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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EVA BEATRICE DYKES  
by  
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Eva Beatrice Bykes



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# THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EVA BEATRICE DYKES

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## The Achievement of Eva Beatrice Dykes

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

The flowing robes and tasselled mortarboards could not obscure the fact that one of the seven women upon whom Radcliffe College was about to confer the Doctor of Philosophy degree was distinctively different from the others. She was black. Among a few in the all-white audience, smiles froze and the customary polite applause was feeble, but the young woman did not notice. She had found goodwill and support in this institution, conservatism, yes, but not prejudice, and she was unmindful of the curious stares as she stepped forward to receive her diploma.

Eva Beatrice Dykes, Doctor of Philosophy. It was the first time in the forty-two year history of this prestigious Ivy League school that a doctorate had been conferred on a black woman. But the event was even more historic. On that Commencement day, June 22, 1921, two other black women in the United States held Ph. D. degrees. Both had graduated the week before, Georgianna Simpson from the University of Chicago on June 14, and Sadie Tanner Mozel from the University of Pennsylvania on June 15. But Eva Dykes, having



completed her requirements in March of that year, had been the first black woman in the United States to earn a Ph. D.

And now, whither, Dr. Eva B. Dykes? This could have been the question in many minds. She, a young black woman, granddaughter of slaves, small in stature but large in ability and vision, now held in her hand one of academia's most coveted prizes, earned in one of its most honored establishments. With this "prize" many doors could be opened. She could be one of the elite, one high on the totem pole of the "talented tenth." She would be gladly accepted--for her own worth and as a worthy "token"--in prestigious white establishments. She was young, gifted, and impeccably qualified. But there was another option, not as glittering, but more in keeping with her character and ambitions: service in the black community. Long before graduation, Eva had made her choice.

The January 4, 1973 issue of The Review and Herald carried a three-page article on Dr. Eva B. Dykes.<sup>1</sup> A few days later, Dr. Dykes received a letter from a man she had never met, a black man "of nearly ninety years of experience," who wrote: "You are the most unusual person I have ever read about in the negro race. . . . Your record of achievement is the most remarkable I have ever read."<sup>2</sup> Eva Dykes

<sup>1</sup>Louis B. Reynolds, "She Fulfilled the Impossible Dream," Review and Herald, 94 January, 1973, pp. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Dr. Eva B. Dykes from Mr. John Ragland of Detroit, Michigan, January 12, 1973. Used by permission.



considers herself remarkable in no way, but certainly, in the eyes of those who know her, her "road" has led to Mr. Ragland's letter.



### III

Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.  
Alexander Pope

The teacher training school of Howard University was Eva Dykes' first formal school experience. She spent four years here, learning the rudiments of the three "R's" and taking music lessons. She was a musical prodigy, amazingly proficient at the piano; although she never majored in music, she was always interested in it, and even managed to take a music course during her senior year at Radcliffe. The teacher training school was the practice ground for students of Howard University's Teachers College, who were required to "demonstrate fitness through practice teaching" before they could receive an A. B.<sup>4</sup> Besides pedagogy, teacher trainees received heavy doses of Latin, philosophy, and other social sciences,<sup>5</sup> and undoubtedly some of this "heavy" knowledge was occasionally displayed to their small pupils.

Grades five through eight were spent at the Lucretia Mott Elementary school, a black institution named after a white nineteenth-century crusader for abolition and women's rights. Somewhere in the school there was a picture of Mrs. Mott, with a description of her activities as a member

<sup>4</sup>Dyson, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 162



of various anti-slavery societies and her founding of the Society for Woman's Rights in 1848. At an early age Eva Dykes was aware of her membership in two minorities--blacks and women, and her desire to help others like herself was so natural and deep-seated that she cannot recall a time when she did not have it.

Early teen-age years quickly went by as she attended another black school, M Street High School later renamed in honor of the poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Looking forward to higher education, she took the "college preparatory" courses which would, with good grades, assure her admission into that "capstone of negro education," Howard University. Making excellent grades were the least of Eva's problems. The late Reverend Dr. E. Smith of Washington, D. C., a former classmate of Howard days, after many years still remembered that when other members of their class "were burning the midnight oil," Eva was able to grasp the material "with the mind of a genius." She had been blessed with a brilliant mind, and was a good student, applying herself with diligence. She applied herself with enthusiasm, also, enjoying every class that she took, though English language and literature always seemed particularly thrilling. In 1910, following her parents' footsteps, she matriculated at Howard University.

