

THE PASSING OF A PIONEER.

CASSANDRA MARIA BEACHCROFT.

BEACHCROFT.—On Feb. 13, 1937, at 53, Church Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea, Cassandra Maria, eldest daughter of the late George and Cassandra Beachcroft, in her 98th year. Interred at Hastings Cemetery. Peace, perfect peace.

On reading the above notice in *The Times* how many Registered Nurses would realise what they owed to the pioneer work half a century ago of Cassandra Maria Beachcroft. We wonder! It is good to possess a memory like a mirror in which past events are reflected without shadow so that they may enrich hours of reflection and keep the heart young with love and loyalty.

Cassandra Beachcroft lived for nearly a hundred years, and yet one can never associate her with old age, so in recalling her personality for the benefit of the present generation of Nurses no doleful ditty must be sung.

On a sunny September morning in the year 1879, after a year's intensive work at the dear, splendid, grimy old M.R.I. (Manchester Royal Infirmary), I tripped down its [entrance steps and waved good-bye to a host of the very kindest people I have met in life, specially gratified that most of the visiting staff were there assembled, including the great Professor Lund, to clasp me warmly by the hand and wish me good luck. You know how it is with Lancashire folk.

Pastures new! Who at twenty-two fails to anticipate their verdant beauty and the scent of their flowering meads? That my destination was the great London Hospital in the East End of London, immersed in those days in tragic surroundings of dire poverty, made its special appeal to sympathy, not an iota of which was wasted, when in touch with the brave sick people of the district.

The sun was still shining when "William" opened the hospital gates and waved my cab towards the entrance steps, on the topmost of which a slight, upright, sprightly little woman waved her hand in welcome. Gay, always gay, for close on a hundred years! That was Cassandra Beachcroft, and for many years we worked together in closest friendship, and such was her elasticity of spirit that I failed to realise a difference of age. Suffice it to say from the day she welcomed me to my charge as "Sister Charlotte" at the London her cheerful spirit never failed. Sprightly, merry, her constant laughter made light of life's troubles; truth to tell she possessed a brave heart.

When I was appointed Matron of St. Bartholomew's

Hospital in 1881, how she took me under her wing. She came with me and waited in the quadrangle, sitting on the fountain, during those excruciating interviews with the Committee, when disappointment might have been my fate!

Poor dear, she drooped a bit after I bid her good-bye, her charge of Rachel Ward, containing 57 beds of acute cases, was a great strain, and it ended in her appointment as a Sister at "Bart's," from which position she was appointed Lady Superintendent of the Lincoln County Hospital, a position she held for fifteen years with fine courage in those days of nursing reform, when it was necessary for a Matron to realise that she had a backbone.

Her devotion to duty earned for her warm appreciation and praise from Committee, Medical Staff and colleagues.

And then it was that Cassandra Beachcroft stepped outside the hospital environment, and envisaged the organisation of a profession of nursing. The "spirit of a Beachcroft" refused to remain quiescent when the gladiatorial combats took place in the arena, the fiercer the opponents, the keener her thrusts. When the Royal Charter was bestowed on the British Nurses' Association by Queen Victoria in 1893, Cassandra Beachcroft was one of its Signatories, and for many years took an active part in its work.

In 1899 we find her name on the Provisional Committee of the International Council of Nurses, founded in London in that year, a movement which secured her warm approval and support.

At a recent meeting of the Executive Committee of the Royal British Nurses' Association, I reminded those present of our debt to her, and a message of condolence was sent to her sisters. Beautiful flowers had already been forwarded from the Association to her devoted friend and nurse, "Rachel," who had worked with and cared for her with selfless devotion for many years, and from whom the following letter has been received:—

"Dear Madam,—

Please convey to the Nurses of the R.B.N.A. the sincere thanks of Miss Beachcroft's sisters for the magnificent wreath sent. It was truly lovely, and a real help and comfort to them to feel their dear sister is remembered after so many years!

Her loss has left a sad blank in our lives.

With proud and grateful thanks,

'RACHEL,'

for E. M. and J. E. Beachcroft."



MISS CASSANDRA MARIA BEACHCROFT,
Signatory to the Royal Charter, R.B.N.A., 1893,
Member of the Provisional Committee, I.C.N., 1899.

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