

THE PRICE OF FAME

by
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[EDITOR'S NOTE – Miss Maud Powell is the foremost woman violinist of the world. Many years ago, as a little Illinois school-girl, she went to Germany to study, and endless were the hours she spent with her violin under her chin, working for the success she has since won. Finally she was classed with the few greatest men of violin fame, with no woman as her equal. No one knows the American girl's Europe better than Miss Powell; no one can tell half so truly the vicissitudes which confront the girl who goes abroad to study music. And all of this she has here told fearlessly, that there shall be no overwhelming disappointments for the girl who chooses a musical career and no pitiful disillusionment which might break her spirit for the great fight out of which success must spring.]

It is a difficult question – too difficult to answer by a simple yea or nay: – Shall you become a great artist and have the multitude at your feet (if you are lucky), or shall you marry the faithful and honest Dick, live a life of humdrum domestic felicity and suffer ever after with a gnawing sense of defeated and thwarted ambition, a bitter "might-have-been?"

But first let me ask you a question or two before I attempt my answer.

Have you talent, a very real talent?

Have you health, strength and a good physique?

Have you character, will-power, courage and determination?

Above all, have you stick-to-itiveness, with an inexhaustible fund of patience?

Do you love your music more than anything else in the world?

Have you money to keep you going comfortably until you have finished with teachers and are fairly launched in the profession?

I hear you say, "I've more talent than any one else in Kaneville, and the girls at college all thought I was a genius;" which means that you and your friends have made comparisons that don't count. How would you stand comparison with very real and vital talents that have been reared in musical surroundings, talents that do things intuitively, talents that are at a starting-point of development at twelve where you are likely to finish at twenty? Besides, if you are going through college, you are wasting precious time that should be devoted to the mechanical side of your art. You must expect to sacrifice something in the way of general education if you are to become an artist. Madame Camilla Urso once told me that she never learned her A B C's until after she had mastered her scales. And I was taken out of school and carried off to the Leipzig Conservatory when I was only twelve. If you want to become a great instrumentalist, you must class yourself with the acrobats and the dancers, who train, train, train, from childhood on: always, everlastingly and unceasingly. How you are going to stand that hard labor, with your

delicate frame and sensitive makeup, I don't know. And were you as strong again as you are, I should still say, "Not strong enough for the fight."

Do you remember how Alice Mainard, large of bone and steady of nerve, a splendid tennis player, cyclist and swimmer, went all to pieces when that fine energy of hers was bent to nerve-racking and ear-splitting hours of study over in Germany; she meantime living on unaccustomed food in boarding-houses and restaurants? And how Jessie Ordway, with her amazing nervous force and indomitable will, practised from six to nine hours a day and said she would be a great artist, yet failed utterly, had a nervous breakdown and perforce went back to her brother to be cared for? The one man she had ever truly cared for had tired of waiting and had married a rich widow. So Jessie's life was wrecked because of misplaced ambition.

Frankly, I say to you that "the game is not worth the candle," unless your music is a part of your very fiber, your breath of life. If you love it thoroughly, love it objectively (so few women do that), and cannot be happy without it, then go ahead. But you wouldn't have needed me to decide for you, if that were the case: you would have been impelled by something within, regardless of advice or a thousand warnings.

Did my mother ever tell Aunt Jinny how I became a violinist? It is a serious confession. The family was broken up when I was taken abroad. Father, fond of home and adoring his wife and children, was left homeless, wifeless, childless: his part to work, work, work and send the monthly check regularly across the seas to pay for lessons, music, concerts, clothes and board. Four years of study abroad, and then the return. But separation was still necessary, for the concert field had to be "worked" from the East, and father's work lay elsewhere. The son and brother went home to his father, but his education was continued without home or mother influence. There were fifteen years of homeless life for all of us: then the nervous strain of professional life, with its incessant travel and irregular hours, proved too much for the brave little mother. She went back to her husband and planned a home life anew. But who shall say, after fifteen years of separation, with estranged habits and interests, that home was ever quite the same again?

Then the question arises: Shall a girl go abroad and fight the battle alone? Not you, my dear, nor any other American girl! And why not? Because she is too far from home, in a land where her independence, her freedom of speech and manners are misunderstood and misinterpreted; where the temptations are more numerous and different from those at home; where her youthful and American unafraidness, and the consciousness that there is no one from home to see and judge, will assuredly lead her into difficulties. Or if, on the other hand, my little American girl is of the guarded, cautious sort, she will have to be so doubly discreet in her behavior, being alone, that her poor little nature will be dwarfed and repressed, her self-expression will suffer from self-consciousness, and her art will not grow and flower as it ought.

