

DEATH OF MR. JOHN PLATT, M.P.

On Saturday, the very painful intelligence was received at Oldham that Mr. John Platt, one of the members of Parliament for the borough, had died at Paris that morning. Mr. and Mrs. Platt had for some weeks been travelling on the Continent, the French capital being their last place of visit. In the beginning of last week information was received that the hon. gentleman was suffering from the effects of cold, and one of his sons went to Paris to join him. On Friday night intelligence came to hand to the effect that Mr. Platt was alarmingly ill, and on Saturday a telegram intimating his death was received. The mournful tidings rapidly spread through the town, and cast a gloom over the whole population. As a townsman Mr. Platt was very highly respected. For a long time he had taken a lively interest in the affairs of the borough, and his position as a large employer of labour gave him great weight and influence over his fellow-townsmen. He took an active part in promoting the incorporation of Oldham, which was accomplished in 1849, and he held office as mayor in the years 1854, 1855, 1856, and again in 1861-2. His connection with the Town Council extended over many years. Mr. Platt was an earnest politician, and for many years he has been regarded as the head of the Liberal party of the town. He was a steadfast supporter of the late Mr. W. J. Fox, who was first elected for Oldham in August, 1847, and on that and on all subsequent occasions when "the Norwich Weaver Boy" came before the constituency he found an earnest and weighty friend in Mr. Platt. Mr. Platt was first brought before the electors as a candidate for parliamentary honours at the general election in July, 1865, when, along with Mr. Hibbert, the present member, he contested the borough against Mr. J. M. Cobbett and Mr. F. L. Sparks. The contest resulted in the return of the Liberals by a very considerable majority. At the last general election, in November, 1868, when the constituency was greatly increased under the new Reform Bill, the Liberal majority was not so very decisive. Mr. Platt's majority, according to the returning officer's report, being only six over Mr. J. M. Cobbett. An attempt was made to upset the election, and the excitement which attended the hearing of the petition before Mr. Justice Blackburn, which resolved itself into a scrutiny of the poll, extending over six days, will not soon be forgotten. The inquiry resulted in the seats being retained by the Liberals, and at the close the learned judge spoke in very complimentary terms respecting the manner in which the election had been conducted. On every occasion when Mr. Platt addressed his fellow-townsmen upon political topics, both before and subsequent to the last general election, he has expressed great admiration of Mr. Gladstone, and confidence in his administration. He went to Parliament pledged to support the cause of progress, and has on occasions recorded his votes in a way that has secured the approval of his constituents. Mr. Platt had long allied himself with what is termed "the Manchester School" in politics, and was a staunch supporter and consistent advocate of free trade, parliamentary reform, and religious liberty. He frequently spoke of himself as a disciple of the late Mr. Cobden. His benefactions to the borough of Oldham have been considerable. It is only a few years since, after building and furnishing the extensive Science and Art Schools in Union-street, he handed them over to the trustees of the Oldham Lyceum, for the benefit of his fellow-townsmen. The educational institutes of the town have always found in him an advocate and supporter. Mr. Platt was head of the extensive firm of Platt Brothers and Company, a concern which has long held a pre-eminent position throughout the world for the production of machinery for spinning and weaving cotton. Long before the passing of the present Education Bill he had established schools at his works, where the young people received teaching free of charge, and where attendance was paid for and insisted upon as at work. This principle is still carried on, but in order to meet the requirements of the existing measure the classes meet at a neighbouring mechanics' institution. The education of the young was a topic which he continually urged, and he contended that, as an employer of labour, any sacrifice or outlay which might be entailed upon him in this respect would be found to his future advantage and benefit. Mr. Platt was a borough and county magistrate. He was owner of an extensive estate and residence in North Wales, and has held the office of high sheriff for the county of Carnarvon. Apoplexy is stated to have been the cause of his death. Mr. Platt is the second member of his family whose death has, for a time, deprived Oldham of one of its representatives in Parliament. In August, 1857, his younger brother, Mr. James Platt, then junior member for Oldham, was killed by the accidental discharge of a gun when out with a shooting party upon the Saddleworth Moors. The remains of the deceased gentleman will be removed to Oldham for interment.