Almost effortlessly, without the academic lag that students often encounter between high school and college,



she settled down to making top grades in English, Latin, Greek, German, and history. Howard University had always leaned heavily toward the classical tradition. Almost from the founding of the institution, proponents of the classics had waged a successful battle against those who would have liked to see a more "practical" curriculum, involving vocational pursuits. In Eva's time, President Thirkield, ninth president of the university, lost many supporters because he seemed interested in industrial education.<sup>6</sup> The new freedmen, in spite of the practical and financial benefits of industrialization, were not enthusiastic about industrial education. As Dyson points out, they would much "prefer to stand on the floor of the House or Senate fittingly attired than to stand in the door of a blacksmith shop in a leathern apron."<sup>7</sup> Through the years, champions of the classics made eloquent pleas for their priority in the Teachers and Liberal Arts Colleges. In 1892, at a meeting of the College Alumni Association, Dean Kelly Miller urged:

There is need of especial alertness to see that the seed of sound scholarship planted by our Alma Mater may spring up into abundant harvest. Against the mad rush after practical results, and the modern short-cuts to culture, the friends of liberal learning need to stand steadfast, and immovable. . . . The road to true learning lies through Greece and Rome. The wonder working arts of the nineteenth century and the fairy tales of science are indeed wonderful to contemplate but as a means of culture, they do not leave upon the mind that residium of beneficial effect as do the perfect forms of truth and beauty,

<sup>6</sup>Dyson, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 167.



developed under the clear skies of Greece, and transplanted to the "Lavinian shores and the walls of lofty Rome."<sup>8</sup>

Dean Miller seemed to be echoing one of the first graduates of the University, James M. Gregory, who, in a paper presented at the Triennial Meeting of the College Alumni in 1880, asked:

Does the English language, or German, or French, or Italian, afford examples of more consummate masters of oratory than Aeschines and Demosthenes; of poetry, than Ovid and Virgil, and Homer; of Satire, than Horace and Juvenal; of criticism, than Longinus and Quintilian; of history, than Herodotus, and Xenophon and Thucydides, and Sallust, and Livy and Tacitus; of the drama than Aristophanes and Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles? Who is the man that can read with the right spirit the moral writings of Cicero and Plato, heathen philosophers as they were, and not have his thought purified and ennobled?<sup>9</sup>

Gregory added, with true rhetorical splendor;

Wherever literature consoles sorrow, or assuages pain--wherever it brings gladness to eyes which fail with wakefulness and tears,--and ache for the dark house and the long sleep--there is exhibited, in its noblest form, the immortal influence of Athens.<sup>10</sup>

Industrialization moved in, inexorably, but the classics remained and kept their high priority until well into the 'thirties. Eva Dykes had large doses of Latin, Greek, German and English literature, English language and history, with one unit each of trigonometry, botany, geology, and psychology--a total of twenty-four units in four years, to complete her requirements for the A. B. degree.

Trained in the classical tradition of her time, Miss

<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Dyson, p. 167.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



Dykes loved literature and languages. Many years later, as a teacher of English literature she listed among the course objectives:

To develop character by emphasizing those noble ideals which permeate some of the English classics such as duty, service, love of nature, love of humanity, love of country, and self-sacrifice.

When Eva graduated Summa Cum Laude from the College of Liberal Arts in 1914, she had come as far and accomplished as much as any woman in her family; but she was ready to move on. She had contracted to teach for the next year, but at her uncle's suggestion, she applied for admission to Radcliffe in 1915. Radcliffe accepted her, though not for the Master's program. In spite of her brilliant record, she was accepted as an "unclassified" student.

Radcliffe's posture was understandable. A prestigious Ivy League institution, its standards were known to be higher than average; and jealous of its reputation, it was not about to accept another college's graduate into its graduate program without a trial period. Besides, students of black institutions were singularly suspect: Howard U., like other black schools, had in the old days repeatedly had to lower its requirements to accommodate the new freedmen, and old reputations die hard. From Radcliffe's point of view, Eva Dykes' Summa Cum Laude was not particularly impressive. Another reason for her "unclassified" status was the fact that, other things being equal, by Radcliffe's standards



Eva's degree in Liberal Arts did not include enough units of English to qualify her for the Master's program. Howard University's curriculum had called for as many units of Latin, Greek and German as of English.

Undiscouraged and undaunted, Miss Dykes plunged into her studies. Her year as unclassified student consisted of a full program of English along with one Latin class, and she made honor grades in each. At the end of the year, Dr. Howard received notification from Radcliffe that his niece would be qualified for an A. B. after another year. So there was more English; a little French and Latin, and at the end of the year another A. B. degree. There were 105 young ladies in that graduating class. One of them graduated "Summa Cum Laude," and Eva was one of the thirteen in the next highest honor level, Magna Cum Laude. She graduated in the top thirteen percent of her class, perhaps even higher, for her Radcliffe undergraduate transcript, except for two "B's" which were also honor grades (so noted on the official transcript of students of Radcliffe), showed all "A's."

In moving on to Radcliffe, Eva had dared what no other member of her family had dared or cared to do: she had assailed the white academic world. And her performance at the undergraduate level indicated that she was equipped to compete on their level as an equal, in fact, as one of their best.



The Radcliffe years passed with incredible swiftness: B. A. 1917, M. A. 1918, classes and then dissertation writing for a Ph. D. in English Philology. Eva elected to write on Alexander Pope, one incentive being his interest and sympathy for black people, which she had stumbled upon in her reading. She decided to research the influence of Pope's classical style and versification on American authors, 1810 to 1850. Her research took her to several cities--Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Cambridge--and sent her delving into the archives of historical societies, the Library of Congress, other libraries. In one of the Carolinas she was denied entry into the archives of a historical society because of her color. While she worked in the Library of Congress she carried her lunch because the neighboring restaurants would not serve blacks. But finally it was all put together, and by March of 1921 she had completed her requirements and taken her oral examination, quietly making history for Radcliffe College and the United States.



