

TO WILLIAM O. BROWN*

For those of us who have been members of the African Studies Association since its founding in 1958, it is hard to believe that Bill Brown will no longer be with us at our annual meetings and as an ever willing member of our committees. We became so accustomed to calling on Bill for advice and guidance at moments of crisis that we are just a bit at a loss when we realize we can no longer turn to him in need.

Bill was a founding member of the ASA, a member of its board, and its past President. These offices, to which Bill was overwhelmingly elected, were no more than fitting tributes to his qualities as a scholar and a leader in his field of study -- qualities which the members of the Association recognized and to which they gladly paid tribute. But Bill was much more than a founding father; he was one of the small group who saw in the early fifties that African studies were to grow from the concern of a handful of devoted men to a major branch of area studies in the American academic roster. Bill was a member of the small committee which met from time to time in 1956 and 1957 to lay out the goals and purposes of the future association. Bill's wise counsel then, as it has so often since, prevented us from making irretrievable errors. I can remember sitting in several long and confused planning meetings in the Spring of 1958 in which alternative forms of the Association were brought up, one after another, and at the end, the group turned to Bill, who, seemingly, had absorbed all the confusing threads of the discussion. He was able to weave them together into a series of decisions which sounded much more intelligent than they ever were, I am sure, during our discussion; and out of them came the Association as it now is.

In the years since then Bill's help was always available when he was called on. More recently he served as an active counsellor to the Association's Research Liaison Committee. As its first Executive Secretary he played a key role in defining its objectives and in its day-to-day operations. He brought to it his many contacts in the field of African studies in Europe and the confidence his

*This talk was presented at the W. O. Brown Memorial Lecture at Boston University, February 27, 1969.

friends all over Africa had in any group with which his name was connected. Bill's interest in the development of African studies in the United States never flagged, despite his tasks as director of his own program here in Boston. He was the author of a definitive report on the state of the field in 1966, and only a few weeks before his passing he was in my office discussing proposals for further help to a committee of the Social Science Research Council taking a fresh look at the future of area studies.

Without him our annual meetings, our board and committee sessions will never be quite the same because the detailed knowledge he possessed cannot be duplicated. I speak for the fellows, the members and for the board when I extend to Ida and to the family our deepest sympathy.

I hope you will forgive me if I conclude on a personal note. During the years I have served as Executive Secretary of the Association, I came to know Bill Brown not only as a scholar and as an unfailing source of guidance through the thickets of the administrative jungle but perhaps more importantly as a warm, responsive, and sympathetic human being, for whom no request was too trifling to evoke his interest and his help. His judgments of people and of situations were always sound; when I disagreed with them, I almost invariably found to my cost that he was right in the long run. But such was his understanding of others that he never took the opportunity so often presented of telling me so. Bill's knowledge of Africa was wide and his understanding of its problems was deep and very personal. One had to know him well to appreciate the strength of his feelings on the issues of race in Southern Africa. For him African problems could never be mere academic abstractions or illustrations of a theory. They were human problems to which he reacted in the same way he did to the requests for help that were made to him by his day-to-day associates. It has often seemed to me that Bill Brown perhaps more than most of us who are concerned with Africa appreciated the significance of Abioseh Nicol's words:

You are not a country, Africa
 You are a concept,
 Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
 To hide our separate fears,
 To dream our separate dreams,
 Only those within you know
 Their circumscribed plot,
 And till it well with steady plough
 Can from that harvest then look up
 To the vast blue inside
 Of the enamelled bowl of sky
 Which covers you and say,
 "This is my Africa" meaning
 "I am content and happy."
 I am fulfilled, within,

Without and roundabout
I have gained the little longings
Of my hands, my loins, my heart
And the soul that follows in my shadow."
I know now that is what you are Africa,
Happiness, contentment, fulfillment,
And a small bird singing on a mango tree.

L. Gray Cowan
African Studies Association