I once heard Mrs. Theodore Thomas say that an artist should have a companion, besides a manager and a maid or valet, to keep the career a-going. Can you bethink you of a relative or friend who will go abroad with you – some one who loves you well enough to sacrifice all her own interests for the sake of your career?

And tell me, when you are thirty or thirty-five, and one day admit to yourself that you did not know what you were talking about when you declared in your early twenties that you were never, never, never going to marry, but intended to devote your whole life to your art; when your heart and your head and your art cry out for a fuller life and broader sympathies, and you feel that you have come to a standstill in development – then what are you going to do? Dick by that time will have turned his heart elsewhere, or if not, what right have you to marry him, with your high-strung nerves, your self-centered life of study and travel, your habits regulated to the demands of a critical public and not a bit adapted to a home career?

Now, by all this I don't mean that you are to shirk. On the contrary, it is right and only fair to herself that a woman should apply herself to something useful while she is young enough to learn easily. Every woman should be able to support herself in case of need. If her choice be music, then no artistic goal should be too high. And by that I do not mean fame goal. Go as far as you can, be as thorough as you can, believe that there is honor and gratification in doing a thing well even though it may not be done in the glare of the lime-light; equip yourself for the possible day of need, but if, happily, the day of need arrives not, enrich your life and that of your friends by being a "really and truly" amateur, capable, knowing, and sympathetic.

You ask if the financial rewards of a "career" are commensurate with the outlay of talent, time, sacrifices and cost of education. In rare cases, yes: generally, decidedly no. If one has the strength of an amazon and can supplement the public work with teaching, working harder and longer than any laboring man ever dreamed of doing, or if there is a certain indefinable something called "magnetism" in your personality which wins your way irrespective of your work – then, yes, the game may pay. Let me tell you, though, that the musical world is full of artists and musicians whose talent and ability command the deepest reverence, who nevertheless cannot swell box-office receipts by a single dollar for lack of that illusive quality – magnetism. The great public is moved by human qualities more than by art qualities. So suppose you spend your youth and early womanhood in the sweatshop of Art, and come forth into the light of public work well equipped technically and artistically – only to find yourself gloriously snubbed by the public because you are aloof and leave them cold? Where is your financial reward then?

I hear you say, "Tell me, has it paid in your own case?" Well, I have lived a rich life, certainly; but I am sure no business man could consider for a moment that the investment has proved a financial success. The reward lies elsewhere than in cold cash. Bear in mind, too, that art was created for the artist and not for the public. And it is a question whether many women would consider it worth while anyway, considering that they lose their childhood, miss the school companionship and social life of early womanhood, and live always a life of training and restriction. There are the hours of practise, the careful diet, the keeping in physical trim, the constant self-denial in the matter of social pleasures, late hours, shopping expeditions, or the many things one likes to do and may not, because of harming the hands or stiffening the muscles. They say Liszt never carried even an umbrella, for fear of dulling the sensitive responsiveness of his precious fingers. Mme. Urso told me, years ago, that I must never take a needle in my hand, for the same reason.

Shall I tell you a secret? Most of the women violinists, the best ones, hate their instruments. Madame Urso was bitter but brave; Lady Halle is (and I have this on the authority

of a manager who traveled on tour with her) cranky and ill-tempered. Poor Arma Senkrah committed suicide. Teresina Tua, the most fascinating talent of them all, got into some sort of trouble while in her fresh, beautiful womanhood and lost most of her artistic cunning and her adorableness quite suddenly. I verily believe I am the only woman who, having stuck to her fiddle unflinchingly, has preserved the remnants of a sweet sanity. And I wouldn't bank heavily on my nerves or temper either! But I would not undo my life, and it is a satisfaction to assert that the professional woman generally keeps her poise, her technic, her memory and her hearing, longer than her masculine rival; and while she may not take the inspired flights of the greatest geniuses, she nevertheless preserves a higher average of excellence. I am often asked how it is that I almost invariably play well, and I believe it is because I am more willing than men are to live as even and quiet a life as possible.

Nor am I satisfied to rest on my laurels. My confreres and my public have been good enough to maintain that I hold the premiere place among women violinists. To continue to be worthy of that confidence is a heavier responsibility than the original building-up of this reputation. The work, the study, the courage, the patience, the self-denial must go on to the end.

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