#### IV

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,  
do it with thy might. Ecclesiastes

Eva Dykes' successful venture into the world of white culture and elitism strengthened her resolve to dedicate her life to her people. Others of her race have entered that world and "lost" their way out. The acculturation is seen as positive, uplifting, while going back, so they think, is a step backward. The true intellectual, however, can never turn his back on his race. In fact, he is always a part of his world even while in the "other," often an uneasy posture. Harold Cruse postulates, "The negro intellectual must deal intimately with the white power structure and cultural apparatus, and the inner realities of the black world at one and the same time."<sup>11</sup>

As far as Miss Dykes was concerned, there was no conflict. She had never been intrigued by opportunities within the white world, except the opportunity to earn in it the highest qualifications. In addition, her "excursion" served to develop her expertise in negotiating with the system. Painfully aware of the limited opportunities of most of her race, she had already decided on a career: through the medium of the classroom she would prepare black youth to

<sup>11</sup>Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 451.



face the world with confidence and effectiveness. She was committed to a life of service to her race.

By heredity and environment, Eva was blessed with the factors that made her an integral part of her community and the community an integral part of her. As far back as she could remember, members of her closely-knit, extended family were active, contributing members of society. Her desire to serve was ingrained, as natural a part of her being as was her desire to excell. As she grew, the environment in which she was nurtured was that of Washington, D.C.'s black intelligentsia, of which Howard University was the cultural and academic center. Founded in the wake of other schools for freedmen, Howard claimed, besides its purpose of "educating the ignorant and alleviating personal suffering in the District of Columbia and in the country at large,"<sup>12</sup> a purpose to be "an evidence of a change in race relations in the United States."<sup>13</sup> Howard's first students were white, and students of all races entered its halls; but more and more the enrollment became predominantly black, so that by Eva Dykes' sojourn there, the University could boast thousands of black alumni, and had become the Mecca of black education. One of the goals of those who zealously supported the classics and arts at Howard was to see the university become for urban blacks what Tuskegee was for

<sup>12</sup>Dyson, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.



rural. Eva's uncle and father were always knowledgeable of cultural and other activities at the University, and Eva and her sisters benefited from the association long before their matriculation. Because so many of her relatives had passed through Howard, and undoubtedly because of their illustrious record there, Dean George Cook, her uncle's good friend, called Eva and her sisters "daughters of the University."

In addition to her immersion in this environment, Eva had been a contributing member of society from a remarkably early age. She was only about seven years old when she played the organ of the Baptist Church which her mother attended. Church officials with more enthusiasm than knowledge used a rope to tie back bellows which could not be manipulated by the little accompanist. Later, at the age of ten, she performed the same service in the Methodist Church which her mother joined. Talented and smart, she performed and participated in the many activities which a culturally-minded community sponsors for its youth.<sup>14</sup> After her first baccalaureate degree, she taught Latin and English for one year at Walden University, a black school in Nash-

<sup>14</sup>Dr. Dykes likes to point out that in her youth there was little segregation of facilities in the Washington, D. C. area. There were white pastors, teachers, and members in the churches and schools which she attended. But with the national outcry for equality, facilities became more and more segregated.



ville, Tennessee,<sup>15</sup> and before her graduation from Radcliffe, she was on the staff of Dunbar High School, her Alma Mater. Her five-year spell at Radcliffe had no negative effect on Eva's decision to serve her community.

Another factor, and actually the more important one, which influenced Eva's choice of lifework was her commitment to God. She grew up in a Christian home, where church attendance and religious instruction were considered vital, and then, six months before graduation, on December 5, 1920, she became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All her previous knowledge of God, truth, and religion crystallized in the doctrines of this unique church. She embraced its belief that the Sabbath (Saturday) is holy and should be devoted to religious activities, and she committed her life to evangelism, which the Church emphasizes. Her religion gave her a moral responsibility to her people.

For eight years, Miss Dykes worked with the adolescents of Dunbar High School, teaching them many valuable lessons along with English and Latin. Her Dunbar students remember her dedication, and her personal interest in students as individuals. Mrs. Pauline Gaskins Mitchell, who was also her student at Howard U., remembers that she was "thoroughly dedicated," "worked beyond the call of duty, and was a perfectionist." She inspired Pauline to go on to college and enter her own field--English. She was concerned about

<sup>15</sup>Walden University is no longer in operation.



all aspects of her students' lives, particularly about having them cultivate the social graces. Mrs. Mitchell recalls that "Whenever she played the piano for Dunbar's enormous student body, she would not touch the piano until 'one could hear a pin drop.'" She undertook the correction of a habit of walking loudly to which one of her bright young students seemed addicted, by having him stay after school and practice coming into the classroom without stomping. The lad was drawn to the young teacher who showed a real interest in his development, and he sought her out for counsel on many occasions, even when he was no longer her student. As was her custom, Dr. Dykes sprinkled sound academic advice with religious instruction, and in the words of the lady he later married, Nathaniel Ashby, the young man, "was satisfied with the instruction he received."

