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MISTRESS OF MUSIC

Melody Was the Monarch of Maud Powell's Aspirations And Ambition

SUCCESS CROWNED HER STRUGGLES

Remarkable Career of the Young And Gifted Violinist of Whom Washington Is Proud

Although Aurora, Illinois, saw the dawn of Miss Maud Powell's life and the first suggestion of her genius, Washington may be said to be her home, if, in a life of incessant travel, she can be considered to have a home at all. Miss Powell might say with John Quincy Adams, "All that I am my mother made me," for it was her mother who put a violin into her hands before she had shown any musical talent, and by the sheer force of her will developed the latent artistic power which otherwise would have been lost to the world.

In those days, Camilla Urso was in the flush of her professional career, and Miss Powell, after hearing her play, thought, "one woman has mastered the violin, why should not another?" This thought speedily became a determination, and at the tender age of nine, Maud Powell was given a "fiddle," as she still calls it, and informed that she must learn to play it.

In the study of rhetoric one of the rules most frequently quoted is that the word "hate" should not be used in connection with inanimate objects, but just as our forefathers threw off the rule of the English king, so this feminine young American threw over an established rule of the king's English and simply hated that fiddle. She hated it for two reasons: first, because its possession drew down on her the undisguised scorn of her schoolmates and a storm of protest from conservative relatives who considered the family disgraced by such an unheard-of proceeding, and secondly, because of the amount of practice it required. She much preferred a romp with her little friends, for in those days she was a sad hoyden.

Camilla Urso Inspired Her

This rebellious state of mind continued until Mme. Urso came again to Aurora and she was taken to hear her play. It was a revelation, and for the first time she realized the possibilities of her despised instrument. After that she never had to be urged to her practice, for now she worked with an understanding of the end to be attained. Twice a week, when not yet in her teens, she went alone the forty miles to Chicago to take her lessons, and at 13 had made such progress that her parents decided to send her abroad for a year of study. Again family opposition came in and again the mother's determination overrode it, sanctioned as the step was by the father and son, who were most directly concerned.

When she appeared for examination before the staid old professors in the Conservatory at Leipsic her talent was so pronounced that all took an unwanted interest in her and opened every avenue at their command by which to foster and develop her great gifts and also to display them to others.

When the year was up, Miss Powell herself was impressed with the progress made and decided to go to Paris for one year more of study. At the Conservatory there, the tuition is free and consequently the examination is made extremely severe for all foreign applicants. At this time there were 87 applicants and but thirteen vacancies, and probably the most anxious hours of Miss Powell's life were the twenty-four preceding her examination. Before the official notice of her success came, she received a letter from her future professor, Dancla, informing her of the fact and congratulating himself that she had been assigned to his classes. This professor, whose name is familiar to every violinist, took infinite pains with her instruction and undisguised pride in her brilliant work, never missing an opportunity to display it.

Furore Created in London

When this second year was almost at an end, she thought of something more that she needed, and that was the experience that comes from concert work. She went to Léonard, played for him and asked his advice. He counseled an immediate trip to London, and gave her letters of introduction to a number of the leading musical people there. She made her debut as a youthful prodigy, and at once became the rage. Among the noted houses at which she appeared was that of the Princess Louise, and upon a request for a second performance, she gave her the regulation American snub, preferring to keep to an engagement, which was not only previously made, but paid her more in dollars and cents. After a London season she made a tour of the provinces, repeating everywhere her metropolitan successes.

She was almost ready to return home, in fact their passage had been engaged, and Prof. Powell advised to their return on a certain steamer, when through the kindness of friends, she met the great Joachim, and at his request played for him. He made no comments beyond the most conventional expressions of approval, but sought out the mother for a confidential talk, in which he freely expressed his pleasure in Miss Powell's work because it was entirely free from the amateurishness of a so-called "prodigy," and also because it showed the nature of a true artiste. He strongly urged a year of study with him in Berlin, as he said it would round out her musical education and put her upon her feet professionally.

Her Triumph Is Continued

That was enough for the mother, who at once cabled her husband of the change of plan, and instead of starting for the United States, they set off at right angles for Berlin. It is a requirement of the Berlin conservatory that all prospective pupils must register their names six months in advance, but Joachim brought about the suspension of the rule in her favor, and furthermore on examination day, when she entered the anteroom, she was taken at once to the committee instead of being obliged to wait her turn. This year of study was but a repetition of the three previous years, and at its end, she would probably have found some other cause for

remaining abroad had not the cholera broken out in Germany and brought from Prof. Powell a peremptory order for their immediate departure.

When she returned to New York she one day walked into one of the Thomas rehearsals and asked him to hear her play. He called one of his musicians to the piano, and, handicapped by a strange accompanist, she yet so pleased Mr. Thomas that he said then and there that he would bring her out in the fall at the first concert of the Philharmonic Society.

Common as is stage fright to every person who comes before the public, it may seem strange that for some time Miss Powell did not know what it was. By that I mean the name of the attack of wobbles, which a prospective entertainer always feels at the thought of his audience. Her mother's first query on her return from the concert was as to how she fared, and often her reply would be:

"I do not think I played quite as well as I might, but I felt so funny about the knees."

Mrs. Powell's Wise Discretion

Instead of enlightening her as to the real reason, the wise mother said:

"Well that was only because your number came so late on the programme that you were tired from waiting."

"Oh, no; that could not have been it, for I was second."

The response came just as readily and unconcernedly:

"Then it was because you were excited by the drive there, and had not had time to get quieted down."

It was not until the child had come into the dignity of womanhood that she knew the meaning of that "funny feeling in her knees" when she faced an audience. When one sees Miss Powell play, when from her violin she brings tones of masculine virility, to which are added the delicacy of touch and sentiment peculiar to a woman, she seems to do it all so simply and spontaneously that the years of drudgery and the incessant practice still exacted are lost sight of in the [words missing] ...ment.

This achievement [words missing] from four to eight [words missing] which are a double strain, in that there is the purely physical fatigue of standing with the arms, hands and head in the necessary position, and the intellectual and emotional exhaustion inseparably connected with the study of any composition.

Steady Work Necessary to Achievement

Perhaps Miss Powell's love and reverence for her art can be best realized by an extract from the paper which she read last Monday week at the musical congress of the World's Fair:

"The road leading to the Parnassus of art is steep and rugged. Moreover, there is no hand to assist and guide after the first few steps have been taken, so the ambitious climber must early learn to seek strength, courage and judgment within himself.... While the violin is the most difficult of all instruments to master, the musical compensation is quite commensurate with the necessary expenditure of time and pains in conquering its difficulties. That expenditure, however, is so vast and so incessant that only those who have learned to play can have any conception of its magnitude.... To those who intend to devote their lives to drawing sounds from that wonderful little product of primeval forest, mountain chamois and human ingenuity, I can only say, 'Art is long and time is fleeting,' and to achieve something of the best, one must do three things: first, work; second, still work, and third, ever work."

After reading that, one who would begin the study of the violin with professional aspirations must needs have consciousness of the genius of a Paganini or a Sarasate, and the courage of a Lief Ericson or a Christopher Columbus.

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