

## MEN OF THE DAY: No. 51.

### THE REVEREND THOMAS BINNEY.

THE influence of climate upon religion is nowhere more strongly shown than in the mixture of gloom and independence which has produced in England what is called Dissent. There are many thousands not only of women but also of men in this country who sincerely believe that their chances after death depend less upon what they do than upon what they believe in life. The refinements of Calvinism have produced Protestants protesting against Protestants, and it will soon become a question in these islands whether the more or the less Roman form of tradition is the stronger. Meantime Dissent is surely and steadily growing among the poor and the oppressed, and, what is important, the poor and the oppressed contribute to its support so large a portion of their little store of hard cash that it offers a career of its own and honours of its own to any man of fair intelligence who will speak its language and adopt its forms.

Mr. Binney is a notable example of such a man. Born seventy-three years ago, he has contrived to store his mind with a large collection of those things the display of which is held to be a proof of education; and in view of a future state he held it necessary at an early time of life to become an Independent preacher. At the age of thirty he was already well-known, and was removed from the Isle of Wight, where he had commenced his career, to the Weigh-House Chapel in Eastcheap. Old London Bridge and the Old Exchange were then standing, yet it is but three years since Mr. Binney preached a farewell sermon to a Weigh-House audience, which must have been many times renewed during his forty years' occupation of the pulpit. He had scarcely appeared as a religious orator before he addressed the public as a religionistic writer, and the large number of books he has produced go to show the demand that exists for literature of a sectarian character. In truth he both speaks and writes fairly in the well-understood limits within which he moves. Not an orator in the full sense of the word, he has yet a great command of vigorous English, and often rises to considerable heights of florid language, adopting on occasion, as he says, an "artificial and somewhat exaggerated form of utterance." He writes in the same way, and both in writing and in thinking betrays the desire, which is possibly a necessity, of captivating an audience by the imagery and illustration and the various secular arts which have been in all times applied to grace all kinds of opinions. He has thus become so popular that he has long been held to be the head of the Dissenters at large, and that he is admiringly called the "Archbishop" by those who protest against the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He has been all his life a professed opponent of the Established Church, which he holds "destroys more souls than it saves," and has in fact done much to prepare the way for the disestablishment now demanded. Although naturally very irritable, somewhat eccentric, and not a little vain, he is in great demand for Dissenting festivals, and no chapel-opening is held to be complete without his presence.

In common with most of those who supply recognised wants Mr. Binney has been rewarded by sufficient maintenance, all the more honourable both to the givers and the receiver because no part of the gift has been dictated by authority. He has promoted the undertakings of missionaries, has made a preaching tour in Australia, and has taken part in many religious quarrels. Nevertheless he is a very fair Christian.