Lillian Ashby says of her late husband and Dr. Dykes:

Aside from the fact that she was instrumental in bringing him to the Truth (Seventh-day Adventism), she was responsible for giving him counsel. He sought for advice with reference to his educational aspirations, the colleges or institutions for his field of study.

Ashby was motivated to illustrious service as a teacher and minister, and Ashby Auditorium at Oakwood College is a memorial not only to him but to a teacher who took time to care.

She prodded the slow and inspired the talented. Among her students at Dunbar she could number several who made outstanding contributions to society. There was Charles



Drew, whose pioneer research in blood plasma preservation (blood banks) saved innumerable lives of soldiers and civilians during World War II. Drew also made innovations in the old blood storage system when he proved that blood does not differ according to race.<sup>16</sup> Another student was William Hastie, who was Dean of the Howard University Law School before he was appointed governor of the Virgin Islands in 1946, and was tapped by President Truman to serve on the U. S. Court of Appeals in 1949.<sup>17</sup> And Joseph Jenkins, for years a highly respected English professor at Tuskegee Institute, was also Dr. Dykes' student. There were many others.

Colleagues as well as students quickly learned to admire this unassuming young woman whose outstanding abilities were matched equally by her commitment to her faith. Dr. Dykes attended no school functions on Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), and to accomodate her, a regular Saturday morning Colloquium was changed to Friday, while permission was readily given for her to meet with parents at other times besides the Friday night teachers' meetings.

In 1929, Dr. Dykes took up an appointment at Howard U. as Assistant Professor of English. The university was then on the threshold of an exciting period of growth and stabilization under its thirteenth president, Dr. Mordecai Wyatt

<sup>16</sup>Charles H. Wesley, The Quest For Equality: From Civil War to Civil Rights(New York:Publishers Company, Inc., 1970),p. 107.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 238.



Johnson. Dr. Johnson, elected to the office in 1926, had been welcomed with open arms by the faculty, not only because he was the first black president of the university, but because he had already attained recognition as an inveterate worker for his race. An intelligent and perceptive man, an orator of no mean repute, upon taking office he began persistent negotiations with the Federal Government which led to the legalization of an annual appropriation for Howard University, for which he received the Spingarn Medal in 1929. President Johnson attempted to secure for the University the most qualified personnel available, and Dr. Dykes joined the Faculty at his invitation. She was one of four to be added to the English faculty that year (1929), bringing its total staff to twelve, and increasing its doctorates to three.<sup>18</sup>

Being at Howard was somewhat like being home at last, but Eva realized that apart from the difference in perspective--formerly a student, now a teacher--there would be a difference in her relationship to the university brought about by the religion she now embraced. She thought it best to inform her superiors at the onset. Dr. Johnson, who grew to love and respect Dr. Dykes enormously, enjoyed relating the story of the manner in which she was brought

<sup>18</sup>Dyson, pp. 172-177.



to his attention. Speaking at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary on one occasion, he began:

I feel especially near to you . . . because one of the finest teachers I have ever known came from your church. Her name is Dr. Eva B. Dykes. She had received a Doctor's degree some time earlier from Radcliffe, and we were about to engage her as a teacher. Prior to taking the job, she had a conference with the Dean, saying, "Before you conclude this contract there is one thing you should know about me. I do not know if after you hear this you will wish to employ me or not, but I feel I must tell you I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and beginning at sundown on Friday until sundown Saturday I will be unable to do any work for the university, for in that period my church is foremost in my allegiance and I . . . will be able to give no service to the university." The Dean brought the matter to my attention . . . and said, "Mr. President, this is a very sad matter. I suppose this finishes it. We cannot employ this young woman. What a tragedy!" But I said to the Dean, "This does settle it. This makes certain we are going to employ this young woman."

"What do you mean, Mr. President? We cannot hire someone who has reservations about service."

I replied, "This is not a reservation but an affirmation. And I would further suggest that any woman who has the center of her life so dedicated is worth keeping, and we should not run the risk of losing a young person of that type. She will be just as loyal to the university on the other six days as she is to the church on the Sabbath." 19

Eva's stand for her convictions impressed Dr. Johnson, himself a fine Christian and minister of the Gospel, who in 1930 was chosen by Rabbi Stephen Wise as one of the ten greatest religious leaders in the country.<sup>20</sup> As a person and as a teacher she commanded the same respect and regard among her colleagues.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, "Impossible Dream," p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Dyson, Howard University, p. 339.



