

When the shop was enlarged, and a box thrown out in what used to be the lodger's parlour, Hope thought that Harold would be contented to return to his place behind the counter and dismiss little Pierce Jones, the Conway lad, who had helped there since just before the wedding week.

But no; Harold thought Pierce had better stay; it tied a man so to be always at every one's beck and call. He had got into a way of dawdling about, either on foot or on the pony, and he spent much of his time at the 'Shoal,' as the tiny public-house was called, short for 'Shoal of Herrings'—its very suggestive sign.

The low wall opposite the 'Shoal' was pleasant to lounge on, and there was always something to be looked for along the high road—the carrier, Sir Wallace Gwyn's four-in-hand, or old John Jones' donkey-cart. He liked taking Hope with him at first on these idle expeditions, but she seldom cared to go. 'Both ought not to leave the shop at once,' she said, 'and it was more a man's work than hers to wait for the load of fancy bricks from Conway.'

Harold argued a little, and then generally set off alone, nodding good-byes to his wife. There was no fault to be found with his conduct as a husband, or even as a master, at present.

Of course he took a glass of ale now and again at the public-house, but only in a neighbourly way. It was not fair to spend half a day there and do nothing 'for the good of the house.' Even Hope saw nothing to make her uneasy in this.

She was busier than ever now—more people to manage for, the shop not yet restored to its usual orderly state, and little Pierce to be looked after. Hope was very anxious to pack him off, and manage matters quietly as they used to do. By-and-by, of course, Harold would see as she did, that boys make more trouble and untidiness than they are worth.

But Harold's eyes saw nothing that they did not choose to see. He was master now, and it would be hard if he was to toil and moil like a mere apprentice. Hope seemed to like the fusty old shop, and the customers

who spent a few pence and then talked your head off; and such horrible clipped English as it made his musical ears ache to listen to! Well, joy go with her if she did, but he meant to be as little behind the counter as possible now.

Still, sit as lightly as he would to the shop, he didn't quite like to see the new red house in the village fitted with a large showy window, nor did he care to hear that a Chester linendraper intended to set up a branch establishment there. He had heard there was an opening for one. It was unlikely that Miss Halliwell, now she was married, would keep on the English shop.

'What an idea!' said Hope, half vexed, half scornful of the rumour. 'But, Harold dear, what ought we to do?—write to Mr. White in Chester?'

No, Harold thought it would do no good. He had evidently made up his mind to come. If any one was to move, he voted they did.

'What, leave Abermawr?' Hope looked incredulously at her husband. Harold didn't care for that serious questioning gaze. He laughed and smiled as if it was all a joke, and sauntered away.

And Mr. White set up a rival shop, all plate glass, and gleaming ribbons, and rolls of gay coloured material. It was a sort of bazaar, too; indeed, 'Grand Bazaar' was painted up outside.

The villagers wondered and admired. Hope saw it all now. Abermawr had been taken up by rich Mr. White. He was going to make a fashionable watering-place of it; he was already building several neat houses destined to be let as lodgings.

'Harold, this is serious,' said Hope one day. 'See, dear, I have a plan in my head. We cannot hope to compete with Mr. White, but let us go to him with a proposal. You never liked the drapery part of our business, and we will offer for a reasonable consideration to give it up to him, keeping the grocery and stores department, and enlarging that. Don't you think it a good idea?'

But Harold wasn't sure. The groceries were nasty perishable goods, he said. They arrived at no conclusion.