

## The Family of Leopold Auer in Memories and Letters

by Marina Akimova

I

In 2018 it will be 150 years since Leopold Auer began his teaching career at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Since his death his name has become synonymous with that of an incomparable pedagogue of violin in the same way as Paganini's name has become identical to that of a supreme violinist. By now no one knows for certain how exactly he taught his students. Sometimes he is described as merely an adroit manager who helped to organise the concert life of the already accomplished musicians. This opinion can be contradicted by the words of Heifetz who worshipped Auer all his life: "Professor Auer was an extraordinary and incomparable teacher. I do not think that there has ever been anyone to touch him in the whole world. Ask me not how he taught. I know not how to tell you about it because he taught every student entirely differently. Perhaps it was because of this supremely individual approach that he was such a marvellous teacher. For me even half an hour with Auer was sufficient to provide me with emotional and intellectual stimulus. He was possessed of a first class brain, superb sense of humour, marvellous nervous system, and tremendous magnetism. As you see everything in him was superlative."

Of late, interest in Auer and his teaching seems to be everywhere. One can come across his name in the most unusual places, for instance on an internet site or in a new book by Dina Rubin, a contemporary writer in the Russian language. Whereas for the erudite and worldly people he belongs to the realm of culture, very much like Paganini does for us musicians, Auer's name remains a symbol of a true teacher and adds to our perpetual nostalgia, particularly to those of us who experienced the deadly indifference of teachers, not an uncommon occurrence in our time.

The only book about Auer in the Russian language was published in 1962 for the centennial anniversary of the St. Petersburg's Conservatory. The book's author, L.A. Raaben, a researcher in music, carried out an enormous

study in the archives and libraries. He interviewed people who were then alive and had known Auer personally, including some of his former pupils and two of his then living daughters. The book contains not only Auer's biography. An attempt was made to reconstruct as far as possible, albeit some 30 years after his death, his pedagogical views and methods, although his pupils, such as Heifetz, were at a loss as to how to explain Auer's approach to teaching. (In Heifetz's words, 'Ask me not how he taught. I do not know how to tell you.')

The details of Auer's many-faceted musical activity as well as the particulars of his transcriptions are also discussed in the book, whereas his persona is less vivid and only a few words are said about his family which is a pity because a story of a foreigner, a musician and also a Jew (one does not know which is the worst in this collection) implanting himself into the Russian aristocratic milieu is fascinating in itself.

Let us try to fill this gap as far as possible. The majority of readers, it is assumed, would be familiar with the general outline of Auer's career and would remember that he was invited to the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he worked for 49 years, by Rubenstein. There he created the so called Russian school of violin which even in his lifetime received international acclaim. When in 1868 the 23 year old violinist arrived in St. Petersburg he travelled lightly, was single and as free as a bird. He was not without some achievements already, but had ambitions for greater things. He knew that his career was just beginning and must have apprehended that one could scarcely wish for a better place for the commencement of one's professional life. Almost immediately after his arrival Auer had found himself in the very centre of the intense musical life of a vast country. The possibilities that opened before him were truly endless. His impressionable nature which suffered initially from cabmen who were 'equally dirty externally and internally' must have soon become accustomed not only to the grabby cabs but also to the perpetual dampness of St. Petersburg, exclusively Russian difficulties of everyday life, and the foul air of a city without sewerage. Against all these difficulties Auer had a recipe which many years later he propounded in his letters to his daughters: 'Only work will help you to tolerate the most horrid climate and all the rest.' He could not spare time for the trifling problems of

daily routine. The musical life around him was vibrant, and he was devoted to music and regarded all else as incidental and unimportant. In just a year or so he was firmly settled. He played solo and in a quartet, and he had started teaching replacing Henryk Wieniawski, the Professor of violin, who was perpetually on tours. His social life was no less vigorous. From Heifitz we already know about Auer's magnetism. But Heifitz knew Auer as an old man. In those days when he was in his mid-twenties that magnetism must have come through his personal charm as well as through his luck which is always infectious to others. Like all lucky people he always managed to be in the right place at the right time. He was agile, lively and laughed easily. He was also a witty conversationalist in practically all European languages, a gourmand, a dandy and, as was later expressed by one of the female writers, had eyes 'with a certain languor'. Thus he looks at us from a contemporary photo: energetic profile, large, soft and well groomed beard, and those wonderful eyes the mentioning of which no biographer of his could ever avoid: enormous, 'protuberant as an apple', 'as if dipped in oil.'