Howard University annual or biennial "progress reports" indicate that Dr. Dykes kept busy and at the top of her profession through many avenues: She took occasional summer classes, held membership in several professional organizations and attended as many of their meetings as her schedule allowed; she was chairman or member of College committees like the Freshman Committee and the Catalog Committee; she was sponsor or advisor of various campus organizations; her pen was busy in many endeavors besides grading students' papers. She had been writing before she came to Howard, and now she continued, publishing in various black and religious journals, among them The Crusader, The Negro History Bulletin, The Journal of Negro History, Message Magazine, The Youth's Instructor, Review and Herald. In 1934, she started writing regular articles for Message Magazine, something she is still doing in 1980. She authored one book and co-authored another,<sup>21</sup> and was for years editor or co-editor of the Howard University Alumnus.

She was a very active church member, serving in a variety of church offices, and doing "missionary work" in the community. Mrs. Mitchell recalls that "after teaching school all week she volunteered to serve as a religious

<sup>21</sup>Eva B. Dykes, The Negro in English Romantic Thought, or A Study of Sympathy for the Oppressed (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1942).



instructor for our entire family on Friday nights." Reynolds mentions that she gave Bible studies and instruction to colleagues, many of whom became members of her church.<sup>22</sup> He adds, "She personally financed a regular systematic distribution of literature to a large group of teachers and friends in Washington and she kept up this mailing faithfully for years."<sup>23</sup>

In other ways, also, she was active in the community. She was in great demand as a musician, speaker, or consultant on subjects like women's concerns, youth problems, Christian education, so she had opportunity to visit several states and Canada, attending youth congresses, Women's Day and Careers Day programs, and similar rallies. She was a member of various civic and university clubs. One she particularly enjoyed was The Music Club where she was able to interact with outstanding musicians in the area. An accomplished pianist, she accompanied well-known artists like Madame Florence Cole Talbert of Memphis, Lillian Evanti of Washington, D. C., Charlotte Wallace Murray of New York, Josephine Muse of the Washington, D.C. Conservatory of Music, Louia Vaughn Jones and Wesley Howard, violinists, and Clarence Cameron White, composer and violinist. On one occasion she travelled to Bermuda as choir accompanist. She was also a skilful choir-director.

<sup>22</sup>"Impossible Dream," p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.



During fifteen years of dedicated service to Howard University, she witnessed its phenomenal growth under the astute leadership of Dr. Johnson. The Liberal Arts College alone mushroomed from an enrollment of a few dozen to over one thousand, with almost one hundred and twenty teachers in 1940.<sup>24</sup> She witnessed other widescale changes in the District of Columbia, as blacks clamoring for equality saw conditions slowly improve.

Dr. Dykes was keenly interested in developments which related to the black experience, for she had known from childhood the misery of racial discrimination and hostility. As children, she and her sisters were taken by their mother for Sunday rides to a recreational facility on the outskirts of Washington, D. C., where they joined other black children at the entrance and looked in at the white children having fun. As an adult she was excluded from many exclusive stores, theaters, restaurants. Even some hospitals were closed to blacks. She had had her first experience with "Jim Crow" as a young woman on her way to teach in Nashville, when she had to sit behind the engineer in the sooty coach reserved for blacks.

Such incidents made her sorrowful, rather than angry or bitter. She had a deep sympathy not only for her own race but for all minorities, and she believed what she had been taught in childhood, that prejudice does more damage to those who indulge in it than to those against whom it is directed.

<sup>24</sup>Dyson, p. 172-177.



A professed "non-violence" adherent who in later years modestly claimed that her involvement in the Civil Rights movement "has been confined to the fervent hope and prayer that some of the deplorable conditions among all minority groups might be remedied," she was nevertheless an intellectual militant in the tradition of her literary ancestors, John Woolman and Henry David Thoreau,<sup>25</sup> perceiving and calling attention to the problems.

One contribution was made through her writing. She published articles on one or another aspect of the subject, for example, "Lowell as a Poet of Freedom" (Negro History Bulletin). Her book, The Negro in English Romantic Thought, is subtitled Sympathy for the Oppressed. It is a heavily documented work which concludes that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, that emancipation of slaves in England was the work of the intellectuals who deplored the negro's plight and wrote sympathetically and voluminously about it. Sentiments of literary men, Eva Dykes claims, "culminated in the abolition of the slave trade and the subsequent emancipation of the slaves throughout the British Dominions."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> John Woolman was an eighteenth century American Quaker, one of Dr. Dykes' favorite writers. His Journal and Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negro Slaves are significant documents on early abolition movements in the U.S. See Thoreau's Civil Disobedience.

<sup>26</sup> The Negro in English Romantic Thought, p. 3.



She was for some time a member of NAACP, receiving its magazine The Crisis. She joined a layman's group that sought improved conditions and more recognition for blacks in her denomination. On one occasion she addressed the leadership of the World Church of Seventh-day Adventists on the subject of a school for black S.D.A. youth in the north (there was already one in the south), and had the satisfaction of seeing her hopes materialize with the founding of an academy in Pennsylvania some years later. She was one of two delegates selected to present the "black case" before the president of the World Church of Seventh-day Adventists (the General Conference), on which occasion she articulated the discriminatory practices of the church methodically, with perceptiveness and dignity. She has lived to see dramatic, miraculous changes within the denomination.

