

Minnie Canarah Lyon, RN'29

(1886-1991)

Minnie Canarah Lyon, the second of four children born to Luster and Della Hester Lyon, began her life in Granville County, North Carolina, about two miles from Oxford, in 1886. Her established birth date is December 25.

She attended Person County public schools and later Mary Potter Academy, a high school from which she graduated in 1915. Following graduation, Minnie taught for one term at the Northside School, near Oxford. She then moved to Durham, where she did domestic work because teaching afforded her little income.

In the fall of 1916 Minnie attended the Woman's Convention of North Carolina meeting in annual session at the White Rock Baptist Church, in Durham, pastored by Dr. Benjamin Brawley. It was here that she offered herself as a missionary to the foreign field. Dr. A. M. Moore, a local physician, was in the audience and volunteered to sponsor Sister Lyon's education at the Religious Training School at Chataqua and continued her education in preparation for greater services to God by doing post-graduate work at Spellman Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Moore financed this part of her education as well. After a semester at Spellman, Minnie returned to Durham, North Carolina, and took nurse's training at Lincoln Hospital. However, she was able to finish only half the requirements for graduation.

In 1921, Minnie accompanied Dr. and Mrs. William H. Thomas to Brewerville, Liberia, in West Africa, where she served as an instructor and nurse in the mission station erected and maintained by the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention of the United States. Dr. and Mrs. Thomas were pioneers in the development of the Lott Carey Program in Liberia. Minnie worked conscientiously alongside them to answer the call of service to these people who lived in what was then a dark continent of the world.

Feeling that she needed more training to minister to the ills of those she served, as well as carry to them the message of Gospel, Minnie returned to Durham and completed the requirements for a professional nursing degree, thereby becoming a registered nurse (RN).

Continuing to answer the call to advance her training, Minnie took post-graduate work in public health at Harlem School of Nursing in New York City. She returned to Africa a year after graduation and worked there until 1937. Somehow she was not satisfied with the support the mission was getting from her Christian friends in the States, so, in the spring of Convention, Minnie traveled throughout North Carolina and other states recruiting for the foreign fields and trying to interest more Baptists in supporting the foreign missionary program.

In the fall of 1937, Minnie returned to Africa and continued her outstanding work with the people she had learned to love so much. It was during this time that she met a little girl whom she called Hawa and took her to the mission station to be taught the rudiments of the mission school. Minnie worked there until 1946, when she returned to the United States. She stayed in North Carolina and traveled for the Lott Carey Convention as a returned missionary. Two years later, she returned to Africa. She continued her work in the mission school until 1951. She then returned to North Carolina, where she retired from the foreign field and made and made home in Durham. In 1961, she was instrumental in getting the Women's Baptist Home and Foreign Missionary Convention of North Carolina to bring Hawa to the United States. Hawa entered Shaw University, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to train for service as a teacher and missionary to her people in Africa. After completing the requirements for the bachelor's degree, Hawa returned to Africa and began working just as she had wanted so much to do, helping her African friends and trying to point them toward a better life. Thus, for Minnie, another dream had become a reality, and Hawa was certainly another star in her crown. Hawa was one of a number of African students from the mission school at Brewerville who crossed the mighty ocean to train in an American school and then return to their native land to help others.

One would think that after such a full life of service to others Minnie would take to the familiar rocking chair of the retired and rest and rock for the duration of her life. But not Minnie. After returning to North Carolina, she continued to travel innumerable miles to carry "light of the Gospel" to young people and encourage them to give their lives to the foreign fields and to seek financial support for the Lord's work. She did not miss a single annual session of the Woman's Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Convention until her health began to decline. Although her vision was very poor and she was nearly blind, her face lit up with a child-like radiance when she asked to speak or to bring greetings to some church or conference. She believed that the Master had commanded her to lay down her sword and shield and come on home to rest forevermore.

*(Ms. Lyon's story was compiled from her obituary published by Fisher Funeral Parlor, Inc., Durham, North Carolina)*