

MEN OF THE DAY. No. 124.

THE REV. BENJAMIN JOWETT, M.A.

NINE AND FIFTY years ago there was lit in Camberwell a firebrand to which the name of Benjamin Jowett was attached. The boy had the advantage of a father who had rivalled Tate and Brady in doggerelising David, and this presumably gave him his first doubts of the inspiration of the Scriptures. He went to Oxford, and as an undergraduate was so distinguished as a Latin scholar that he was made Professor of Greek. Having thus acquired the right to teach the Greek language, he set himself to learn it; and he has so far succeeded that, although in matters of scholarship his opinion is worthless, he has acquired a considerable understanding of the Platonic Philosophy.

In addition to undertaking the duties of his office, the Professor launched himself into public notice upon the famous volume of Essays and Reviews, to which he contributed an article on the Inspiration of the Bible; a paper which made a complete exposure of the false views entertained upon that subject, and in which he sketched his own unbiassed opinion of himself as the ideal Philosopher, and advocated a Christianity winnowed by the Socratic method, and a lofty morality built upon profound doubts. This naturally led to his prosecution for heresy before a court chiefly maintained for the recovery of small debts, but the prosecution failed owing to the judicious trimming of the Assessor to the Court, that eminent arbitrator, Mr. Montague Bernard.

This was not considered a victory for the Faith, and Professor Jowett was immediately provided with another grievance by the refusal to give him a proper stipend. But Fortune did not long permit him to enjoy this advantage, and his popularity soon received a fatal blow from the raising of his salary, since which time he has had the further misfortune to become Master of Balliol, which has added to the grave doubts previously felt whether he really was the Beast of the Revelation.

In person he bears a resemblance to the conventional cherub of the tombstone; he has a poor voice, and therefore is not successful as a lecturer, though his style as a writer is pure and beautiful; he is dapper, neat, and amorous, and has a thorough appreciation of the relative importance of undergraduates differing in social position. Nevertheless he is the patron of many poor Scotch students, and in general of all men of unrecognised ability; and he has distinguished himself by editing for their behoof an expurgated edition of the Book of Common Prayer for use in chapel. He has, too, a fellow-feeling for the heathen, and has not only allowed Colenso to preach in his chapel, but it is wickedly and falsely related of him that meeting once an Indian Prince who had been brought up in the errors of Mohammedanism and converted thence to the errors of Roman Catholicism, Professor Jowett reconverted him to Buddhism, saying, when the conversion was complete, "I prefer your religion to mine, for you have a morality, while I have none."