

THE MIRROR

A REFLEX OF THE LIGHT AND LEADING OF THE WEEK;

CONTAINING ARTICLES, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED, ON

Politics, Social Questions, Literature, Science, Art, Music, and the Drama.

No. 1., Vol. I.]

ABERDEEN: TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 1881.

[ONE PENNY.]

Our Picture Gallery.

No. I.—JOHN WEBSTER, LL.D., M.P

THE Radicalism of Aberdeen finds a fitting Parliamentary representative in Dr. Webster of Edgehill. In the long platform campaign that preceded (and largely contributed to) the downfall of the late Administration, Dr. WEBSTER took his fair share. Perhaps no man in the North, Provost Culbard, of Elgin, probably excepted, manifested such animosity towards Lord Beaconsfield and all his works, and it is doubtful if his Elgin compeer contributed so much as did Dr. Webster to the enlightenment of the public in the north-east of Scotland on the wanton and wicked foreign policy of the ex-Premier. Long before the dissolution was announced, Dr. Webster had fairly earned the succession to Mr Farley Leith. It was unfortunate that he was selected simply as an easy way of cutting the Gordian knot created by the rival claims of the famous thirteen candidates. It is a greater misfortune that Dr. Webster has reached his three score years and ten. He has, however, risen far above the somewhat mean objections based on these grounds, and has proved himself a capable and industrious M.P.

In that valuable compendium, "Dod," Dr. Webster defines himself as "A decided Liberal." The definition cannot be challenged. Reference has already been made to Dr. Webster's attitude towards questions of foreign policy. It is only necessary to add that he was one of the small band of Radicals who—consistent to their principles—last year urged the immediate recall of Sir Bartle Frere. Judging from his frequent utterances on home politics we shall be surprised if, in the settlement of the Irish land question, he be content with anything short of the "Three F's." On Church questions he may be safely and concisely termed "an out-and-out Disestablishmentarian." As a practical legislator, Dr. Webster last session did some quiet and effective work—and none the less effective though quiet—in connection with several Scotch measures, notably the Married Women's Property Bill. He has already come to be recognised as, in a sense, a representative Scotch member, and has gained the ear of the House accordingly.

Dr. Webster is a remarkably fluent speaker. He is cool, and self-possessed, and can talk away for any length of time. He adopts none of the artifices of rhetoric, but he excels in lucid and well reasoned exposition. Never straining after "points," a listener is occasionally surprised to find how "points" are being rapidly scored by the bland old gentleman before him who keeps his hands in his trousers pockets, steadily turning over the keys and coins

therein. Such surprise, for instance, was felt by many of the hearers of his excellent speech in condemnation of the Commission's action in the Professor Smith Case, when—in the cool style of the "mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat"—he compared Dr. Kennedy and his abettors to Bunyan's "Implacable" and his allies. Another example of this remarkable power of Dr. Webster—of delivering sledge-hammer arguments with a gloved hand—was given at the recent meeting of the University Council. In proposing Dr. Bain as Assessor—a note-worthy instance of our member's genuine Radicalism—he first overlaid Mr John F. White with compliments, and then adroitly quoted a document which covered Mr White and his proposer, Professor Black, with confusion.

Of Dr. Webster's long and prominent connection with local affairs and local politics, there is now no call to speak. The fusion of the Colleges and the proposed railway across the Links, with which his career as Councillor and Provost was most intimately linked, are questions now buried in the dust of oblivion. The once burning question of the purchase of Torry Farm has long since entered on the same quiet heritage, and it is almost unkind to recall the fact that at the celebrated Head Court of April 1869, Dr. Webster met with a most unpopular reception. His chief claims to local fame—apart from his having organised the Liberal Association and become M.P. for the city—lie in the great work he has done in connection with the Infirmary, in his having projected the Music Hall Buildings, and in his having been the Lord Rector's representative in the University Court for the past twenty years.

Dr. Webster is the son of a well-known local lawyer, Alexander Webster, of whom an excellent portrait is preserved in the Trades' Hall. He was born in 1810, became a member of the Society of Advocates (Aberdeen) in 1831, entered the Town Council in 1853, and was Lord Provost from 1856 to 1859. During his headship of the city, he had the honour of presenting the keys to the Queen at the boundary at King Street, on the occasion of Her Majesty's passing through from Haddo House to Balmoral. He also promoted the 1859 meeting of the British Association in Aberdeen, at which the Prince Consort presided; and he presented the freedom of the city to Lord John Russell, the late Earl Stanhope, and the late Earl of Airlie. In March 1861, Mr E. F. Maitland (afterwards Lord Barcaple), the first Lord Rector of the University after the fusion, appointed him his Assessor (which confers a seat in the University Court); and he has acted as Assessor to all the succeeding Lord Rectors. In 1877 the University of Aberdeen (at which he graduated) conferred on Mr Webster the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.