

## Samuel Bownas to James Wilson.<sup>1</sup>

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Bridport, 12th of 2nd mo., 1751.

My beloved, worthy Friend.

Thine of the 12th of 12th month, 1750, came in due course, and I was glad to see it, not having heard anything of or from thee a long time; but was glad to find both thee and thy dear Sarah yet in the land of the living. I often think of you with much comfort and satisfaction, and of former times at Bendrigg and Greyrigg, how in the innocency of children, we enjoyed one another, and took great pleasure in our religious duties, according to our attainments and experience in Divine matters; but now alas! we have outlived the greatest part of our former Friends and acquaintance, and are left pretty much alone: for when I am in London, most of my old Friends are gone; so at other places, it is the same; and the young generation of this age don't seem to come up so well as could be desired. The Church seems very barren of young ministers to what it was in our youth, nor is there but very little convincement to what was then. It seems to me (and I have been a minister 54 years) that I had more service, and better success in my ministry, the first 20 years, than I have since had for a long time. I do not find any fruit or good effect of what I do that way; and yet what I am concerned in seems to be very acceptable and well received by others; but they don't, to my observation, have that good effect, as I could desire they should. I have closely examined where the fault is, but don't find it out.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Bownas was born in Westmorland about the year 1676, of Quaker parents. In his early youth, while working as a blacksmith, he does not appear to have had many religious impressions, but later, at about the age of twenty, religion took hold upon him and he commenced to preach in the meetings he attended. For many years he travelled over Great Britain and Ireland as a preacher, and twice visited America in the same capacity. He died at his home at Bridport in 1753. An autobiographical record of his life, entitled, *An Account of the Life and Travels of Samuel Bownas*, has run through various editions and may now be obtained in the reprint, brought out by J. B. Braithwaite, Jr., in 1895. This letter to James Wilson is reproduced from a copy made by the late John Mounsey, of Sunderland, for John Chipchase, of Cotherston, and presented to Friends' Reference Library, by Charles Brady, of Barnsley, (D. Portfolio 14.94.)

On my last journey into your parts, it seemed to very little purpose ; likewise in Norfolk, Suffolk, etc. It appeared to me that I had very good and edifying service in many places, but that is all I find come of it ; “ The man spoke well,” say they, and that is all I get for my labours. Now formerly, I rarely went a journey but I found some convincement, and taking this into consideration makes my heart oft sad, but we must submit, for unless our Master bless our ministry, we cannot make it profitable to them.

I have been little on horseback this winter, although, through mercy, I have had my health beyond what I could expect. I am sometimes fearful that by age I am grown indolent, and the peace and tranquillity of mind that I enjoy proceed more from that, than a solid foundation of the work of truth upon me ; and if it should so turn out, it will be a great loss and disappointment indeed, as I see nothing I have done worthy of so great favours that I now enjoy, [which] makes me inspect my own unworthiness more narrowly, and to acknowledge that at least I am but an unprofitable servant. I have sometimes, according to my thoughts, pretty agreeable service in public meetings, but then at times am jealous of myself, that I have more of form than power, and that may be the cause why so little of good manifests itself amongst them that hear. Dear Brother, we had never more need of one another’s prayers and assistance than now. All my travelling abroad, I count very small ; and if any good was done by my ministry my Master did it and let Him have the praise thereof, who is God, blessed for ever, Amen. I am now unfit for travelling, and go very little abroad. I now see that it is an excellent thing to do our day’s work, while strength of body and mind holds good. I am afraid to venture to Bristol, which is not much more than fifty miles, and I shall hardly see London any more. It would be very agreeable to me, as a man, to be at the Yearly Meeting once more, but I dare not venture, except a considerable constraint was upon me to undertake it. I am very unfit for service of any kind, for my paralytic disorder unfits me for writing ; I cannot write till afternoon, and then only for a time, but can do it pretty intelligibly, so as I can read it myself ; but am four or five days writing so much as this letter contains.

I visit about eight Meetings, between ten and fifteen miles distant. I can ride about twenty miles a day, pretty well, on my old horse : am loth to part with him, but he

seems as though he would outlast me : he was twenty years old last Spring ; and I am going on seventy-five ; so the horse and his rider come near 100 ; not many such instances to be met with. My hearing is much declined ; but my sight is tolerable, with the help of glasses. I can walk as nimbly as I could for years back, and my legs as clear and free from swelling as ever I knew them. My memory is much impaired, but I sleep very sweetly and have no pain or aches in bed : these favours of Providence are great, for which I desire to be humbly thankful. Sometimes I have according to my ability comfortable opportunities in the ministry ; but I am afraid of large Assemblies, my strength inwardly being impaired.

I have about Forty pounds a year to keep me, and I keep up my collection, and entertain all the ministers that visit us. Jonah Thompson<sup>2</sup> I miss much, not one minister within thirty or forty miles from me, and but two so near, and they lie very wide from each other. I very much admire thy steady, fair writing; some decline in one part and some in another : my legs are better than thine, and thy hands are better than mine : sometimes one part of the house decays faster than another. I have been part of five days writing this. With my dear love to thee and thy dear Sarah, thy son and daughter Coldwell, Jonathan Hedley, and such as may enquire of and for

SAMUEL BOWNAS.

P.S.—My dear love to David Hall, Lydia Lancaster, Robert Wardell, Robert and Grace Chambers, and John and Deborah Wilson.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jonah Thompson, a Dorsetshire schoolmaster, was at this time engaged in a religious visit to America.

<sup>3</sup> James and Sarah Wilson lived at Brigflatts, near Sedbergh, and their daughter and son-in-law, Thomas Coldwell and his wife, lived at Darlington. Lydia Lancaster, formerly Rawlinson, was a noted minister, of Lancaster, who travelled extensively. David Hall was the Skipton schoolmaster. Jonathan Hedley was a minister, of Darlington.

A long letter from S. Bownas to James Wilson, dated the 8th month of 1751, is in *D.* (Gibson Bequest MSS., i. 55), and another to the same correspondent, in 1736, is copied on to the fly-leaf of a volume of the *Memoirs of the Life of David Hall*, belonging to David Mort, of Birmingham.