

4 Christian Admirers

In sharp contrast to the hostility he encountered among Jews was Bennett's reception among Christians: "Notwithstanding the abhorrence of my brethren, yet I have always found in my distressed state some friends of the English Gentlemen, who were divested of religious and national prejudices; and with an eye of humanity and feeling were always ready to encourage me with their good recommendations in those branches of my occupations, to procure me a livelihood."¹ It was not only individual Christians Bennett admired but their culture and society that he discovered in London: "though varied sometimes in opinions, yet they are more nearly related in the sacred principles with us, than the other nations; but moreover, a glorious nation in whose light my brethren are enlightened; and in their shadow constantly refreshed[.]" He further expresses the

unbounded veneration I feel for our present Nazarenes with regard to their extensive capacities, active in all branches of human knowledge, particularly in the Arts and Sciences, and whose examples had made a strong impression on my mind; from my infancy I was constantly their admirer, and very much exerted myself to be their imitator: adding the benefit and liberal instructions I received in my travels abroad, but particularly here in London, from several Professors, Doctors, and Artists in the many branches of human Literature and Arts, in which noble pursuit I hope to live and die.²

He was particularly taken by the reception of *The Constancy of Israel*, his first book, as we have already noticed: "and although it [the publication of the book] did not affect my nation, in whose behalf of religion and liturgy it was calculated, yet it has had its good effect among many literary characters in this metropolis, which attracted their attention, and became my friends till the present day." Finally, he adds: "I have met with friends in trade, who supply me with work in my profession. I was honoured with some literary friends of the first rank and amiable characters in this metropolis." And at the same time, he was hindered by "that proud pontiff, [Rabbi] Sol. Hirschell, [. . .] to obstruct all intercourse among my nation, which might contribute to my temporal existence."³

Here then was a Jew with many intellectual and artistic talents rebuffed by the elites of his own community but embraced by an impressive number of pow-

1 Solomon Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place, Displayed, in a Series of Critical, Theological and Rabbinical Discussions, on a Hebrew Pamphlet, Entitled "Minḥat Kena'ot" (Avenge Offer)* (London: the author, 1818), 5.

2 Solomon Bennett, *Neṣaḥ Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), iv–v. I have quoted part of this strong statement earlier, in chapter 2.

3 Bennett, *The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place*, 5–6.

erful cultural and political figures from all corners of London's Christian community. Besides Bennett's testimony, we possess additional sources that reveal how wide and deep Bennett's Christian engagements were. There are of course a significant number of citations of his contemporaries in his writing, sometimes referring to them as his acquaintances or friends. There are the less frequent mentions of Bennett and his works in contemporary Christian writing. Lists of his patrons open each of his publications. There are his known engravings commissioned in London by various Christian donors. And most notably, Solomon Bennett is the subject of thirty-seven extant letters in the archives of the Royal Literary Fund requesting financial support for him and his family between 1824 and 1840, apparently from the time Bennett was unable to continue his work as an engraver. The letters represent both requests from individuals on behalf of Bennett and responses from the secretary of the society to those requests, as well as petitions and thank-you notes from Bennett himself when asking for or receiving a contribution from the fund.⁴

The individuals who wrote in support of Bennett were certainly among the elite cultural figures of London. I will first mention the three most prominent figures documented in the petitions to the Royal Literary Fund who genuinely stepped forward to support Solomon Bennett and his family: William Frend (1757–1841), a Unitarian reformer and close associate of Joseph Priestly;⁵ James Christie the Younger (1773–1831), an English antiquarian, auctioneer, and the eldest son of James Christie, founder of Christie's auction house;⁶ and Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865), surgeon, librarian of the Duke of Sussex, and distinguished Egyptologist.⁷

4 British Library, London, Western Manuscripts: Loan 96 RLF 1/526. Applications to the Royal Literary Fund by Mr. Solomon Bennett and Mrs. Elizabeth Bennett, his widow: Oct. 5, 1824 (£30); Dec. 19, 1826 (£20); Apr. 9, 1828 (£10); Mar. 20, 1829 (–); Dec. 1, 1829 (£10); Oct. 25, 1830 (deferred); Dec. 3, 1830 (£10); Jan. 2, 1832 (–); Feb. 3, 1832 (£10); Dec. 30, 1832 (–); Jan. 1, 1833 (£10); Feb. 1, 1834 (–); Mar. 2, 1835 (–); Nov. 27, 1837 (£10); Dec. 12, 1838 (–); Jan. 5, 1839 (£20—to Elizabeth Bennett); Feb. 4, 1840 (Elizabeth Bennett; rejected).

5 On Frend, see Nicholas Roe, "Frend, William (1757–1841)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, June 8, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10169>; Frida Knight, *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend (1757–1841)* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971).

6 On Christie, see H. R. Tedder, revised by Francis Russell, "Christie, James (1773–1831)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5363>; Frank Hermann, "Christie, James (1730–1803)," *Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5362>.

