

About a quarter of a mile down the shady lane, which ran by one side of Mrs. Kent's dwelling, was the pretty farmhouse, orchard and homestead of Farmer Bell, whose eldest daughter Susan,—the beauty of the parish,—was the object of a passion, almost amounting to idolatry. And, in good sooth, Susan Bell was well fitted to inspire such a passion. Besides a light graceful figure, moulded with the exactest symmetry, she had a smiling innocent countenance, a complexion coloured like the brilliant blossoms of the balsam, and hair of a shining golden brown, like the fruit of a horse-chesnut. Her speech was at once modest and playful, her temper sweet, and her heart tender. She loved Robert dearly, although he often gave her cause to wish that she loved him not; for Robert was subject to the intermitting fever called jealousy,—causelessly,—as he himself would declare, when a remission of the disease gave room for his natural sense to act,—causelessly and penitently, but still pertinaciously, jealous. I have said, that he was a fine young man, tall, dark, and slender; I should add that he was a good son, a kind brother, a pattern of sobriety and industry, and possessed of talent and acquirement far beyond his station. But there was about him an ardour, a vigour, a fiery restlessness, commonly held proper to the natives of the south of Europe, but which may sometimes be found amongst our own peasantry. All his pursuits, whether of sport or labour, took the form of passion. At ten years old, he had gone far beyond all his fellow pupils at the Foundation School, to which, through the kindness of the squire of the parish, his mother had been enabled to send him; and even posed the master himself:—at eighteen, he was the best cricketer, the best flute-player, the best bellringer, and the best gardner in the country:—and some odd volumes of Shakspeare having come into his possession, there was some danger, at twenty, of his turning out a dramatic poet, had not the kind discouragement of his master, to whom some of his early scenes were shewn by his patron and admirer the head gardner, acted as a salutary check. Indeed, so strong, at one time, was the poetical *furor*, that such a catastrophe as an entire play might, probably, have ensued, notwithstanding

Mr. Lescombe's judicious warnings, had not love, the master-passion, fallen about this time in poor Robert's way, and engrossed all the ardour of his ardent temperament. The beauty and playfulness of his mistress, whilst they enchanted his fancy, kept the jealous irritability of his nature in perpetual alarm. He suspected a lover in every man who approached her; and the firm refusal of her father to sanction their union till her impatient wooer were a little more forward in the world, completed his disquiet.

Affairs were in this posture when a new personage arrived at Hilton Cross.

In addition to her other ways and means, Mrs. Kent tried to lessen her rent by letting lodgings; and the neat, quiet, elderly gentlewoman, the widow of a long-deceased rector, who had occupied her rooms ever since Robert was born, being at last gathered to her fathers, an advertisement of "pleasant apartments to let, in the airy village of Hilton Cross," appeared in the country paper. This announcement was as true as if it had not formed an advertisement in a country paper. Very airy was the pretty village of Hilton Cross,—with its breezy uplands, and its open common, dotted, as it were, with cottages and clumps of trees; and very pleasant were Mrs. Kent's apartments for those who had sufficient time to appreciate the rustic simplicity, and sufficient humility to overlook their smallness. The little chamber glittering with whiteness; its snowy dimity bed, and "fresh sheets smelling of lavender;" the sitting room, a thought larger, carpeted with India matting, its shining cane chairs, and its bright casement wreathed on one side by a luxuriant jessamine, on the other, by the tall cluster musk-rose, (that rose of which Titania talks,) sending its bunches of odorous blossoms into the very window; the little flower court underneath, full of hollyoaks, cloves, and dahlias; and the large sloping meadow beyond, leading up to Farmer Bell's tall irregular house, half covered with flaunting vine; his barns, and racks, and orchard;—all this formed an apartment too tempting to remain long untenanted in a bright month of August. Accordingly it was almost immediately engaged, by a gentleman in black, who walked over one fair morning, paid ten pounds as a deposit, sent for his trunk