It is worth mentioning that at the time music was in great vogue in polite society. Musicians, particularly the good ones, were constantly visiting there. An invitation to the Court was by no means a rarity. The Great Duchess was the patron of the RMO, the Russian Musical Society. The then Director of the Conservatory, Mikhail Azanchevskii, belonged to a noble and wealthy family. In his house Auer had met his future wife.

A few words need to be said about this Azanchevskii. The Brockhaus and Efron's encyclopaedic dictionary informs us that he was educated at the school for Ensigns of the Guards (like poet Lermontov) and also at the College for Cavalry Cadets. Thereafter he went to Germany to perfect his musical education as music had always been his passion. One little detail is missing from the dictionary: that is that he left Russia not only for the sake of music but also because he had a violent quarrel with his father who planned a military career for him and refused to hear anything about music. The father was incensed to such an extent that he disinherited his son. As a result, Azanchevskii led a precarious existence in Germany spending the little money he had on books and sheet music. In the end he managed to amass a

sizable library which, on his return to Russia, he gave as a present to the Conservatory. He returned home only after his father's death. His brothers' commendable decision was to return to him his inheritance in full. By so doing they had deprived themselves of a considerable part of their own portion.

In gratitude for the gift of the library Azanchevskii was appointed the Director of the Conservatory. He spent only five years in his post and had to go to Switzerland on account of tuberculosis which was a prevalent illness in his family. Thereafter he went to Nice where he had a tragicomic experience. He had learned that Tchaikovsky, whom he knew well, was living in San-Remo. Azanchevskii, who by that stage was quite ill, undertook a lengthy trip in order to see his old friend. Tchaikovsky at the time was in a terrible state of melancholy on account of his disastrous marriage. As soon as he had learned that Azanchevskii was on his way to see him, he decamped in order to avoid the meeting. For many years thereafter he was tormented by shame for his cowardice. Azanchevskii died soon after this episode.

Azanchevskii's sister was married to a doctor, Evgenii Venceslavovich Pelikan. She too had consumption. Her husband was a man of note and is mentioned by the writer Leskov. In later years he became a minister. The Pelikans' daughter Nadezhda, the future wife of Auer, remembered how on her return to St. Petersburg at the age of thirteen she was astonished to see how the subordinates of her father were bowing and walking backwards when leaving his study. This was only one of the many strange things she encountered in Russia. Hitherto she had lived abroad with her mother. The mother produced three daughters in quick succession but soon fell ill with consumption. Taking her daughters with her she went to Switzerland where she moved from one sanatorium to another. The true reason for her mother's departure from St. Petersburg was given by Nadezhda in her memoirs written at the end of her life. To her friends she gave a different reason, but we shall talk about that later. She and her sisters grew up to be quite foreign and did not like to speak Russian. All her life Nadezhda preferred to write letters, even to her Russian friends, in French.

When Nadezhda was thirteen the doctors decided that her mother was strong enough to return to St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, two years later she died of consumption. One can well imagine the life of the young girl in a country unfamiliar to her with the language she did not know well and without her mother. She was looked after by her father who, although kind and loving, was by that stage practically deaf. At that time she felt herself rather lonely. In summers the girls were sent to their aunt's estate. The aunt, wishing to bring them up in piety and also to occupy their time, insisted on them reading the Psalter and the works of Khomiakov, a notable Slavophile, while she herself spent her time embroidering. As far as is possible to judge from Nadezhda's memoirs, in her adolescence and early youth she was somewhat of an eccentric. She liked none of the young men she knew either in St. Petersburg or in the country. Partly this was because the young men spent much of their time hunting hares and then discussing the hunt, unless they talked about the management of their estates and their managers, and how to obtain as much money as possible. The young girl was sorry for the hares. As for the money, she hated financial conversations all her life, was never a good manager and was often short of money, especially after the deterioration of her relations with Auer. She never seemed to have enough for life in Paris and for the acquisition of good furniture for which she had quite an appetite. According to one of her friends, Nadezhda 'had a gift to make elegant everything she touched', but that came at a price.