7 On Pettigrew, see Gabriel Moshenska, "Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew and the Study of Egypt in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *History of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 201–214; Gabriel Moshenska, "Selected Correspondence from the Papers of Thomas Pettigrew (1791–1865), Surgeon and Antiquary," *Journal of*

William Frend (see Figure 4.1) was a highly talented student at Christ's College, Cambridge, who was ordained in the priesthood of the Church of England in 1783. Four years later he left the church and, under the influence of a group of Cambridge dissenters, he declared himself a Unitarian. Frend was especially interested in the study of the Hebrew language and worked on a new translation of the Old Testament with his Unitarian colleagues and friends Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestly. Frend's pamphlet *Peace and Union Recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans*, written during the heat of controversy engendered by the French Revolution and published in 1793, led to his trial by university authorities, who banished him from Cambridge and forced him to relocate to London in the following year. He soon became prominent among the intellectual leaders of the reformist London Corresponding Society and one of the leading radicals of his day. His close friends included Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Dyer, and William Blake.

Frend first mentioned Bennett in a letter of October 1824 to the officers of the Royal Literary Fund, requesting financial support for his Jewish associate, who was then in dire economic circumstances:

Mr. Frend begs leave to recommend to the notice of the literary fund the case of Mr. Solomon Bennett, author of a very ingenious work entitled the Temple of Ezekiel, of which he has given in two plates the ground plan of the elevation. He is one of the most learned Jews in this country but from a family and wife of four children, decreasing business, and attachment to literature is at present in considerable distress. A donation of twenty or thirty pounds would extricate him from his difficulties and the money could not in strict conformity to the rules of the Institution be better employed.⁸

Frend also sent another letter to the Fund's secretary, Joseph Snow, with a similar request, also mentioning that he had sent him two of Bennett's publications. Within a short time, the officers responded favorably to Frend's petition, and Bennett wrote on November 14, 1824, to thank them profusely:

Open Archaeology Data 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5334/4f913ca0cbb89>; Gabriel Moshenska, "The Finest Theological Library in the World": The Rise and Fall of the Bibliotheca Sussexiana," in *Book Collecting in Ireland and Britain, 1650–1850*, ed. Elizabethanne Boren (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018), 168–187; Andrew Lister, "The Duke of Sussex and T. J. Pettigrew's *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*," *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* 14 (1987): 58–65; and John Symons, "Pettigrew, Thomas Joseph (1791–1865)," September 24, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22063>.

⁸ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, British Library, London, London, Western Manuscripts, Loan 96 RLF 1/526: 3.

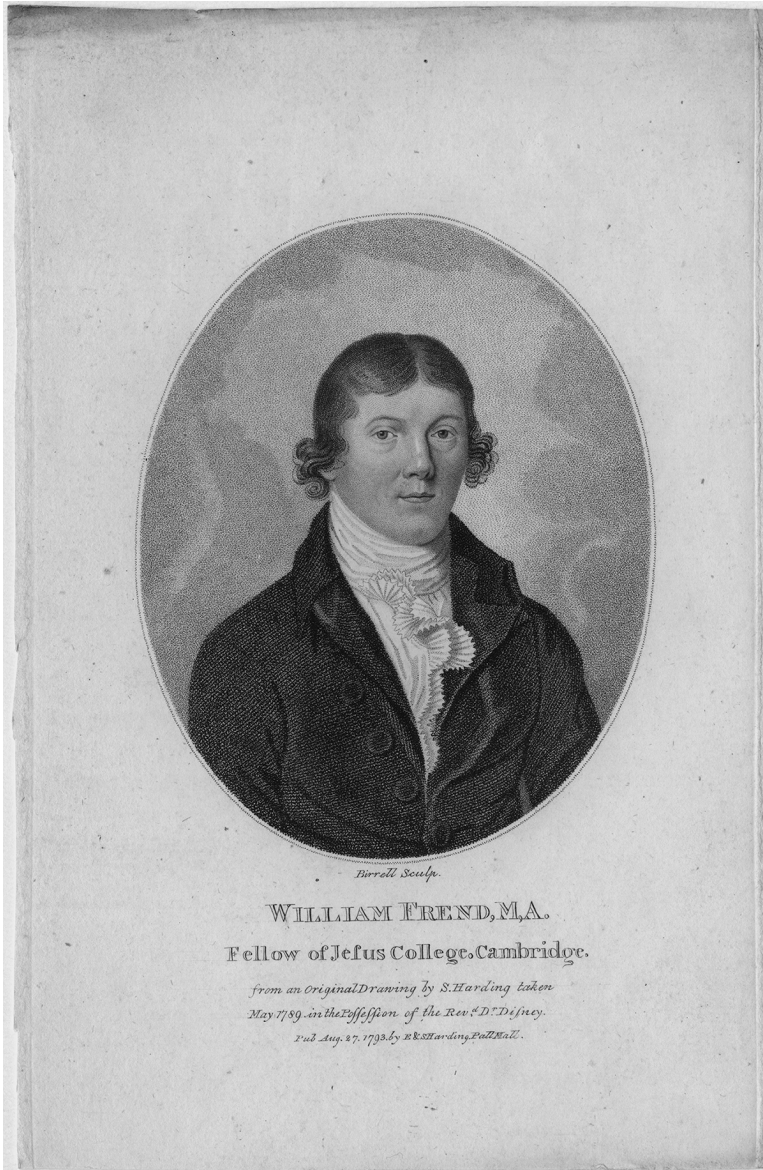


Figure 4.1: William Frend, Unitarian clergyman.

