

# **BROWNLOWS.**

**A Novel.**

**BY MRS. OLIPHANT.**

## **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER I. MR. BROWNLOW'S MONEY.

CHAPTER II. SARA.

CHAPTER III. A SUDDEN ALARM.

CHAPTER IV. A LITTLE DINNER.

CHAPTER V. SARA'S SPECULATIONS.

CHAPTER VI. AN ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER VII. THE FATHER'S DAY AT THE OFFICE.

CHAPTER VIII. YOUNG POWYS.

CHAPTER IX. NEW NEIGHBORS.

CHAPTER X. AT THE GATE.

CHAPTER XI. THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

CHAPTER XII. NEWS OF FRIENDS.

CHAPTER XIII. A CRISIS.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV. LUNCHEON.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII. A CATASTROPHE.

CHAPTER XVIII. TREATING HIS OWN CASE.

CHAPTER XIX. PHŒBE THOMSON.

CHAPTER XX. POWYS'S BITS OF PAPER.

CHAPTER XXI. HOW A MAN CAN DO WHAT HE LIKES  
WITH HIS OWN.

CHAPTER XXII. THE DOWNFALL OF PHILOSOPHY.  
CHAPTER XXIII. ALL FOR LOVE.  
CHAPTER XXIV. A NEW CONSPIRATOR.  
CHAPTER XXV. HOW SARA REGARDED THE MOTE IN  
HER BROTHER'S EYE.  
CHAPTER XXVI. A DOUBLE HUMILIATION.  
CHAPTER XXVII. SARA'S OWN AFFAIRS.  
CHAPTER XXVIII. DESPAIR.  
CHAPTER XXIX. NEWS.  
CHAPTER XXX. WHAT FOLLOWED.  
CHAPTER XXXI. SUSPICION.  
CHAPTER XXXII. THE REAL TRAITOR.  
CHAPTER XXXIII. ONLY MR. BROWNLOW'S CLERK.  
CHAPTER XXXIV. AN IMPOSTOR.  
CHAPTER XXXV. AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.  
CHAPTER XXXVI. MOMENTARY MADNESS.  
CHAPTER XXXVII. THE MORNING LIGHT.  
CHAPTER XXXVIII. MOTHER AND LOVER.  
CHAPTER XXXIX. COMPOUND INTEREST.  
CHAPTER XL. JACK'S LAST TRIAL.  
CHAPTER XLI. SIR CHARLES MOTHERWELL.  
CHAPTER XLII. A GUARDIAN.  
CHAPTER XLIII. THE LIGHT OF COMMON DAY.  
CHAPTER XLIV. PAMELA'S MIND.

## CHAPTER XLV. CONCLUSION.

## **CHAPTER I.**

### **MR. BROWNLOW'S MONEY.**

EVERY BODY in the neighborhood was perfectly aware what was the origin of John Brownlow's fortune. There was no possibility of any mistake about it. When people are very well known and respectable, and inspire their neighbors with a hearty interest, some little penalty must be paid for that pleasant state of affairs. It is only when nobody cares for you, when you are of no importance to the world in general, that you can shroud your concerns in mystery; but the Brownlows were very well known, much respected, and quite unable to hide themselves in a corner. In all Dartfordshire there was no family better known; not that they were county people, or had any pretensions to high connection, but then there was not one family in the county of whom John Brownlow did not know more than they knew themselves, and in his hands, and in the hands of his fathers before him, had reposed the papers and affairs of all the squires about, titled or otherwise, for more years than could be counted. It was clever of the Brownlows to have had so much business in their hands and yet not to be rich; but virtue, when it is exceptional, is perhaps always a little extreme, and so it is probable that an honest lawyer is honester than most honest men who have no particular temptation. They were not rich, and yet, of course, they were far from being poor. They had the kind of substantial old brick house, standing close up to the pavement in the best end of the High Street of Masterton, which would be described as a mansion in an auctioneer's advertisement. It was very red and infinitely clean, and had a multitude of windows all blinking in the sun, and lighting up into impromptu illuminations every winter afternoon,

