

a contingency which they, or rather one of them, could not but count upon with the most undoubting certainty.

"Why would they thus have encouraged our intimacy so long," Margery would say, in answer to Edward's fears, and in order to *cultivate* them, "if there had been the slightest objection to it?"

Edward certainly had his fears, and not without cause. He had overheard a conversation between her parents about Richard Swindale. He was too young and inexperienced to understand its full import; but her name was coupled with his in a way which he did not like, something about seeing her comfortably settled in the world, but not certainly with Edward Arkland.

It was on the occasion of his repeating this conversation to poor Margery, when she was as much distressed at its import as he had been, that she gave him her hand and declared that although she never could be his without her parent's consent, that hand would be laid in the cold grave before it should be given to another.

CHAPTER IV.

"As a poor pedler he did wend,
Bearing a trusse of trifles at his back,
As bells and babies and glasses in his packe."

Spenser.

A casual allusion has been made in the last chapter to a Scotch pedler. At the period of my story there were few country shops, and these were confined, as they are still, to the little hamlets in the fertile valleys extending across the country between the two great mountain ranges of the north. With these hamlets the Fell-siders held little or no communion. Although generations had passed away since it had been unsafe for them to descend into the plains except in force and armed with "bills and bows," yet they always kept aloof long after the necessity for doing so had ceased. Even to this day, indeed, they appear almost like two separate and distinct races.

To supply the place of shops, then, in the Fells, pedlers on foot with a heavy pack, as it was called, containing as great and general an assortment of such things as the farmers wanted, as they could carry. This consisted chiefly of articles of finery for their wives and daughters, their flocks and fields furnishing them with all else that they wanted.

These pedlers generally, indeed I may say universally, came from the other side of the Border, and but few of them returned to their native country. They were either lost in the thick mists on the mountains, or were way-laid and

murdered. The latter was too frequently their melancholy fate.

Being strangers in a strange land, more indeed like an enemy's country, having no settled place of abode, they were seldom missed and never enquired after, so that the perpetrators of the foul crime were hardly ever brought to justice.

One of this fraternity was old Josh McWolff. The first name is generally a contraction for Joshun, but in his case it was generally believed to be an abbreviation of a longer name, Jehoshaphat; and it was whispered, too, that the Mac was an assumption to which he had no real title; he had, besides, a Jewish cast of countenance, and there was not much difficulty in identifying him as one of that persecuted people.

Poor Josh! he was a harmless quiet old man, and an honest, save that he would sometimes drive rather a hard bargain with some of the simple mountain maidens, making solemn asserations about the cost price of an article, as far from the truth as are the "poles asunder."

He had travelled those Fells for many a weary year. He had furnished the ribands for the rosette in William Mounsey's cap when he was christened, and he had expressed a hope, not ten days before the grand sheep-shearing, that he should have to come provided, on his next trip, with materials for a bridal dress for his sister Margery. Poor fellow! he little thought that his own winding-sheet would be wanted first.

On his last visit to Wüstel Head, a place he never missed, it was indeed one of his best houses, he tried to persuade Margery to purchase an old gold ring with a little sparkling diamond set in it; it was of curious workmanship, and quite an antique, at least it is so now. It is still in the family, kept as a rare and valuable relic; it might, however, have been quite new then.

Margery, convinced either by the old man's eloquence, or by the looks of the little sparkling beauty itself, or by both, that her little hand was not half so pretty without it, set her heart upon buying it; but alas! the price was too high for her purse, and the old people were inexorable, and poor Margery, after trying it on again as if to see that it would not fit, in order to have an excuse for giving it up. But no, it fitted the taper finger that adorned it as if it had been made for it, and she held it up to her mother as a last appeal, but it would not do, and casting a long last lingering look upon it, she gave it up with a faint smile, meant for a tear.

Edward Arkland was a painful witness of the scene, he had money in his pocket too, but what could he do, he could not offer his assistance without being observed, narrowly as he watched for an opportunity to do so.