Gentlemen! Of the Committee of the Literary Fund Society. I am to acknowledge in the most thankfull manner your kindness in presenting to me through my worthy friend Wm. Frend Esq. the sum of thirty pounds as an assistance. Surely it will stimulate my literary pursuits

for the future *vehaba letaher mesayyin lo*, he that wishes to perfectionate himself finds always assistance (as the Rabbinic saying), and which kindness I cannot refrain from stating my sincere thanks; with true respect, I remain, Gentlemen your most obedient and humble sir, SBennett, 14 Panton St., Haymarket.⁹

Frend sent similar letters on behalf of Bennett at least twice more in 1834 and 1835.¹⁰

On the basis of these brief letters alone, it is hard to assess the nature of Frend's personal relationship with Bennett. Bennett did dedicate his book *The Molten Sea* (1821) to Frend, certainly a significant gesture. In addition, we might speculate about one reference in a letter written by Frend. The distinguished cleric's deep commitment to the study of Hebrew is well-known, but how he initially acquired his learning is less clear. Frend had seven children; the oldest daughter was Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan, who wrote *Threescore Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan* (1895), edited by her daughter Mary. Mary offers the following introduction to a rather obscure letter written in 1830 by her grandfather, which she confesses not to fully understand: "The following letter from William Frend to Lady Noel Byron expresses his interest in the Hebrew language and religion. What the enclosure referred to was I have been unable to ascertain, but it must have reference to a supposed outbreak of incendi- arism by Polish Jews." And here is the beginning of the letter:

My dear Lady Byron,

The enclosed confirms my opinion. Many books that you see in Hebrew characters are not written in the Hebrew language, but in that of the country where they were printed—German, Polish, Turkish, etc. A parchment found on the down of Cumberland once puzzled the learned, and after all it turned out to be merely a magic square, probably written by a Jew pedlar for his amusement. I do not blame, however, in these times of apprehensions of the turnpike people, but you may be sure of this, that, of all people in the world, the Jews are the least likely to be concerned with our conflagrations. My interpreter is a very learned Jew and if it falls in your way to recommend a Hebrew teacher to anyone, I beg you to remember him. I look upon it as a very great advantage of my early life that I came to town in one summer vacation on purpose to learn Hebrew. This led me to an acquaintance with the *nation*. I have dined in its booths on the Feast of Tabernacles, have several times taken the Pascal Supper—which, by the way, explains the New Testament better than all the commentary on the Lord's Supper—have spent hours upon hours in the synagogue on the days of the great atonement, have heard the Hosannahs repeatedly there; and the fruit of all this is that I think I see rather more clearly into the meaning of the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxvii., and of Rev. xv. 3 and xxi. 12 than the generality of my countrymen; and though the madness of the people should render England a scene of desolation, yet my last words will, I hope, be

⁹ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 7.

¹⁰ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 28, 30.

like those of Habakkuk iii. 17 ["Though the fig tree does not bud, and no yield is on the vine; [. . .] Yet I will rejoice in the Lord"; Hab. 3:17–18].¹¹

Was Frend referring to Bennett as his learned interpreter, his teacher? It is impossible to know for sure.

James Christie, in addition to his primary occupation as auctioneer, was also a scholar of sorts, publishing on chess, Etruscan vase painting, and the ancient worship of the elements. His business acumen did not quite equal that of his father, but under his leadership Christie's remained quite successful. He was also fascinated by poetical and biblical studies. His connection to Bennett was much more superficial than that of Frend (and as we shall soon see, of Pettigrew as well) and emerged exclusively from his active involvement in the Royal Literary Fund as its registrar for several years. In January 1827, he wrote the following letter to Mr. Snow:

Dear Mr. Snow, I have inquired into the case of Solomon Bennett and have visited him in the White Cross St. Prison where I gave him the twenty pounds noted to him by the Literary Fund Committee. I have requested him to transmit his acknowledgments for the same to the society's chambers. [. . .] He Is Considered a Man of Much Learning among Those of His Own Nation but of an Unfortunate Temper by Which He Has Disobliged His Best Friends, and among them here Dr. Hirschell whom he attacked with illiteracy and acrimony. [. . .] He Therefore Seems to Have Cut Himself off from the Possibility of Receiving Pecuniary Relief from the Wealthy of His Own People. His most valuable friend, I believe, was the late Lord Stanhope who seemed to have contributed to his larger work and probably to the good style and the introductory parts of it. His sole employer and his proper profession is as a seal engraver[, which, . . .] it seems, could furnish him with full employment were his talent for engraving in that line equal to his knowledge of Hebrew literature. He may yet gain a livelihood as a teacher of that language or as an engraver[.]¹²

Christie adds two interesting bits of information: Bennett's confinement to a debtor's prison and the dire straits into which he had fallen only a few years after his initial gift from the Fund, and his alleged relationship with Charles Stanhope—apparently the third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816), since Christie mentions he had recently died. Stanhope, a colorful figure in politics with interests in science as well, was clearly connected with Protestant dissenters. But it is difficult to tie him to Bennett, Hebrew, or biblical interests. This is the only men-

¹¹ William Frend, letter quoted in Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan, *Threescore Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan*, ed. Mary A. De Morgan (London: R. Bentley, 1895), 59–62n.

