chief protagonist in defying autocracy must be crushed out.

We must recall the fact that the Morant policy had prevented the College of Nursing, Ltd., acquiring absolute economic power over the Nursing Profession, and had deprived it of the income—the Nurses' Registration and Examination fees—upon which it calculated to finance its supremacy. Do not for a moment forget this fact. These funds meant life and death to the College Company, in support of the only basis upon which the employer could force his autocratic will upon the worker. If the College Council under the Act could not administer these fees, then its representatives upon the General Nursing Council must do so. At all costs the College representatives must capture the Council when the forthcoming election was held. To do this it was absolutely necessary to remove from the Chair of the Registration Committee the woman who realised and opposed the College policy, so that by new Rules the electorate could be packed by College members so as to secure a preponderating majority on the new Council. With myself in the Registration Chair, and the Rules as approved by Parliament, this was almost impossible, as for months many College Matrons had discouraged their nurses from registering, and many nurse-members of the College bitterly resented the breach of faith with them, when they realised they were not to be placed automatically on the State

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)