when that blazing red luminary went down, not over the river and the open country, as he ought to have done, but into the rectory garden, which happened to lie in his way as he halted along toward the west. The Brownlows for generations back had lived very comfortably in this red house. It had a great, rich, luxuriant, warm garden behind, with all sorts of comforts attached to it, and the rooms were handsome and old-fashioned, as became a house that had served generations; and once upon a time many good dinners, and much good wine, and the most beautiful stores of fine linen, and crystal, and silver were in the house, for comfort, and not for show. All this was very well, and John Brownlow was born to the possession of it; but there can be no doubt that the house in the High Street was very different from the house he now inhabited and the establishment he kept up in the country. Even the house in the High Street had been more burdened than was usual in the family when it came to his turn to be its master. Arthur, the younger brother, who was never good for much, had just had his debts paid for the second time before his father died. It was not considered by many people as quite fair to John, though some did say that it was he above all who urged the step upon old Mr. Brownlow. Persons who professed to know, even asserted that the elder son, in his generosity, had quite a struggle with his father, and that his argument was always "for my mother's sake." If this, was true, it was all the more generous of him, because his mother was well known to have thought nothing of John in comparison with the handsome Arthur, whom she spoiled as long as she lived. Anyhow, the result was that John inherited the house and the business, the furniture and old crystal and silver, and a very comfortable income, but nothing that could be called a fortune, or that would in any way have justified him in launching out into a more expensive description of life.

At this time he was thirty at least, and not of a speculative turn of mind; and when old Mrs. Thomson's will—a will not even drawn up in his office, which would have been a kind of preparation—was read to him, it is said that he lost his temper on the occasion, and used very unbecoming language to the poor woman in her coffin. What had he to do with the old hag? "What did she mean by bothering him with her filthy money?" he said, and did not show at all the frame of mind that might have been expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Thomson was an old woman, who had lived in a very miserly sort of way, with an old servant, in a little house in the outskirts of the town. Nobody could ever tell what attracted her toward John Brownlow, who never, as he himself said, had any thing to do with her; and she had relations of her own in Masterton—the Fennells—who always knew she had money, and counted upon being her heirs. But they were distant relations, and perhaps they did not know all her story. What petrified the town, however, was, when it was found out that old Mrs. Thomson had left a fortune, not of a few hundreds, as people supposed, but of more than fifty thousand pounds, behind her, and that it was all left in a way to John Brownlow. It was left to him in trust for Mrs. Thomson's daughter Phœbe, a person whose existence no one in Masterton had ever dreamed of, but who, it appeared had married a common soldier, and gone off with him ages before, and had been cursed and cast off by her hard-hearted mother. That was long, long ago, and perhaps the solitary old creature's heart, if she had a heart, had relented to her only child; perhaps, as John Brownlow thought, it was a mere suggestion of Satan to trouble and annoy him, a man who had nothing to do with Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, this was the substance of the will. The money was all left to John Brownlow in trust for this woman, who had gone nobody knew where, and whose very name by marriage

her mother did not state, and nobody could tell. If Phœbe Thomson did not make her appearance within the next twenty-five years, then the money was to pass to John Brownlow and his heirs in perpetuity beyond all power of reclamation. This was the strange event which fell like a shell into the young lawyer's quiet life, and brought revolution and change to every thing around.

He was very much annoyed and put out about it at first; and the Fennells, who had expected to be Mrs. Thomson's heirs, were furious, and not disinclined to turn upon him, blameless as he was. To tell the truth, theirs was a very hard case. They were very poor. Good-for-nothing sons are not exclusively reserved for the well-to-do portion of the community; and poor Mrs. Fennell, as well as the Brownlow family, had a good-for-nothing son, upon whom she had spent all her living. He had disappeared at this time into the darkness, as such people do by times, but of course it was always on the cards that he might come back and be a burden upon his people again. And the father was paralytic and helpless, not only incapable of doing any thing, but requiring to have every thing done for him, that last aggravation of poverty. Mrs. Fennell herself was not a prepossessing woman. She had a high temper and an eloquent tongue, and her disappointment was tragic and desperate. Poor soul! it was not much to be wondered at—she was so poor and so helpless and burdened; and this money would have made them all so comfortable. It was not that she thought of herself, the poor woman said, but there was Fennell, who was cousin to the Thomsons, and there was Tom out in the world toiling for his bread, and killing himself with work. And then there was Bessie and her prospects. When she had talked it all over at the highest pitch of her voice, and stormed at every body, and made poor Fennell shake worse than ever in his paralytic chair, and



overwhelmed Bessie with confusion and misery, the poor woman would sit down and cry. Only one thousand pounds of it would have done them such a great deal of good; and there was fifty thousand, and it was all going to be tied up and given to John Brownlow. It was hard upon a woman with a hot head and a warm heart, and no temper or sense to speak of; and to storm at it was the only thing she took any comfort from, or that did her any good.

