



## SHOT IN THE BACK,

By SIR GILBERT E. CAMPBELL, BART.,

Fenshire is by no means a picturesque county, and the portion of it in which Bradeley Grange was situated was even more hideous than other parts, which was certainly by no means celebrated for their beauty. The Grange was situated on a slightly elevated plateau, some three or four miles in circumference, and was built in the hideously debased style of architecture which came into vogue with the Fourth George. An ugly square house, with a tasteless Italian façade, the plaster of which had peeled off in many places, showing the rough brickwork behind, whilst the coating of stucco, which at some forgotten period must have been white, was now disfigured with green patches of damp, and huge unsightly stains of a dullish red colour, as though some gigantic reptile, which had received a death-wound, had crept over the walls in vain efforts to find some place of security. Nearly all the windows were boarded up, and the doors which afforded entrance from the outside were cracked and blistered, as if paint was a rare commodity, and only procurable by the most lavish expenditure. Bradeley Grange stood in the centre of an enclosure which had once, perhaps, been called a park, but which was now utterly unworthy of such a name. The ground was covered with coarse, rank grass, at which cattle sniffed and snorted disdainfully, whilst here and there were shallow pools of water, utterly devoid of fish, but the haunt of innumerable frogs, newts, efts and other unpleasant-looking amphibious creatures. All about the park were stumps of trees, showing that at one time the place had been thickly timbered, and had doubtless presented a very different aspect before it had been so completely denuded of its sylvan ornaments. Some half a mile in rear

Altogether the house and park seemed to have been entirely given over to the hand of neglect, and formed a curious contrast to the home farm and the fruit and vegetable gardens which it was evident were once carefully tended. Bradeley Grange had not always been like it was at present. At one time the gravel in front of the house had borne many indentations from the feet of the horses of coming and departing friends, the now deserted rooms had echoed to the sounds of music and revelry, whilst the long array of bedchambers on the upper floor had seldom been without the proper allowance of guests. This was shortly after the present owner had come into the inheritance, but a few brief years had brought a complete change. Lawrence Bradeley, at twenty-four full of buoyant hopes and and gay spirits, was a very different creature from the tyrannical old despot who held the reins of power at the Grange. He had married into a county family, as wealthy and ancient as his own, and when his young wife died in giving birth to a son, the husband's grief was for a time entirely beyond the power of control. At the beginning of his sorrow he took no dislike to the innocent cause of his loss; indeed, he could hardly bear him out of his sight. He shut up the Grange, saw but little company, and was never seen at the meet or at the rural sports patronized by his equals in the county. At nine years of age the lad, Leonard Bradeley, was sent to the rector of the parish, the Rev. Mr. Chamberlayne, for educational purposes, and there it was that the squire's downward career commenced. He became griping and penurious, was a harsh master to both servants and tenants, and appeared to live for no other purpose than making money. The timber was felled

of the house, however, were several plantations, the homes of the extensive stock of pheasants, which the present owner bred and preserved with such merciless severity. If the exterior of the house and its surroundings was dull and disagreeable, the interior was fully in keeping with them. Long dreary passages which seemed to lead to nowhere in particular, in which an unseen presence seemed always to linger by the side of anyone pausing, and a faint phantom-like echo to mock the footfalls which sounded on the uncovered boards. Half-opened doors showed them rows of lofty and extensive rooms with shapeless masses of furniture piled up in the centre and covered with sacks and worn-out rick cloths. The paper hung in long sheets from the walls, and when the wind whistled through the long corridors and deserted rooms, as it did at frequent intervals, the rotting wall coverings grated and rubbed against each other with a sound which was inexpressible, eerie and dispiriting

and carted away, every bit of produce was sent up to London, whilst, and this his neighbours could not forgive, his game, though carefully preserved, was sold to a wholesale poulterer who contracted for it. Not that the squire led an entirely solitary life, for at times he would break out into outbursts of dissipation, and, perhaps, for a week or more, drink hard in company with some pot-house toadies, who formed the court of which he was a little king. These bouts of hard living were, however followed by months of the severest economy, and it was during one of these that he withdrew his son from the public school, at which, at Mr. Chamberlayne's suggestion, he had placed him, and bringing him back to the Grange, informed him that his time for idling had gone by, and that he must expect now to work for his living.

To Leonard Bradeley the change was a terrible one, and the mean and sordid surroundings almost more than he could bear. He was a bright, handsome lad of eighteen years of age when he was torn away from the society of his equals, and doomed to mix either with farm servants or the disreputable crew which at certain times was admitted to his father's table. He had a great taste for reading, but if he now attempted to take a book in his hand, it brought down upon his head a storm of vituperation and insult from his father, with a string of sarcastic remarks about fine gentlemen who wanted their bread and butter for nothing. He loathed and disliked the farm-work upon which he was employed, but in time a feeling of despair crept over him as he performed his task with the regularity of a machine. In spite, however, of his taste for literature he was fond of field sports, a good rider and a sure shot, and as this last accomplishment was of great service in killing the game for the London market he was, during the shooting season, to a great extent, relieved from the drudgery of farm-work.

Five years had passed since Leonard Bradeley's return from school, and he had grown up into a tall, handsome young man, but with a shadow of inexpressible sadness pervading his features. He had picked up none of the habits or the expressions of those who were his everyday associates, and the gentry of the county, though they had unjustly included the lad in the sentence of ostracism poured upon the father, could not help casting glances of pity upon him as they met him returning wearily from his daily toil, or, gun in hand, going forth on his errand of butchery to some distant covert.

It was a bright cheerful day towards the close of October, and Leonard was leaning against the door-posts, enjoying the genial rays of the sun, when he heard the harsh voice of his father shouting, "Leonard. Leonard," from the interior of the house. The young man shrugged his shoulders, and seemed at first disinclined to obey the summons, but obedience had so grown upon him that after an instant's reflection he turned round and walked down the gloomy passage which led to his father's peculiar sanctum. This was a small chamber, adjoining the servants' offices, and which had formerly been the butler's pantry, as was evident by the shelves and cupboards which the squire found handy for his account books, samples, etc. Half-a-dozen guns were placed in a rack over the mantelpiece, a rough kitchen table stood in the centre of the uncarpeted floor, half-a-dozen Windsor chairs were placed here and there, and a barrel of small beer, with a battered pewter measure standing upon it, completed the furniture of this desirable living-room. The one window had not had its glass cleaned for months, and the air was faint with the reek of stale tobacco.

The squire was seated upon the edge of the table swinging his feet backwards and forwards; there was a deep scowl upon his brow, and the instant his son entered the room he addressed him in his usual coarse and bullying manner.

"So, Mr. fine gentleman," said he, "I heard a nice account of you last night; now I want to know whether it's truth or lies; where were you?"

"I had finished all the work I had to do," replied his son, "and I thought I might take a walk."

"And where did you go to?" demanded the squire as the young man paused.

"I went to Orpminster," answered Leonard.

"Curse you," roared his father. "Am I to get a cork-screw to drag the words out of you. What were you doing in Orpminster. Now, now, it wasn't market day. Come, make a clean breast of it, or it will be the worse for you."