¹² Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 13.

tion of his support of Bennett, and even of his possible editorial intervention in *The Constancy of Israel*.¹³

Thomas Pettigrew (see Figure 4.2) was perhaps the most interesting of the three supporters of Bennett, certainly because of his complementary interests in Hebrew and biblical studies, but also because of his intimate relationship with Augustus Frederick (1773–1843), the Duke of Sussex, as we shall explore. Pettigrew, who excelled in medicine and surgery, was appointed personal physician to Prince Edward (1767–1820), Duke of Kent and Strathearnthe, and even won acclaim for vaccinating Princess Victoria, his daughter. After an introduction by Edward to his brother, the Duke of Sussex, Pettigrew was soon appointed the latter's physician as well. Following a visit to the duke's vast personal library during which he offered suggestions on its reorganization, he was invited to become the duke's librarian and was primarily responsible for the supervision and expansion of this collection of some fifty thousand volumes, most famous for its vast holdings of Bibles in many languages. Under the duke's influence, Pettigrew also became a Freemason. In addition to his medical writings, Pettigrew became a distinguished Egyptologist, publishing his most famous work, *History of Egyptian Mummies*, in 1834. Pettigrew was also responsible for a scholarly catalogue of the duke's library, *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*, published in two parts in 1827, containing the religious manuscripts and printed editions of the Bible. A second volume appeared twelve years later after a falling-out between the duke and his librarian, which considerably curtailed this ambitious publication.

On April 29, 1828, Pettigrew wrote to the custodians of the Royal Literary Fund:

Gentlemen, I try to recommend to your notice Mr. Solomon Bennett [. . .] who is at present time suffering. [. . .] He has, I am informed, been an early recipient by your excellent institution but I believe is not a justification from further relief should his case be thought worthy of reexamination. He has a wife and [. . .] five or six children which are dependent upon him. He is a Profound Hebrew Scholar but His Knowledge of the English Language Is Too Imperfect to Render His Literary Powers of Much Relief to His Family. By some criticisms upon interpretations of the rabbinical law, he has incurred the antagonism of the high priest and is even excommunicated from the Synagogue. By this his livelihood as a seal engraver, which was principally among those of his own persuasion, was completely destroyed and the poor man's resources cut off. I am satisfied that he is a man of good, I believe, of exceptional character. I now felt it my duty to ascertain myself before I gave him

13 See G. M. Ditchfield, "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, November 11, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26241>; John Opie, "Stanhope, Charles, third Earl Stanhope (1753–1816)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1001276>.



Figure 4.2: Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, librarian of the Duke of Sussex.

other relief myself or mention or insist it from others, and I feel too great an interest in your institution to recommend to it any individual who I am not most perfectly satisfied in deserving of attention. T. J. Pettigrew¹⁴

Pettigrew's endorsement yielded a ten-pound grant from the Royal Literary Fund, but Bennett's health and economic situation continued to decline and he wrote another letter over a year later, on March 20, 1829, begging for more. His reflections on his situation as a scholarly writer in London are quite revealing:

[. . .] I always devoted my time to the study of the fine arts in the different branches of engraving, for the support of my family; my vacancies of business I always devoted to the different branches of literary pursuits; parts of my literary productions are happily brought to light, and the public notice (the works of which cannot fail to escape your records) yet a great part are still preserved in my treasure of M.S. But unhappily, since seven months I became afflicted by a weakness in my sight, in so far as I am obliged to give over my engraving business (Dr. Pettigrew can bear testimony to my infirmity of sight). Happily, it has left me sight enough for the capability of reading and writing, which are the only means to draw from it a livelihood, though as most humble one for my [. . .] family. Nay to make a living from literary pursuits is the greatest question. For except those who have literary appointments in churches, synagogues, and public colleges, they are really exposed to beggary. As to receive emoluments from book sellers, these, to my knowledge, are the most unhappy views; as nothing but novels, books of Harriet Wilson, toilet books, satirical tracts etc. are the only current articles for publishers; literary productions do not suit their trade. The bookseller, like the baker and publican, calculates the consumption of the articles he undertakes; he even notices the quantity instead of the quality. Such are the hopes presenting to my views for the dayly support of me and my family to be squeezed out of the literary pursuits. Nay, even prejudice to not fail to have her share in the reduction of my temporal course. Having laid before your honourable society my real situation, I most humbly petition to forward your kind assistance on behalf of my present condition; viz., a small quarterly allowance in addition to the humble scrapings which I may gather from literary pursuits and with the other will enable me to preserve the humble condition of my family; to pursue my literary studies as well, as to attain to a promotion of a literary institution, which I have in view. Gentlemen, I do not forget that I have already received some of your bounteous assistance in times past. However, I have to notice that I have not yet proven richer and accordingly some small allowance may produce good effects too. Signed SBennett to the Honourable Council of the Literary Fund Society.¹⁵

Over the course of the next decade, Bennett regularly wrote to the society begging for support. Pettigrew also wrote follow-up letters in 1829 and 1832 on his behalf, but Bennett remained mired in financial debt and deep anxiety, as his letter of February 3, 1832, indicates:

¹⁴ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 8.

¹⁵ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 11.