This money, which Mrs. Fennell regretted so bitterly for a long time, was nothing but a nuisance to John Brownlow. He advertised and employed detectives, and did every thing a man could do to find Phœbe Thomson and relieve himself of the burden. But Phœbe Thomson was not to be found. He sought her far and near, but no such person was to be heard of—for, to be sure, a poor soldier's wife was not very likely to be in the way of seeing the second column of the "Times;" and if she should happen to be Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Doherty by marriage, nobody but herself and her husband might be aware that she had ever been Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, all the advertisements and all the detectives failed; and after working very hard at it for a year or more, John Brownlow very quietly, and to his own consciousness alone, d—d Phœbe Thomson, and gave up the useless investigation.

But he was a man who had eyes, and a strong sense of justice. When he thought of the poor Fennells, his anger rose against the wretched old woman who had laid on him the burden of her money. Poor Mrs. Fennell's son was good for nothing, but she had a daughter who was good for much; and Bessie had a lover who would gladly have married her, had that wicked old miser, as John Brownlow in his indignation said, left only a thousand pounds out of her fifty to help the paralytic father and passionate mother. Bessie's lover was not mercenary—he was not covetous of a

fortune with his wife; but he could not marry all the family, or work for the old people, as their daughter had to do. This was what Mrs. Fennell meant when she raved of poor Bessie and her prospects. But Bessie herself said nothing. The lover went very sorrowfully away, and Bessie was silent and went on with her work, and made no show of her trouble. John Brownlow, without knowing it, got to watch her. He was not aware for a long time why it was that, though he always had so much to do, he never missed seeing Bessie when by chance she passed his windows. As luck would have it, it was always at that moment he raised his eyes; and he did his best to get pupils for her, "taking an interest" in her which was quite unusual in so quiet a man. But it was not probable that Bessie could have had much of an education herself, much less was qualified to give it to others. And whether it was want of skill, or the poverty of her surroundings, her poor dress, or her mother's aspect and temper, it is certain that, diligent and patient and "nice" as she was, pupils failed her. She did not get on; yet she kept struggling on, and toiling, keeping a smile in her eyes for every body that looked friendly on her, whatever sinking there might be in her heart. And she was a slight fragile little creature to bear all that weight on her shoulders. John Brownlow, without knowing it, watched her little figure about the streets all the year through, marveling at that "soft invincibility," that steady standing up against defeat and every kind of ill which the gentle soul was capable of. And as he watched her, he had many thoughts in his mind. He was not rich, as we have said; on the contrary, it would have been his bounden duty, had he done his duty, to have married somebody with a modest little fortune, who would have helped him to keep up the house in the High Street, and give the traditionary dinners; and to maintain his wife's family, if he were to marry, was something out of the question. But then that fifty

thousand pounds—this money which did not belong to him but to Phœbe Thomson, whosoever she was, and wheresoever she might be. All this produced a confusion of thought which was of very strange occurrence in Mr. Brownlow's office, where his ancestors for generations had pondered over other people's difficulties—a more pleasing operation than attending to one's own. Gradually, as time wore on, Phœbe Thomson grew into a more and more mythical figure to Mr. Brownlow's mind, and Bessie Fennell became more and more real. When he looked up one winter's afternoon and saw her passing the office window in the glow of the frosty sunset, which pointed at her in its clear-sighted way, and made thrice visible the thinness of her cheek and the shabbiness of her dress, Mr. Brownlow's pen fell from his fingers in amaze and self-reproach. She was wearing herself out, and he had permitted her to do so, and had sat at his window thinking about it for two whole years. Two years had passed since Mrs. Thomson's death. All the investigations in the world had not been able to find Phœbe; and John Brownlow was master of the old woman's fifty thousand pounds; and the Fennells might be starving for any thing he could tell. The result was, that he proposed to Bessie, to the unbounded amazement not only of the town of Masterton, but even of the county people, who all knew Mr. Brownlow. Probably Bessie was as much surprised as any body; but she married him after a while, and made him a very good wife. And he pensioned her father and mother in the most liberal way, and saw as little of them as possible. And for a few years, though they did not give many dinners, every thing went on very well in the big brick house.