Her broad sympathy for all people sprang from her intellectual awareness and from her upbringing. Like Socrates she saw that it is much more damaging to the individual character to do injustice than to receive it.<sup>27</sup> She understood why whites, particularly southern whites, never addressed a black man as "Mr. ----." "Mister" comes from the Latin magister, master, and whites, she realized, subconsciously refused to give that status to blacks. However, Eva Dykes believes that such "status" is meaningless. Dr. Rey-

<sup>27</sup>This concept is discussed at length in Plato's Republic.



nolds records:

Dignity, she was raised to understand, had nothing to do with one's social station: character, conduct, were everything. . . . She tells her students that the doctorate is purely an academic title and it is not necessary for people to call her doctor. However, she had found it imperative at one time to use the title at a post office in Huntsville because there a Negro woman either had a title or she would be called auntie or referred to by her first name. Neither of these, of course, was acceptable to her and the title was used merely as a defense.<sup>28</sup>

By precept and example, she taught that battles can be won by character, conduct, and hard work, that pride in one's self is more important than race or color.

Another "minority" of which Dr. Dykes was a member, and whose affairs concerned her was women. In spite of their supposedly secondary role in society, her research revealed that "Women have always played an important role in all great historical movements."<sup>29</sup> She knew what it meant to be discriminated against as a woman, especially in the matter of salaries. When she came to Oakwood College, she was earning \$41 a week, "One dollar less than I am making," the president told her. But as time passed, things changed.

Irene Wakeham recounts:

One day outside Moran Hall she overheard one of the men professors thanking President Frank L. Peterson for the raise he had been given.

"Raise? What raise?" Dr. Dykes asked the president. "Why didn't everyone get a raise?"

"But Dr. Dykes," he told her with a smooth, conciliatory gesture, "You are a woman."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Reynolds, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup>The Negro in English Romantic Thought, p. 127.

<sup>30</sup>Irene Wakeham, "Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes," Spectrum, 12 May, 1975, p. 8.



Dr. Dykes was shocked, but not dumbfounded. "Elder Peterson," she asked quietly, "when I go to the store to buy food or books, do they charge me less because I am a woman? Does it cost me less to ride the bus because I am a woman?" Unfortunately, her inarguable logic did not change the situation.

One of the most comprehensive chapters of The Negro in Romantic Thought is devoted to the British women who agitated against chattel slavery. Dykes' conclusion, based on exhaustive research (See chapter on "Some Women Abolitionists"), is that "The actual abolition movement in England seems to have been started by a woman."<sup>31</sup> She agreed with one authority that "it was the persistence of a woman . . . that brought the whole question of the abolition of the slave trade before the British Legislature."<sup>32</sup> In some of her articles, also, for example, "Bible Women as Good and Bad Counsellors" (Review and Herald), Dr. Dykes demonstrated her interest in women as a group.

In 1944, Eva Dykes agreed to move to Huntsville, Alabama, to teach at Oakwood College, a small black Seventh-day Adventist school which, although it had been in operation for almost fifty years, had been granted senior college status only the year before. This would be a drastic move: A single woman, well into middle life, a gentle, cultured

<sup>31</sup>Dykes, p. 127.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 128.



woman who had spent all her life in the atmosphere of a fairly large university in the nation's progressive capital, was moving to a "school in the woods" in the Heart of Dixie. Life in Washington, D. C. was no "crystal stair," but facilities for blacks were far superior to those in Alabama. Besides, it was wartime, and generally, life would be more circumscribed in a rural area. At Oakwood College, students were required to show they had brought their own sugar and food rations before they were allowed to register. On receiving her resignation, President Mordecai Johnson urged her to reconsider, not merely because he was reluctant to lose an outstanding teacher, but because he realized what a tremendous sacrifice she would be making--much as he admired her for it. She courteously declined, and Dr. Johnson, besides writing a beautiful testimonial for her, arranged with the Board of Trustees to release her not as a resigning teacher, but as "a member of the Faculty on indefinite tenure." Colleagues shook their heads, and learning of the tremendous salary cut she would be taking, offered to send her a monthly "stipend."

Dr. Dykes was fully aware of the limited facilities of Oakwood College and the rampant Jim Crowism in Huntsville. She had visited the campus on previous occasions, had delivered the commencement addresses in 1940 and 1944; and being the only black S.D.A. institution of higher learning, Oakwood was well known in black S.D.A. constituencies.



Two admiring articles on her life were published, in 1973 (Review and Herald) and in 1975 (Spectrum Magazine), and several interviews, biographical and topical, were taped and recorded for her files in the archives of the Eva B. Dykes Library, and for inclusion in works on outstanding blacks and women. A representative of Howard U. requisitioned some of her material for the University Archives.

In 1976, she received an invitation from Dr. Geraldine Rickman, president of the National Association of Black Professional Women in Higher Education (NABPWHE), to be the guest of honor at the charter meeting of the Association in Wingspread, the Johnson Foundation Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, on April 5. Accompanied by her friend, Mrs. Ruby Troy, Dr. Dykes flew to Wisconsin, was given charter membership in the Association, and honored as the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States. Mrs. Troy, a woman of talent and culture with first-hand experience of what it has meant to be a black woman in America, was enthralled. There were hundreds of black women present, all holding doctoral degrees. The occasion was historic, the most significant venture of its kind ever attempted by black women.

