

'TWIXT LOVE AND DUTY.

By L. T. MEADE, author of "Richard Maitland," "Consul," etc.

THE time was midsummer. A girl in a very plain and neatly made cotton dress was standing by an open window. Creepers twined all round the window, some of them peeping into the room. Jessamine, monthly roses, and the deep waxy petals of the magnolia were amongst the blossoms.

A light, soft breeze fanned the girl's cheeks and brought into the room great wafts of sweetness from the flowers which surrounded the window, and which filled the beds in the garden beneath.

"Hallo, Sally!" exclaimed a gay voice, "there you are as usual in one of your daydreams. What are you exciting yourself about this morning? It is neither choir-practising day nor school-treat day. As far as I can tell, there is nothing going on—nothing whatever, and yet you look—Stop dreaming if you can, and let us begin breakfast. Do come and take your place at the head of the table."

Sally Erskine followed her sister without another word. She seated herself before the tea-tray, and with a quick, rather impatient movement began to perform her office of tea-making.

Anne Erskine cut slices of bread from the loaf, and scolded two round-faced, ruddy-looking boys. Mr. Erskine raised his eyes from a letter he was reading and nodded affectionately to Sally.

Shortly afterwards Sally was heard to exclaim excitedly, after pouncing on a letter beside her plate: "I've got the scholarship, papa. Scholarship from The Minerva Magazine—thirty pounds a year for three years. I am first on the scholarship list. The editor says so; this is his letter. Oh, who would have believed it possible! Now I may go to Newnham or Girton."

"What does Sally mean by saying she has got a scholarship, Anne?" asked Mr. Erskine.

"I'll explain it to you, papa.—Sally, do eat your breakfast and allow me to speak. You are scarcely responsible at the present moment.—It is this way, papa. Sally and I have taken The Minerva Magazine for the last year. You have noticed it, I am sure, for I've seen you reading it. Well, papa, The Minerva Magazine offers a big prize—a scholarship they call it—to the girl who comes out first in a certain competition. She has to go through a very stiff training, and the person who adjudges the prize is a real live professor."

"It is thirty pounds a year for three years. And six hundred girls competed for it. And it isn't a prize; it is a scholarship—the Minerva Scholarship. I'm distinguished for life. Oh, do let me give you another good hug!"

Mr. Erskine rose hurriedly to his feet. "I'm going out," he said. "I ought to be in the four-acre field now. See that the boys go off to school in good time, Anne. Sally isn't quite responsible."

He nodded in a gentle, affectionate way to his family and left the room. Anne hurried her brothers over their breakfast, and Sally, her cheeks flushed, her eyes like stars, read and re-read her precious letter.

As soon as the two girls found themselves alone, Sally looked full at Anne, and said in an emphatic voice: "Then the matter is quite settled; I go to Newnham in October."

"My dear Sally, you know how strong our father's prejudice is."

"We must get over it, Anne. My mind is made up. I shall spend three years at one of the women's colleges, and then start a career of my own."

"I don't believe our father will consent," said Anne, "and even if he did, thirty pounds a year would not cover your expenses."

"No; but thirty pounds a year will help largely towards them; and then you must not forget I have my share of mother's money. I shall be of age in a few weeks now, and then the money is my own absolutely. Oh, Anne, life seems really worth living at last!"

Sally sprang from her seat at the breakfast-table as she spoke; she was a tall, slightly built girl, with clear, open, brown eyes, a round face with rosy cheeks, a good-humored mouth, and a white, rather broad forehead.

Anne was small, thin and pale; she was generally considered Sally's inferior, both in appearance and ability, but she was far more reliable than her elder sister.

The Erskines were not a rich family. Mr. Erskine had inherited a small farm from his father. He was supposed to manage it entirely himself. Whether he did manage it is an open question; he certainly contrived to lose money over it year after year. Sally was the ostensible mistress of the old farmhouse, but Anne did most of the work and took more than her share of the trouble. Mr. Erskine was gentlemanly and inert. He was fond of his children, but he did not like them to worry him. He disliked undue excitement of any sort. His breakfast hour this morning had not been at all to his taste, and in his heart of hearts he owned to a feeling of regret that Sally should have got the scholarship.

"These new-fangled ideas are the ruin of women," he murmured, as he walked slowly to the four-acre field. "Sally won't be herself for days after this undue excitement. What will be the consequences? Nothing fit to eat will appear upon the table. Those hard-boiled eggs I ate at breakfast are giving me indigestion already. Oh, if women would but recognize the fact that they are sent into the world to be good daughters first, and good wives afterwards!"

On his way home to early dinner Mr. Erskine was overtaken by a pleasant-faced young man, who owned a farm adjoining his own.

"How do you do, Tom?" said Mr. Erskine, nodding to him. "Are you coming to join our dinner? I warn you, you had better not. There'll be nothing fit to eat." And then he told him of the scholarship and Sally's success. "But you seem glad at the news?"

"Well," replied Tom Ross, "from my own point of view, I suppose I ought to be sorry, because she'll be less inclined than ever to say yes to me. Still," continued the young man, carried away by a vision of Sally's ecstasy, "I'm honestly glad for her sake, for she has deserved this prize. I'll come back with you, Mr. Erskine, and take my chance of a badly-cooked dinner."

"Tom," said Sally, rushing out to meet her lover, and grasping him by the hand, "I know papa has told you, so I need not go over the news again. Anne and I have been arranging everything, and we have just written to Newnham for particulars with regard to the entrance examination. If all is well, I hope to enter Newnham in October. What's the matter, Tom? Aren't you delighted; don't you congratulate me?"

"Yes, Sally, I congratulate you."

"Aren't you glad?"

"For your sake I am glad, but"—

"Oh, don't let us have any dismal 'buts' to-day. If you intend to be very nice and cheerful, and if you mean to take my part during dinner, you may stay and play tennis afterwards."

Tom Ross promised vehemently; he would uphold Sally, and look cheerful, and be as nice and as apparently delighted as if he were her brother; nevertheless, he could not help a queer sort of ache which filled his heart whenever he looked at the bright, excited girl. She had never been