I do not grow younger; my sight is not yet nor will it be restored; Accordingly, there is no hope of returning to my business of the art of engraving. Gentlemen! It is not an annual claim that makes me call on your laudable institution for relief, but it is the daily [. . .] grievances that urge me to appeal to you, at least once a year and I am to add, I suppose you gentlemen to be parents of families, no doubt that the emotions of your feelings give care to the calls of your tender offsprings, who call even for luxuries and paintings; how much more so be the feelings of parent when seven tender calls are daily crying for bread and other indispensable necessities of life like those of the present Petitioner? To erase from your mind suspicions and to corroborate facts. With vehemence and reluctance, I present you with my unfortunate credentials. Viz., a lot of small pawn broker tickets, which I am obliged to make money for the mere daily bread for my family!!!¹⁶

Bennett's relationship with Pettigrew clearly extended beyond these letters to their shared scholarly interests. At about the same time, in November 1828, Bennett asked Pettigrew if he would allow him to examine a newly acquired manuscript Pettigrew had purchased for the duke's library, a manuscript of a Hebrew translation of the Arabic commentator Averroës (Ibn Rushd) on Aristotle: "I shall be thankful if you can let me have a glance of the Hebrew Mss. of Aristotle intitled *Ha-Shamayim ve-ha-Olam*, The Heavens and the Universe, which you bought for the duke's library. This work was frequently handled and mentioned by the Hebrew Rabbies such as Maimonides, Rabbi Levi Ben Gershon in his work intitled *Proelium Domini* [The Wars of the Lord], and many more of the antient Rabbinical philosophers."¹⁷ Pettigrew not only agreed to this request but apparently asked Bennett to write a summary of the work in English, which he did and which he signed. The manuscript suggests a close working relationship between the Jewish scholar and the learned librarian; it also suggests that Bennett was familiar with the duke's library, had studied its books and manuscripts on other occasions, and was an ideal consultant to Pettigrew and to the duke himself on his Hebrew texts. It was understandably most appropriate for Pettigrew to reach out to support Bennett in dealing with his economic woes.

When one adds to these three the other intellectual figures in contact with Bennett from a variety of intellectual and political persuasions, the list of his associates is impressive. Among the more prominent are Thomas Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury (1756–1837); Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837); the aforementioned Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex; William Drummond (1769–1828), Scottish diplomat, poet, and philosopher; and Francis Foster Barham (1808–1871), the religious writer and founder of the Society of Ailists.¹⁸

¹⁶ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 20.

¹⁷ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS München 371, end of manuscript.

¹⁸ This list also includes two unusual female donors and associates of Bennett, Baroness Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee and Catherine Housman, who are discussed in the next chapter.

Thomas Burgess was a well-known high churchman, the Bishop of St. Davids and then Salisbury. His career began to blossom when he was first appointed examining chaplain to Bishop Shute Barrington of Salisbury. He published many works on Christian theology and antiquities in general, mastered Hebrew with a keen interest in Hebrew grammar, and was fascinated with biblical studies, as the holdings in his library testify.¹⁹

The sources suggesting personal contact between Burgess and Bennett are limited but nevertheless revealing. They consist of two mentions in Bennett's begging letters to the Royal Literary Fund. The first Bennett wrote on December 18, 1826: "As for references, your society may refer to my worthy friend Wm. Frend Esq., The R. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Salisbury as well as to your own records."²⁰ The extraordinary juxtaposition of the Unitarian Frend and the conservative Bishop Burgess as his primary references suggests the unique mixture of his Christian admirers. For indeed these two religious leaders could hardly have interacted with each other, let alone spoken with each other, given their polarized religious positions. But in their shared concern for this needy Jew, they were united. In another letter, dated January 14, 1831, Bennett mentions his gratitude to the Lord Bishop and indicates his intention to write to him: "I have something about a publication to write to him: The Bishop's address is Lord Bishop of Salisbury 17 Devonshire Place." The listing of Burgess's address does suggest a more intimate relationship between the two.²¹

Bennett also records a serious conversation he had with Burgess about the merits of the Kennicott project of restoring the original version of the Old Testament:

I once had a conversation with a worthy friend of mine, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, having presented him with some instances of gross corruption in the standing versions. His Lordship candidly confessed, that the Old Testament required a thorough revision by He-

¹⁹ On Burgess, see Nigel Yates, ed., *Bishop Burgess and His World: Culture, Religion, and Society in Britain, Europe, and North America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), and William Owen, "Burgess, Thomas (1756–1857)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1009447>.

²⁰ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 9.

²¹ Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, MS 526: 17. In his "Editor's Preface" to Bennett's *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* ([London: printed for the family of the late Solomon Bennett, 1841], 4), Francis Foster Barham wrote: "Solomon Bennett was known in his lifetime as one of the most eminent Hebrew scholars of his age. We believe he was the instructor of Dr. Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury, a prelate well calculated to estimate his merits and proficiency." Such testimony, if accurate, adds another dimension to Bennett's impact on his Christian associates and makes more credible my suggestion above that Bennett also tutored William Frend.

brew scholars, grammarians, and etymologists. The venerable bishop then asked my opinion with respect to the Hebrew and Samaritan Bible, edited by Dr. Kennicott, in reference to the collations he (Dr. Kennicott) made between the several MS copies which he collected from different parts, even from the Asian and African dominions, by means of the English ambassadors and consuls residing there (which, as I was informed, cost the Government about 24000 pounds), in which collations Dr. Kennicott thought he had discovered thousands of variations in the bulk of the MSS, which he styled different readings (the term different errors would be more becoming). I then demonstrated to his Lordship the impropriety, and the vagueness of the mode of his collations, and the unhallowed consequences resulting from it. “Dr. Kennicott,” said I, “would have done better to bestow his learning in behalf of a perfect version, instead of a collation of MSS which are without authority and correctness.” It is to be lamented, that the enormous sums of money devoted by Government to that religious, most sacred, and most essential subject, the possession of a perfect version of the Bible, have been all in vain.²²

Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough, was an Irish antiquarian who was shown the great Mexican manuscript the *Codex Mendoza* in the Bodleian Library and eventually decided to devote his life to the study of the antiquities of Mexico. Kingsborough promoted and edited, with copious notes, a magnificent work titled *Antiquities of Mexico, Comprising Facsimiles of Ancient Mexican Paintings and Hieroglyphics* (9 vols., 1830–1848). Its major aim was to demonstrate that the indigenous peoples of America were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. He apparently developed a relationship with Bennett based on their common biblical interests. Bennett was especially interested in the rare Hebrew books in his library, and King invited Bennett to peruse and study them.²³

In one instance, Bennett examined an extant manuscript of the Hebrew Bible from the late twelfth century. He was particularly excited by this discovery, since he thought it had been owned by the Jewish exegete David Kimḥi (ca. 1160–ca. 1235):

But happily for the literary world, the original MS. of the Old Testament of the most learned Rabbi David Kimchi (of Spain) which has contributed to posterity a treasure of learning in the knowledge of Scripture and grammar, has escaped those popish and hellish conflagrations [of many other medieval Hebrew manuscripts]. The original MS. is a most voluminous

22 Solomon Bennett, *Critical Remarks on the Authorised Version of the Old Testament: Containing Some Examples of Its Errors, with Specimens of an Amended Translation* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), 6–7. On Kennicott and his Bible project, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chap. 1.

23 On Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough, see Alfred Webb, “Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough,” in *A Compendium of Irish Biography: Comprising Sketches of Distinguished Irishmen, and of Eminent Persons Connected with Ireland by Office or by Their Writings* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1878), 275, and Gordon Goodwin, revised by Alan Bell, “King, Edward, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15560>.

folio volume, written on vellum, with the Massoretical annotations, and with Kimchi's minutiae in the grammatical and etymological indagations on Scripture, as we behold at the present day in our printed Bibles. This valuable MS. (written in the latter part of the 12th century,) now forms a portion of the library of the Right Hon. Lord Kingsborough. The MS. having been under my inspection, I took particular notice that at the end of that volume is a list of all Chaldaic words which are interspersed in the Holy Language of the Bible, which Kimchi introduced in an extra column, with the illustrations of the same in the Holy Language,—giving also his own testimony in the following terms: “*Amar David Bar Kimḥi ha-Sephardi z'l[.]*”²⁴

Elsewhere, Bennett describes a letter he received from Lord Kingsborough about a Hebrew translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*:

On this subject I shall quote a portion of a letter addressed to me by the learned Lord Kingsborough, respecting the *Almagest* rendered into the Hebrew language, with many additions and with most neatly executed astronomical designs of the Rabbies of old relative to it. The style of the language and the mode of writing exhibited in that volume vouch for its antiquity. His Lordship writes thus: “I was, however, not aware of its (viz. the *Almagest*) ever having been translated into Hebrew, although the fact does not in the least surprise me and I should even have inferred it from the varied and extensive erudition of the many eminent individuals of your nation who flourished in Spain several centuries ago[.]”²⁵

Bennett does not indicate if Kingsborough owned the manuscript or not. What is clear from these two references is the kind of scholarly exchange that Kingsborough and Bennett enjoyed.

Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex (see Figure 4.3), was connected to Bennett primarily through his librarian Thomas Pettigrew, as we have seen. But

²⁴ Solomon Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language: Showing Its Origin, in Unison with the Copiousness of Its Grammatical and Etymological System, to Have Been from Time Immemorial Retroceding to That of the Creation* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1835), 44–45n. Charles Sharpe's catalogue of sale of the Viscount Kingsborough's library lists several of Bennett's books (*Catalogue of the Rare and Valuable Library of the Late Rt. Hon. Edward Lord Viscount Kingsborough* [Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1842], 104) but does not mention this Kimḥi manuscript, which I cannot yet identify precisely. The list of Aramaic words is found in an appendix of Kimḥi's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, and apparently this is what Bennett saw when inspecting the Kingsborough manuscript. Cf. the Cervera Bible, for example, where Kimḥi's work is copied together with the biblical text (images and a description of this Bible are available at the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668000/>).

²⁵ Solomon Bennett, *Likūṭim me-ha'ataḥah ḥadashah 'al Torah, Nevi'im u-Ketuvim = Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible Translated from the Original Text, and Comprising Selected Chapters [. . .] Arranged in Three Columns, viz. the Authorized Version, the New Version, and the Original Hebrew Text* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1836), iv.

the duke was clearly viewed by many contemporary Jews as a genuine hero because of his commitment to Hebrew learning and his liberal views regarding Jewish civic emancipation. At his death, he was mourned in the synagogues of London. He was also known for his progressive views regarding the abolition of the slave trade, Catholic emancipation, and parliamentary reform. He was a major figure as well in London Freemasonry and even supported studies of religious history by the esoteric scholar Godfrey Higgins (1773–1833), which he hoped might form the basis of a new world religion.²⁶

It seems highly likely that while frequenting the duke's vast library, Bennett had more than one occasion to interact with him directly. There is no written evidence that such meetings occurred (although the duke is listed as a sponsor of several of Bennett's book projects), but a fascinating letter that Bennett addressed to the duke when presenting him with a copy of his *Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible* (1836) is extant. The handwritten letter, composed on February 22, 1837, less than two years before Bennett's death, was inserted into a copy of the book now located in the British Library.²⁷ Bennett opens:

It would be injustice done to your Royal Highness the zealous student and admirer of the holy language and its literature to withhold from you that great sacred design, so essential and universally desirous object as bliss of a New and judicious Version, with judicious critical illustrations of the Hebrew Bible, the specimen I am now submitting to the erudite judgement of your Royal Highness's consideration; the integrity of which has been suppressed and buried for the period of 1800 years past, not to let it sink anymore into oblivion.

