

After receiving a good education at school, in Chester, young Brassey was, at the age of sixteen, articled to Mr. Lawton, a land surveyor and agent. With Mr. Lawton he soon became a great favourite, and, at the age of twenty-one, was taken into partnership, and went to reside at Birkenhead. On Mr. Lawton's death, young Brassey succeeded him as agent and representative of Mr. Price, who owned the whole of the land on which the populous and thriving town of Birkenhead now stands. Here he resided for eight years, and acquired great experience in directing the progress of that thriving place. The bent of a man's whole life is often determined by what we call accident,—the mere turning of a straw. So it was with the young land agent at Birkenhead. One day Mr. George Stephenson, the inventor of the locomotive, called on Mr. Brassey, for the purpose of inquiring after some stone for a viaduct on the Manchester and Liverpool Railway—the first railway for passenger traffic ever constructed. They went out together to examine a certain quarry of which Brassey had the management. Stephenson must have divined something of the high qualities of his young companion, during their walk, for he soon after sought to engage him in railway making. Under his advice, Mr. Brassey tendered for the construction of a viaduct between Stafford and Wolverhampton, and also for ten miles of the railway. He obtained the contract, and completed the work most successfully. This was the turning-point in his career, and the beginning of those great railway operations in which the remainder of his life was spent, and which extended over a large part of Europe, India and the British possessions in America. Step by step he advanced, gradually widening his operations, gaining the confidence of engineers and others interested in railways, by his faithfulness, his determination to do his work efficiently, whether at a gain or loss to himself, and his resolution to avoid all petty subjects of dispute, and never to make difficulties or contingencies an excuse for delay, or for demanding an alteration in the terms of the contract. Engineers and capitalists soon found what a comfort it was to have such a man to deal with,—one whose word was as good as his bond, and who never failed to fulfil an engagement. It is related of him that, on one occasion, when a great viaduct for which he had contracted, gave way, entailing an immense loss, some friends urged him to represent the case to the company, so as to obtain some mitigation of his