

THOMAS BINNEY 1798 – 1874

Sometime Minister Newport Congregational Church

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The son of a Presbyterian elder Thomas Binney was born in Newcastle –on-Tyne on 30 April 1798. He was educated at a local school before commencing a seven year apprenticeship with a local bookseller. Often working for twelve to fifteen hours a day he still found time to study and after turning to Congregationalism he spent three years in the theological seminary of Coward College at Wymondley, Herts, in preparation for the ministry. For about a year he was minister of the New Meeting, Bedford and in 1824 he accepted a call to St. James Chapel, Newport the centre of the Isle of Wight IW.



One evening in 1826 as the sun was setting and the stars beginning to shine, the thought came to Binney that the sky was never without light, it was eternal. His well known hymn still popular today “*Eternal Light! Eternal Light!*” was written there and then before he went to bed that night. Dr Routley remarks that it has:

“A touch of Calvinistic austerity and self-abasement that makes it one of the noblest and most sympathetic expressions of the ‘numinous’ in our language.”

1. Eternal Light! Eternal Light!
How pure the soul must be,
When, placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,
Can live, and look on Thee!
2. The spirits that surround Thy throne
May bear the burning bliss;
But that is surely theirs alone
Since they have never, never known
A fallen world like this.
3. O how shall I, whose native sphere
Is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear,
And on my naked spirit bear
He uncreated beam?
4. There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode;
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit’s energies,
An Advocate with God –
5. These, these prepare us for the sight
Of holiness above:
The sons of ignorance and night
May dwell in the eternal Light,
Through the eternal Love!

After five years in the Isle of Wight, Binney moved on to London in 1829 as minister to the Weigh House Chapel, and quickly stepped into the front rank of Metropolitan preachers. He became chairman of the Congregational Union in 1845 and during his year of office visited America and Canada. Three years later he published a sermon on “*The Service of Song in the House of the Lord*”, and was one of the first Nonconformists to introduce anthems and chanting into his services. In 1857 he went for a visit lasting nearly

two years to Australia. America gave him a doctorate in divinity, while Aberdeen gave him the degree of LL.D.

In 1874 Thomas Binney renounced preacher retired. He was to die at his last home in London at Upper Clapton, Hackney on February 23, 1874.

Little now reminds us of the time Thomas Biney spend on the Isle of Wight. His church is now a branch of Weatherspoons and has the title *The Man in the Moon*, the name of the pub on the site before the church. However there is a house in a street opposite the Cowes Baptist Church which has the name *Binney Cottage*.

His Congregational memorial is in Abney Park cemetery, Stoke Newington, shown below.

Thomas Binney was well known and famous enough to be a feature of *Vanity Fair* Magazine.



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