While Bennett apologizes profusely for approaching the duke with a request for support, he justifies his appeal by noting his humble circumstances, the intensity of his labor, and the sacredness of the task. But he is fully aware of the im-

²⁶ On the Duke of Sussex, see T. F. Henderson, revised by John Van der Kiste, "Augustus Frederick, Prince, duke of Sussex (1783–1843)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/900>, and Adam Shear, "Footprints and the Duke of Sussex (Augustus, 1773–1843)," *Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Space*, April 24, 2020, <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/footprints/2020/04/24/footprints-and-the-duke-of-sussex-augustus>. The great affection shown the duke by the London Jewish community is illustrated by the eulogies offered at his death, such as Louis Loewe, *A Discourse [on Ps. cxix. 55] Delivered [. . .] on the Day of the Funeral of H.R.H. Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex* (London: J. Wertheimer, 1843); *Tefilah ye-taḥanunim: [. . .] be-vate kenesiyot ha-Ashkenazim be-London uve-khol malkhut Britanya beyom kevurat ha-sar* (London, 1843); Abraham Belais, *Elegy on the Death of His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex: Also a Prayer for Her Majesty the Queen and All the Royal Family, Heb. & Eng.* (London: the author, 5603 [1843]).

²⁷ My thanks to Professor Joanna Weinberg for sending me a photograph of this letter (British Library Shelfmark 01903.e.5).



Figure 4.3: Augustus Frederick, the Duke of Sussex.

pact of the duke's opinion on any matter, including his influence on his Jewish subjects:

Considering therefore the magnitude of the work, and the great Spring of the audibility given to the voice of your Royal Highness at large, but of the wealthy members of the Synagogue in particular (among whom my humble situation can form no figure), to recommend and to stimulate them to take part in the object and design, which tends *likhvod ha-Torah u-likhvod Beit Yisrael* (In honor of the Torah and the House of Israel). Considering that is not in the power of my most humble circumstances to bring into the world a work of such magnitude, and so expensive as this is in the design of the account of,

he appeals to the duke for his assistance. He adds finally that the specimen has been already examined by Dr. Samuel Lee, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge “and of some of his Cambridgian friends before it has been submitted to the press.”

Bennett's letter is interesting in that it appeals to a Christian duke to raise money particularly from the Jewish community, an ironic admission that Bennett's approach to his fellow co-religionists is ineffective. But with the duke's stamp of approval, his grandiose project of retranslating the Hebrew Bible might come to fruition. The involvement of a Christian scholar of Hebrew of the stature of Samuel Lee in approving Bennett's work is also revealing.²⁸

In the English version of his commentary on Ezekiel's Temple, Bennett included some of his short remarks on the book of Daniel stimulated by questions addressed to him by an illustrious Christian friend, William Drummond (see Figure 4.4). Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond was a distinguished classical scholar and diplomat, serving in Italy and the Ottoman Empire. Besides his numerous scholarly studies, he also was well known for his radical religious views on Christianity. In 1811 he printed for private circulation his *Oedipus Judaicus*, in which he attempted to prove that the Old Testament was an extended astrological allegory. The book immediately incurred the wrath of several critics, including Mrs. Catherine Housman of Bath, who was one of Bennett's most enthusiastic supporters, as we shall see.²⁹ Using his vast knowledge of ancient pagan religions and archaeology, Drummond insisted that the Hebrews had invented the zodiac, that the zodiacal structure found at Palmyra was built by Solomon, and that multiple biblical passages could be reduced to an astrological explanation, especially those describing the Temple and Tabernacle.

²⁸ On Lee, see Thomas Hamilton, revised by John D. Haigh, “Lee, Samuel (1793–1852),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16309>.

²⁹ On Drummond, see Muriel E. Chamberlain, “Drummond, Sir William, of Logiealmond (1770?–1828),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 5, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8088>. On Housman's work against Drummond, see the next chapter.



Figure 4.4: Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond.

Bennett, along with his other Christian associates we have already mentioned, certainly would not have agreed with the radical thesis of Drummond's work.

Nevertheless, he respected his Christian interlocutor; and as the following conversation well illustrates, that respect was reciprocated. Here first is Bennett:

I was highly gratified with your approbation of my work, but still more so by the MS. *Remarks* I received from you, the sentiments and inquiries in which evince the liberality of your mind. It is truly gratifying to find men who are above religious and national prejudices, as such are the supporters of the whole of the human race, affording that counterbalance to general dogmas and hypothesis, without which moderation and truth would be crushed beneath the weight of misrepresentation and of error.