She saw Auer for the first time soon after her arrival in Russia. It so happened that they both came to Russia in 1868. Azanchevskii took his nieces to a concert where a new foreign violinist, recently hired by Rubenstein, was expected to play. In the carriage during the drive to the concert uncle Misha [Azanchevskii] told them Auer's story. He was a Hungarian Jew, a son of poor people. He had to work hard to help his parents to construct dowries for his five elder sisters. He studied music with Joseph Joachim, a prominent violinist of his time, and was known in Germany and in London. 'He is a great artist', concluded uncle Misha his story. Nadezhda listened with great interest. As she later recorded, 'this type of a hero' was quite unknown to her either from life or from books.

Thus, a romantic picture of Auer was created in the young girl's imagination even before she saw him. That she should create a romantic hero out of such a material speaks of her intelligence and good taste. She wrote her memoirs about her husband when she was very old, and he was already dead. She never completed it, stopping in the most interesting place. The manuscript is about 30 pages of typed text written in French. Just imagine how it was written: in Stalin's Moscow in 1930 in a communal flat (it must have been a communal flat) an ancient woman who was then profoundly deaf and practically at death's door, dictated her memoirs about Auer in French to her daughter, a teacher at a musical college. In 1922, despite the twenty years of separation, Auer managed to claw her out of Sovdepia (Soviet Union). She settled in her favourite Italy in Florence. In 1929 shortly before her death, she returned to Moscow to live with her daughters. From Florence to the Moscow of those days!

Most probably she came back because she was too old and infirm, and needed care. She returned just in time because after Auer's death there would have been no one to provide for her. His second wife, after becoming a widow, would scarcely be burning with desire to pay for her husband's first wife. Besides, she herself would not have had sufficient means for that. Although Auer had left her \$50,000 and a house in New York, she was quickly reduced to poverty. Some six years later her Russian friends started a fundraising campaign for her and managed to collect \$1,000. Among the benefactors was Rachmaninov. We know about his participation in this from his own letters. The friends had a long discussion about how they could offer Auer's widow the money in the most delicate way.

In her memoirs Nadezhda did write how she had heard Auer play for the first time when she was only thirteen years old. It is evident that she tried to describe it so as to provide a great impression, although it is also evident that she knew very little about the violin (which is quite understandable). Her impression of his playing is transmitted through exclamations and a naïve translation of music into words: violin seemed to have asked, cello seemed to have answered...transparent clear sound pervaded the air. If one considers that this was written not by a thirteen-year old girl but a woman of seventy,

twenty five years of life with one of the best violinists of his time seemingly had taught her nothing about violin or her husband's art. She liked it that he was famous and paraded him before her numerous friends, but that was all. Her memoirs stop at the point when they were about to be introduced to each other. She was then sixteen years old. All that we know about Auer's family life comes from Nadezhda's life-long correspondence with her friend, Rachel Khin-Goldovsky. In these letters Auer the musician features regrettably little. All that interests us the most about Auer's fame as a musician is conspicuous by its absence. Occasionally there is a mention of his being away on a tour which is significant only because of what kind of life could be had during his absence.

