

so earlier, had become by the late 1840s. The rapid growth and expansion, during these twenty-five years, of the business begun by Henry Platt represents an almost incredible achievement which in itself is a token of the rise of England in the first half of the nineteenth century to an unrivalled position of commercial and industrial power.

In 1845 Joseph, Henry Platt's eldest son, died of consumption at the age of 30. The younger son, James, was taken into partnership. The following year Elijah Hibbert died and eight years later, in 1854, the two surviving partners, John and James Platt, succeeded in acquiring Hibbert's share in the business from his trustees. These two young men were now the sole proprietors of the greatest textile machinery business in the world and it goes without saying that they were both exceedingly rich. The name of the firm was changed to Platt Bros. and Co., and it is by that name that the firm is known to this day. The two brothers were enlightened business men. They treated their employees well and these now numbered 2,500. It is significant that in 1854 they took into partnership the firm's cashier and two heads of departments.

shooting

In August, 1857, James Platt was killed in a hunting-accident on the moors above Ashway Gap in Yorkshire, where he and his brother had a country house. He was only 33. He left an only daughter and his share in the business was purchased by his brother John. John Platt, Henry Platt the founder's only surviving son, was now, at the age of 40, to all intents and purposes, the sole owner and controller of this enormous business. He must have been fantastically wealthy. Those were the days, with income tax at 6d. in the £ and all forms of government taxation reduced to a bare minimum, when men could amass great riches. Soon John Platt was to make his presence felt in this county and, more particularly, he was to turn his attention to transforming the parish of Llanfairfechan. What sort of man was he?

First of all, it should be remembered that he had grown up with the business from the early days when his father was practically making machinery in the kitchen. He had known the days of hardship and struggle. What education he had, he had received in the local schools at Oldham, such as they were. He had acquired for himself the mechanical and scientific knowledge that was useful to him in his business. In his youth he had played and associated with boys who were later to be his workmen. He knew his men and knew how to handle them. He was shrewd, able and, above all else, exceptionally vigorous. He was, indeed, a man of abounding energy. His business came first and foremost; and during the years when practically the whole responsibility for the running of the huge organization fell upon his shoulders, he not only carried on the business but succeeded in expanding it enormously. In 1854 Platt Bros. were employing 2,500 men. In 1872, the year of John Platt's death, they were employing 7,000 men. That in itself is a measure

of the size of the business and of the progress made during the period John Platt was at its head. He brought the business through some very difficult times. Take, for example, the period of the American Civil War, the period of the cotton famine which caused such terrible distress in the industrial towns of Lancashire. The cotton mills had been forced to close and unemployment was general. John Platt rose to the occasion magnificently. He set about adapting existing machinery to work East Indian and other staple cotton and he extended and developed the production of machinery for woollen and worsted manufacture. Oldham, in particular, was spared the worst effects of the cotton famine, and it is small wonder that the folk of that town looked upon John Platt as their greatest friend and benefactor.

Henry Platt, the old founder of the firm, had taken no interest in the politics and public life of his adopted town. It was not so with his sons. Whilst still in his twenties John Platt took an active part in the campaign for the repeal of the Corn Laws. "He prided himself," wrote the *Oldham Chronicle* many years later, "on being the disciple of Cobden and Bright on free trade questions." He was in politics an advanced Liberal; indeed, a Radical, being for many years chairman of the Oldham Radical Committee. To staunch Conservatives like Lord Penrhyn and the other Caernarvonshire squires whose ranks he was presently to join, he must have seemed a left winger of the most dangerous description, supporting as he did such ideas as household suffrage, short parliaments and the total abolition of church rates and all oaths, tests and religious disqualifications. He was actively in favour of the spread of education amongst the working classes. His brother, James Platt, had been closely associated with the Oldham Lyceum, being appointed its president at the age of 24 and both brothers had contributed most generously to the fund of that educational institution. John Platt was also a reforming spirit in the field of local government and fought hard for municipal reform in Oldham. He became mayor of Oldham in 1854 and was to hold that office several times in following years.

John Platt's great and increasing wealth brought him not only political influence and municipal office. It had interesting social consequences. He had been born at a cottage in Dobcross and in his father's early days in Oldham had lived in a drab terrace house with the workshop on the top floor. His wife had been brought up at Lowerhouse Mills. But in Oldham in the 1840s and 1850s the newly-rich manufacturing folk of the second generation were moving away from the mill houses and mean streets in which their fathers and mothers had lived and were building what that generation regarded as handsome villas and elegant residences standing in their own grounds. The estate of Werneth, the ancient manor house of Oldham and once the property of the old family of the Oldhams of Oldham, was acquired by some enterprising business men and developed into the most fashionable and exclusive residential district