One word which has been used repeatedly by those who have known of Dr. Dykes' academic achievement is "inspiring." Her scholastic record was an incentive to many. Her friend Mrs. Lillian Ashby reminisces on the impact of Eva's accomplishment at Howard and Harvard, "It was such an inspiration



Dr. Dykes stressed the importance of mastery of material at each level of schooling in the concept of "minimum essentials." "There should be a clear knowledge of what should be expected of pupils beginning with the primary grades. No student, in my opinion, should pass from one grade to another until he has met these requirements." Dr. Dykes' syllabuses were always several pages long, with requirements clearly outlined, and students who failed to complete the requirements knew what to expect. She worked patiently with students, determined "to get the subject matter across," as Mrs. Myrtle Murphy puts it. Dr. Cooper never sat in any of her classes, but as student and teacher he remembers her campus-wide impact through her English cooperation program and her stress on "minimum essentials" and audibility. He calls Dr. Dykes "a teacher of teachers."

Other qualities which Dr. Dykes' students remember her stressing in the classroom were punctuality and dependability. As usual, she practiced what she preached. Dr. Millet recalls, "Late one night, Dr. Dykes rushed down to the president's home to submit a report which technically was due within that deadline date." And Dr. Lewis J. Larson, who was sparing in compliments to his faculty, said, "I have appreciated your prompt and courteous cooperation in the various committee assignments and extra-class responsibilities." Recognizing her dependability he added, "I have always felt that if Dr. Dykes was doing something, we could be sure it would be done



well."

Academic excellence only would hardly have earned for an individual the honors which Eva Beatrice Dykes has accrued. Every citation she has received has made mention of her character and personality, and often of her talents outside the classroom. On presenting her the Howard University Alumni Award on Charter Day, 1945, Professor Jason C. Grant, her former colleague in the Liberal Arts College, observed that few graduates of the university "had led so rich and varied a life or one so signalized by so many achievements as Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes."<sup>36</sup> He continued:

Here then, is a Howard graduate who has lived and is living a life not narrowed to the confines of a single category, but a full life characterized by a wide range of important activities and distinguished achievements. Such a life is in keeping with the highest . . . Christian ideals of the College of Liberal Arts of Howard University and thus merits richly such recognition as the Alumni Award can give.<sup>37</sup>

At her retirement, a citation from the Vice-President of the General Conference read:

The contributions which you have made in the field of education, music, public relations, and social graces, etc. are of inestimable value, and time can never replace. . . . In your teaching you have instilled in the students the finer and worthwhile things of life. . . . Also, the life goal of many a youth has been changed in the right direction because of the inspiration received from you.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Administration of the College, President Rock penned:

<sup>36</sup>Quoted by Reynolds, "Impossible Dream," p. 17.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.



to me," and surely it was an incentive to dozens of other young black women who knew her or knew of her. Mrs. Pauline Mitchell says that Dr. Dykes not only inspired her to go on to college but to enter her own field, English, and to work towards membership in the Howard U. Honor Society, Kappa Mu. Mrs. Helen Sugland says, "She constantly advised me to higher achievement (in education)!"

Her professional colleagues found her a source of inspiration. Forty years after their first meeting, Dr. Otis B. Edwards, , whose formal education had been acquired intermittently over a period of many years, told Dr. Dykes, "The words 'Doctor Eva B. Dykes' were the inspirational part of the introduction which began my acquaintance with you in Washington, D.C." Truly, as Dean Emerson Cooper once remarked, "she was a reservoir of inspiration and motivation to both teachers and students."

Another popular comment on Dr. Dykes as teacher is that she was thorough and diligent and expected the same of her students. Dr. Millet says, "Her courses were no 'snap,'" and Dr. Reynolds confirms, "She made students toe the mark." Dr. Charles Bradford says that he and other ministerial students who entered Dr. Dykes' journalism class "with the idea that it must be endured in order (for them) to graduate from the theological course," not only learned to enjoy it but were made to realize "almost immediately" that the class "would indeed be no lark."



Your retirement we regard as a termination of a brilliant and productive career in the active service of higher education. . . . Your vitality and awareness being what they are cannot be muffled or inhibited by such a small thing as retirement. . . .

In a formal commendation for Dr. Dykes, upon her nomination for the Outstanding Educators Award in Vienna, Dean Cooper wrote:

The record of Dr. Dykes' contribution to Oakwood College is an illustrious and enviable one. She has served Oakwood with conspicuous excellence, with unflagging dedication, with extreme devotion, and with profound qualities of gentle greatness. . . . Dr. Dykes brought a spirit of true greatness to Oakwood College.

