



SCENES FROM "THE LITTLE TYCOON" AT ACADEMY OF MUSIC, MONTREAL, 20th to 25th OCTOBER.
(By our special artist.)

On the Virgin Stalk.

By MISS A. C. JENNINGS.

Helena, too, when she heard him honourably spoken of, was pleased to remember, though her personal recollections of him were vague, that this was the man who had been her own especial friend.

But, although these thoughts were pleasant, they did not lend much vitality to her lonely life. The lingering, eventful days followed each other as she grew older, and she began to perceive that nothing happened to her, that the lovely surprises and triumphs and disclosures of youth were passing her by, unfairly, she thought, for she found herself sitting as a spectator at the show while she could still have loved and laughed and wept and enjoyed as keenly as the busiest actor there.

She had missed something, and Life's horizon was narrowing day by day.

But nobody knew or cared anything about these thoughts of Helena's. Her sisters believed that they were her very good friends, and they believed also that she was very well off; that it was nice to have so many pretty things made for their children by her ingenious fingers, and that by-and-by, in the natural course of things, Helena's fortune would fall to the little ones, which would be still nicer.

So her barren future was complacently settled by others without the suspicion of any secret rebellion in Helena's heart against this rather arbitrary plan of her destiny. For it is a truth, although not quite an agreeable one, that it is needful for each one of us to take his or her place and part in life and keep it against all invaders with what strength is in us.

If a generous nature makes one sacrifice of its own rights it will be taken at its word and taught further renunciation, but it will find few defenders chivalrous enough to say:

"Heaven did not mean
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean."

Brothers and sisters drift apart from the simple bond of family feeling in the intenser struggles of new and complex interests developed by individual hopes and aspirations. It can scarcely be otherwise, and yet this is not absolutely and invariably true; but, I think, those are exceptional people who, when they marry, or in any other way enlist in the world's marching ranks, do not forget their father's house.

All which means that the sisters of Helena Wylde were not more remarkable for what is called natural affection than the majority of human beings.

And inflexible Time began to whisper to Mr. Wylde in situations that he was growing old. His health was not

actually impaired, but the dull, grey winter mornings oppressed him and the long days of summer wearied him. He was tired of business cares and calculations and the routine of office duties; and a growing distaste for exertion, combined with an inevitable recognition of its necessity, warned him that nature was claiming a well-earned period of repose, and that the time was at hand when he would gladly see a younger man in the place he had so long successfully occupied.

But where should he find the "younger man," now that he had mentally resigned his labours, whom he could wisely and willingly invest with his discarded mantle?

His thoughts reverted wistfully to Harry Drummond. He felt sure that his old favourite would bring him the rest and comfort he needed. But he was not sure that Drummond would come cheerfully. He had taken kindly root and flourished in that foreign soil to which he had been exiled for so many years, and life in the warm, luxurious island was in many respects a pleasanter experience than a stern northern climate could offer.

Having once, however, allowed himself to meditate upon this subject, Mr. Wylde was not the man to relinquish his idea without a trial, and accordingly wrote to Mr. Drummond that he wished to consult with him upon an important change in the management of the firm which he had in contemplation, and was anxious to have a personal discussion about the matter, and suggesting that the voyage was not a long one. He added that if Mr. Drummond would agree to come and see his old-time friends they would try to make his visit something of a holiday for him.

Harry Drummond had fitted himself easily into his West Indian life, and had not yet grown dissatisfied with conditions which, sooner or later, vex and weary most men not to the manner born. And he was far from understanding Mr. Wylde's meaning literally, for the latter had not been explicit. But the younger man felt that there could be no question or hesitation on his part about complying with the request of his true and constant friend, and made his preparations accordingly.

It was April, a rather wild and stormy month for the proposed voyage. At that season the violent spring gales so prevalent upon his hazardous native coast were likely to be encountered, but that was not taken into account.

He had written to Mr. Wylde by the previous mail announcing the date of his departure from Barbadoes. He was coming north in one of the fine traders belonging to the firm, which was all but ready to sail direct for the port to which he was bound. He thought the opportunity one too favourable to miss, and his arrival might be calculated upon definitely.

In all his years of absence he had not, Mr. Drummond said, longed for home. He had been busy and prosperous, and, although he had not forgotten his youth, he had been

contented. But now that it had been put into his head, he found it so pleasant to think that his early friends had not forgotten him in almost twenty years, that he was as homesick as a school-boy, and had begun to fancy that a tropical sky was enervating him. A breath of the fresh wild north-westerners he remembered so well would, he thought, set him up wonderfully.

Mr. Wylde seemed to forget his weariness and grow more cheerful, as people at his age do when some new hope or interest stirs the languid narrowing stream of life.

He talked a good deal to Helena about dinner-parties, a mode of hospitality he had of late much neglected, and suggested that she should give some dances and show Drummond some pretty girls who were not Creoles.

The weather was gusty and fitful, but the spring days grew longer, and great mountainous masses of dazzling sunlit cloud drifted majestically across the intensely blue sky at the pleasure of the variable winds, the snowy peaks and promontories parting and shifting to reveal the deep, cool azure caverns which lay behind their fantastic forms.

And the sea took on the lovely soothing colour so unlike its wintry hue. But it was the transition season, when fierce and sudden changes were not uncommon. The Billow was on her homeward trip, and Hugh Wylde, being one of her owners, and having besides that strong personal interest in her safety, felt that he should be glad to see her canvass furled in port again.

The vessel had a reliable commander and was in every respect well equipped and seaworthy; but when about the twentieth of the month a week of tempestuous weather set in he began to feel rather uncomfortable.

Some disasters in the fishing fleet were already reported, and a large foreign steamer, trying to run in upon the perilous coast without a pilot, had, in a dense fog, gone ashore below the light-house, and was beating herself to pieces upon a sunken reef which there lay in wait for the unwary.

On the twenty-fourth the violence of the wind had somewhat abated, and the water was less turbulent. There seemed a prospect of a lull in the conflict at least; but the fishermen of the neighbouring coves, who had mostly come in from the deep-sea fishing grounds for shelter would not yet prophesy fair weather.

Mr. Wylde kept a good boat in the cove below Cliff House, and Peter Schmidt, who was in charge of her, was an old pilot who had given up the active duties of his craft for a less toilsome life on shore.

The opinions of Peter were almost infallible, but he gave his employer no particular consolation at this juncture, although he knew well why he was consulted.

(To be continued.)