I tell the story thus briefly, instead of introducing these people to show their existence for themselves, because all this is much prior to the real date of this history. Mrs. Brownlow made a very

good and sweet wife; and my own opinion is that she was fond of her husband in a quiet way. But, of course, people said she had married him for his money, and Bessie was one of those veiled souls who go through the world without much faculty of revealing themselves even to their nearest and dearest. When she did, nobody could make quite sure whether she had enjoyed her life or merely supported it. She had fulfilled all her duties, been very kind to every body, very faithful and tender to her husband, very devoted to her family; but she died, and carried away a heart within her of which no man seemed ever to have found the key. Sara and John were very little at the time of her death—so little, that they scarcely remembered their mother. And they were not like her. Little John, for his part, was like big John, as he had a right to be; and Sara was like nobody else that ever had been seen in Masterton. But that is a subject which demands fuller exposition. Mr. Brownlow lived very quietly for some years after he lost his wife; but then, as was natural, the ordinary course of affairs was resumed. And then it was that the change in his fortunes became fully evident. His little daughter was delicate, and he got a carriage for her. He got ponies for her, and costly governesses and masters down from town at the wildest expense; and then he bought that place in the country which had once been Something Hall or Manor, but which Dartfordshire, in its consternation, henceforward called Brownlow's. Brownlow's it was, without a doubt; and Brownlows it became—without the apostrophe—in the most natural way, when things settled down. It was, as old Lady Hetherton said, "quite a *place*, my dear; not one of your little bits of villas, you know." And though it was so near Masterton that Mr. Brownlow drove or rode in every day to his office, its grounds and gardens and park were equal to those of any nobleman in the county. Old Mrs. Thomson's fifty thousand pounds had doubled

themselves, as money skillfully managed has a way of doing. It had got for her executor every thing a man could desire. First, the wife of his choice—though that gift had been taken from him—and every other worldly good which the man wished or could wish for. He was able to surround the daughter, who was every thing to him—who was more to him, perhaps, than even his wife had ever been—with every kind of delightful thing; and to provide for his son, and establish him in the world according to his inclinations; and to assume, without departing from his own place, such a position as no former Brownlow had ever occupied in the county. All this came to John Brownlow through old Mrs. Thomson; and Phœbe Thomson, to whom the money in reality belonged, had never turned up to claim it, and now there was but one year to run of the five-and-twenty which limited his responsibilities. All this being made apparent, it is the history of this one year that I have now to tell.

## CHAPTER II.

### SARA.

MR. BROWNLOW had one son and one daughter—the boy, a very good natured, easy-minded, honest sort of young fellow, approaching twenty-one, and not made much account of either at home or abroad. The daughter was Sara. For people who know her, or indeed who are at all acquainted with society in Dartfordshire, it is unnecessary to say more; but perhaps the general public may prefer a clearer description. She was the queen of John Brownlow's house, and the apple of his eye. At the period of which we speak she was between nineteen and twenty, just emerging from what had always been considered a delicate girlhood, into the full early bloom of woman. She had too much character, too much nonsense, too many wiles, and too much simplicity in her, to be, strictly speaking, beautiful; and she was not good enough or gentle enough to be lovely. And neither was she beloved by all, as a heroine ought to be. There were some people who did not like her, as well as some who did, and there were a great many who fluctuated between love and dislike, and were sometimes fond of her, and sometimes affronted with her; which, indeed, was a very common state of mind with herself. Sara was so much a girl of her age that she had even the hair of the period, as the spring flowers have the colors of spring. It was light-brown, with a golden tint, and abundant as locks of that color generally are; but it can not be denied that it was darker than the fashionable shade, and that Sara was not above being annoyed by this fact, nor even above a vague and shadowy idea of doing something to bring it to the correct tint; which may rank as one of the constantly recurring proofs that young women are in fact the