And here is Drummond's thoughtful response:

I have to thank you for your answer to my Remarks. My occupations at this moment make it impossible for me to enter into particulars. I must do you the justice, however, to say, that I think you defend the *Hagiographer*, not only with ability but with candour. I will fairly own to you, that the latter part of the *remarks* was written chiefly with the view of knowing your sentiments on the subject. Perhaps you are not aware, that we *N[otsrim]* (I dare not say plainer) seldom know the grounds on which you *H[ebrews]* rest your defense. See an article in the last Monthly Review, in which you are openly attacked, (it is necessary and unavoidable for the fairest and most candid critic in our happy land of free opinion,) and yet, to those who look below the surface, you are secretly praised and encouraged.³⁰

In 1841, three years after Bennett's death, Francis Foster Barham edited and published *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible* on behalf of his family.³¹ This volume was only a small portion of a much larger project, intended to encompass the entire Hebrew Bible with Bennett's English translation and notes. By editing Bennett's manuscript and adding an approving introduction, Barham lent his prestigious name to the list of Christian acolytes who appreciated this Jew's efforts on behalf of the dissemination of the Hebraic legacy.

Barham was an accomplished and remarkably prolific writer, editor, and philosopher who articulated a theological system that strove to unite all the scattered truths of every religion without their errors. In 1843, he claimed to have discovered the supreme central doctrine and gave it the name of Alism, A, Al, or Alah

³⁰ Solomon Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel: viz. An Elucidation of the 40th, 41st, 42nd, &c. Chapters of Ezekiel, Consistently with the Hebrew Original; and a Minute Description of the Edifice, on Scientific Principles, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View* (London: published by the author, R. Hunter, and M. Solomon, 1824), appendix, 132, 146. The article mentioned by Drummond is by the Reverend Dr. Christopher Lake Moody, in *The Monthly Review or the Literary Journal Enlarged* 68 (August 1812): 396–401 (article 8).

³¹ The title page reads: *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible: The Hebrew reprinted from the text of Heidenheim / the English version [. . .] revised by the late Solomon Bennett [. . .] ; the Hebrew text [. . .] corrected by Mr. H. A. Henry; [. . .] edited by Francis Barham, Pts. 1–2.*

being the most ancient and universal title of the deity in Hebrew Scripture. In later years he devoted considerable energy to the preparation of new translations of the Old and New Testament in chronological order, a herculean task that he was unable to complete.³² He learned of Bennett's unpublished translation of the Old Testament and decided to publish it alongside the Hebrew original. I return to this effort in chapter 8. Here I quote from the preface to this volume to demonstrate his great appreciation of Bennett and his work:

It is just because the translation is Mr. Bennett's, that it is so valuable in the eyes of unprejudiced truth-searchers. He was a Hebrew, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," and with all the peculiar sagacity and learning of his nation he came to his work of translating its sacred documents. He brought to the study of the original a mind singularly erudite, yet free, bold, and unfettered. To translate the Hebrew Bible for himself, and to satisfy the critical aspiration of his own soul, was his favorite design for many a studious year. He knew that to please himself was the best way to please the world, and he never deserted a text till he conceived that he had perfectly understood and expressed its latent power in definite terms. [. . .] He translated the Bible as if no translation had been made before, as if he alone were High Priest of the Holy of Holies, and the first to reveal its mysterious and ceremonial sanctities to the eyes of an uninitiated world.³³

Bennett never received sufficient monetary support from these individuals, especially after suspending his activities as an engraver, and thus endured chronic financial distress. But the three who wrote on his behalf for funds seemed genuine in their concern for him, and the others surely respected and appreciated him especially for his Jewish learning and integrity.

If anything seemed to unite some of these Christians at least with each other and with Bennett, it might have been a desire to revisit the scriptural foundations of Christianity with a view to challenging Trinitarian and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. This impulse was evident in William Frend, the Unitarian, and in Francis Foster Barham, the publisher of Bennett's translation of Genesis, who was animated by a syncretic determination to put Christianity into the much bigger frame of universal revelation. The Duke of Sussex, a strongly Whig liberal, was keen on the emancipation of Catholics and especially on greater rights for dissenters, and one assumes that the study of the Scriptures was for him a solvent of religious differences. He was also an ardent Freemason. So was Thomas Pettigrew, his librarian and a master of Egyptology, another Protestant libertarian, rather anti-clerical and at a distance from Anglican Toryism. With Drummond,

³² On Barham, see Anne Taylor, "Barham, Francis Foster [known as Alist Francis Barnham] (1808–1871)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 10, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1373>.

³³ *The Hebrew and English Holy Bible*, "Editor's Preface," 1.

one leaves the world of Dissenting scholarship altogether for free thought. Another of Bennett's patrons not yet discussed fits here as well: Rachel Fanny Antonina Lee.

On the other hand, there were high churchmen and Tories among his supporters: Catherine Housman, Thomas Burgess, the Bishop of Salisbury, and Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough—all true conservatives who would have nothing to do with Drummond or Frend. Perhaps Bennett represented the figure of the Jewish scholar who could unify the fringes of the Christian world, where the Protestant impulse to seek the original meaning of the Scriptures shaded from orthodoxy to heterodoxy; he could be a kind of attractive neutral sage who might cover over the fractures and tensions in that community.³⁴ Certainly, in light of the extensive record of Bennett's meaningful Christian contacts, this dimension of interreligious dialogue and respectful exchange marks the highlight of Bennett's social life in London.

³⁴ I am most indebted to Dr. Michael Ledger-Lomas for help in formulating the last two paragraphs.