From California, a former administrator of Oakwood College, Mr. H. T. Saulter, wrote Dr. Dykes:

I enjoy building things with wood. There have been a few items that I have constructed from wood and when completed I enjoyed seeing them placed where they served in some useful function. You are a builder, also. You have been building minds. Unlike objects of wood, minds are not completely finished and then put to some useful task. The training which you have given to the minds of hundreds of young men and women have set in motion thinking powers that are ever growing broader and deeper. What joy can be yours as you lay aside your regular teaching duties and see many of your former students pushing forward and making strides in their journey throughout this life. . . .

In 1980, the writer of this paper found that former colleagues, students, and friends of Dr. Dykes were delighted to talk about Dr. Dykes, and the qualities which impressed and influenced them in their contact with her. "Candid camera" initial responses to request for information about Dr. Dykes have been impressive and revealing. Recently-retired Oakwood Professor of English, Mrs. Florence M. Winslow, whom



colleagues regard as a repository of knowledge, said, "I am practically a hero-worshipper of Dr. Dykes." Perhaps only those who know Mrs. Winslow's conservative stand on hero-worship could fully appreciate this remark. Mrs. Winslow and Dr. Dykes were on the Faculty together for many years, and co-authored a Manual of English. Mr. Alan Anderson, himself a brilliant man and an author, who has known Dr. Dykes from his childhood, commented, "She is a super person," and a contemporary of Dr. Dykes, who has known her for many decades, told the writer over the telephone, "You are working with a great soul, and expressed best wishes for my success in this worthy endeavor. The highest tribute that can be paid to an individual is the sincere testimony of those whose lives have been influenced by his.

Among the qualities which Dr. Dykes' acquaintances found very striking were humility and modesty, and in sum, her sweet, gentle nature. Former Howard classmate, the late Reverend E. Smith, referred to her as "modest little Eva," and her friend, Lillian Ashby observes, "her unassuming manner has always impressed me. . . . Some of lesser stature--with limited ability--have been far more arrogant, ostentatious, and vocal than she." For eleven years Dr. Dykes held the only doctorate on the Oakwood faculty. President F. L. Peterson, who succeeded Mr. Moran in 1945 often lamented: "I long for the day when one faculty member could greet another on this campus, 'Good morning, Doctor,' and



receive the response, 'Good morning, Doctor.'" Dr. Dykes' unique position never went to her head. As Dr. Reynolds remarked, "Attitudes of class superiority she considers not only in excess of her credentials but distasteful in themselves."<sup>38</sup> His observation that "There are about her no put-on or professional airs" was as true in the early Oakwood years as at any other time in her life. Someone once asked Dr. Dykes whether she was ever bored by her close association with church members who were well below her educational level. She responded, "Never. I enjoyed the company of the members of the Church because there is a tie that binds members of an S.D.A. church together all over this wide world."<sup>39</sup>

Dr. Dykes remembers favors with gratitude. She repeatedly thanks Dr. Millet for making her first European tour possible, and Dr. Reynolds for arranging to have pictures taken of her and her sister in different European cities. She shared none of Dr. Millet's regret that she could not have received a larger gift.

Mrs. Helen Jackson notes that despite her evangelical spirit and her firm commitment to the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Eva Dykes was always very tolerant and respectful of other people's beliefs. Mrs. Pauline Mitchell adds that she was "adaptable and comfortable

<sup>38</sup>"Impossible Dream," p. 17.

<sup>39</sup>Interview by Clara Rock, 1975. (Taped). Copied for E. B. D. Library.



in the company of many types of people--the elite, the intelligentsia, students, the underprivileged, religious, those not professing her religious faith." Mrs. Helen Sugland, her friend of fifty years, affirms, "Eva walked with kings and never lost the common touch."

Old students recall with gratitude Dr. Dykes' interest in people, their concerns and problems. She taught her students by precept and example to be interested in people.

One English Literature course objective was typical:

To discover in the literature of England the characteristics of the English people: their desires, their hopes, their achievements, and their ways of thinking.

She lived what she taught, and her life has been beautiful.



VI

A thing of beauty is a joy forever;  
Its loveliness increases, it can never  
Pass into nothingness . . .

John Keats

Today (1980) Professor Emeritus Eva Beatrice Dykes lives quietly at her home on the campus of Oakwood College. Health habits of a lifetime stand her in good stead: she is amazingly active and agile. Her speech is still peppered with literary allusions, her daily newspaper is still read in its entirety--"I read every word," she smiles almost apologetically; "it's a bad habit I must break." She tries to refrain from making more clippings, to add to the hundreds which stuff her files and demonstrate the many issues which have interested her through the years: the problems and progress of blacks and women, the relevancy of literature to life, religious matters, and many others. Her mind is alert as she ponders and discusses the problems of the world--"What do you think of-----? . . . If I were President Carter, I would . . ." She is enjoying her retirement in peace and dignity.

In a century that will survive in history through people like Mary McCloud Bethune and Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Jesse Jackson, hers . . . has been a quiet, almost uneventful life; but she deserves her place in the pantheon. Com-



mitted to a policy of refusal to retaliate, she nevertheless managed to play an aggressive role in the improvement of several thousand black people. As a black person, as a woman, as an academician, she has been a trailblazer. She will be remembered.