least vain portion of the creation, and have less faith in the efficacy of their natural charms than any other section of the race. She had a little rosebud mouth, dewy and pearly, and full eyes, which were blue, or gray, or hazel, according as you looked at them, and according to the sentiment they might happen to express. She was very tall, very slight and flexible, and wavy like a tall lily, with the slightest variable stoop in her pretty shoulders, for which her life had been rendered miserable by many well-meaning persons, but which in reality was one of her charms. To say that she stooped is an ugly expression, and there was nothing ugly about Sara. It was rather that by times her head drooped a little, like the aforesaid lily swayed by the softest of visionary breezes. This, however, was the only thing lily-like or angelic about her. She was not a model of any thing, nor noted for any special virtues. She was Sara. That was about all that could be said for her; and it is to be hoped that she may be able to evidence what little bits of good there were in her during the course of this history, for herself.

“Papa,” she said, as they sat together at the breakfast-table, “I will call for you this afternoon, and bring you home. I have something to do in Masterton.”

“Something to do in Masterton?” said Mr. Brownlow; “I thought you had got every thing you could possibly want for three months at least when you were in town.”

“Yes,” said Sara, “every thing one wants for one’s bodily necessities—pins and needles and music, and all that sort of thing—but one has a heart, though you might not think it, papa; and I have an idea that one has a soul.”

“Do you think so?” said her father, with a smile; “but I can’t imagine what your soul can have to do in Masterton. We don’t cultivate such superfluities there.”

“I am going to see grandmamma,” said Sara. “I think it is my duty. I am not fond of her, and I ought to be. I think if I went to see her oftener perhaps it might do me good.”

“O! if it’s only for grandmamma,” said young John, “I go to see her often enough. I don’t think you need take any particular trouble to do her good.”

Upon which Sara sighed, and drooped a little upon its long stem her lily head. “I hope I am not so stupid and conceited as to think I can do any body good,” she said. “I may be silly enough, but I am not like that; but I am going to see grandmamma. It is my duty to be fond of her, and see after her; and I know I never go except when I can’t help it. I am going to turn over a new leaf.”

Mr. Brownlow’s face had been overshadowed at the first mention of the grandmother, as by a faint mist of annoyance. It did not go so far as to be a cloud. It was not positive displeasure or dislike, but only a shade of dissatisfaction, which he expressed by his silence. Sara’s resolutions to turn over a new leaf were not rare, and her father was generally much amused and interested by her good intentions; but at present he only went on with his breakfast and said nothing. Like his daughter, he was not fond of the grandmamma, and perhaps her sympathy with his own sentiments in this respect was satisfactory to him at the bottom of his heart; but it was not a thing he could talk about.

“There is a great deal in habit,” said Sara, in that experienced way which belongs to the speculatist of nineteen. “I believe you



can train yourself to any thing, even to love people whom you don't love by nature. I think one could get to do that if one was to try."

"I should not care much for your love if that was how it came," said young John.

"That would only show you did not understand," said Sara, mildly. "To like people for a good reason, is not that better than liking them merely because you can't help it? If there was any body that it suited papa, for instance, to make me marry, don't you think I would be very foolish if I could not make myself fond of him? and ungrateful too?"

"Would you really do as much for me, my darling?" said Mr. Brownlow, looking up at her with a glimmer of weakness in his eyes; "but I hope I shall never require to put you to the test."

"Why not, papa?" said Sara, cheerfully. "I am sure it would be a much more sensible reason for being fond of any body that you wished it, than just my own fancy. I should do it, and I would never hesitate about it," said the confident young woman; and the father, though he was a man of some experience, felt his heart melt and glow over this rash statement with a fond gratification, and really believed it, foolish as it was.

"And I shall drive down," said Sara, "and look as fine as possible; though, of course, I would far rather have Meg out, and ride home with you in the afternoon. And it would do Meg a world of good," she added, pathetically. "But you know if one goes in for pleasing one's grandmamma, one ought to be content to please her in her own way. *She* likes to see the carriage and the grays, and a

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