## II

But let us go back to the beginning. At the age of sixteen the girls were considered old enough to be introduced in society. Prior to that they were taken to concerts in the Conservatory and elsewhere. Now as young ladies they were encouraged by their uncle Azanchevskii to attend his own musical evenings in a small circle of friends. It so happened that at the very first such evening the young ladies had the honour to be introduced to Auer. Their old companion, Miss Helene, querulously remarked to their uncle Misha that it was Auer who must consider himself honoured by the introduction to the ladies. However, even before the formal introduction, there was a portrait. On a visit to a music shop during an early morning stroll Nadezhda, while looking through the collection of post cards, found 'a beautiful photo of Auer'. 'This photo was to become her companion for years'. Her confidant, her sister Zoë, could not understand such an interest. 'I do not know about you, but for me he is a musician only on stage. In the drawing room he is just a Jew. Well, all right: I have my prejudices.' 'Do you remember father's words, - replied Nadezhda, - prejudices are our major foes. There.' 'Nothing is more irritating than the smugness of a youngster who always wants to be right', - replied Zoë and turned away.

However, it soon transpired that General Pelikan's broadmindedness had its limits. He became seriously alarmed when he learned that his daughter was in love with 'the drawing room violinist'. There were no scenes. The General was not a man to disinherit or curse his daughter. He merely suggested that she should spend some time in Moscow with their relatives in order to make sure of her feelings. Her friend, who kept in her diary the minute details of all her intimate conversations with Nadezhda later wrote that 'the Moscow trip did not help; and Nadezhda Evgenievna Pelikan, a noble young lady, soon became simply Mme Auer.'

Azanchevskii introduced Nadezhda and Zoë to Auer by saying: 'here are the Pelikan sisters, your fans who go to all your concerts and quartets. They are very happy to make your acquaintance,' Nadezhda was terribly embarrassed but, luckily for her, her sister and the English woman were near, 'and I let them talk .' What happened afterwards is described in minute detail. Auer, Zoë and the English woman went in search of some food. The hostess took Nadezhda to Malozemova, a pianist, who sat in solitude and boredom in the large drawing room awaiting the arrival of the guests. The room was in semi-darkness with the candles as yet unlit. The enormous Steinway was as yet uncovered. Next to it were four chairs prepared for the quartet. Malozemova said that should Leschetitsky, (a well-known pianist of his time) arrive, she would not play. Nadezhda asked why not. The dialogue ensued: M: You must be new to St. Petersburg if you do not know that Leschetitsky is a sworn enemy of Rubenstein. And his enemies are my enemies also. All our people, including the students, feel as I do: it would have been an unforgivable ingratitude to have a god and not to adore him. It's impossible. Oh! You do not know him. He is on tour at present, but when he is back you shall hear him. Perhaps you will even meet him, and you will see that it is impossible not to adore him.

N: Him or his music?

M, laughing: Both, him and his music.

Nadezhda was encouraged by her friendly tone and ventured to ask: 'Is he even more extraordinary than Auer?' Malozemova laughed uproariously so that she became quite red in the face and her teeth chattered like

castanets (thus it is written in the memoirs. Nadezhda being of an artistic nature was evidently given to exaggerations).

While Malozemova was laughing in that bizarre manner, Nadezhda noticed Auer making his way towards them. Malozemova shouted: 'Auer, Auer, Auerini! Come here! I'll introduce you to a charming young lady who in all earnest asked me whether Rubenstein, whom she does not know, is more extraordinary than you are. Ha, ha, ha, what a lady-killer (coeur-mangeur in Nadezhda's memoirs) you are, what a victor you are!' Auer also laughed with his 'joyous, open and noisy' laughter. Then he turned serious and said to Nadezhda: 'You know, Mlle Nadine, Rubenstein is a genius, pure genius while your humble servant, Leopold Auer, is merely a good *raccleur de violon*. That's the difference between us.' 'Oh, stop this, - said Malozemova, - every one knows that you are a first rate violinist (*du premier choix*)'. Auer interrupted her: 'Enough of this, Sofka, be quiet. I am sent by Miss Helen to find Nadine and bring her to the buffet for some tea. Come with us, Sofka. It would do you good to learn how to behave yourself properly'. (In the past Miss Helen kept a school for girls in Paris, then became bankrupt as the result of Franco-Prussian War, and came to Russia.) 'You are a modest man, - ejaculated Malozemova, - have you already met Nadine and Miss Helen?' 'And also Mlle Zoë whom I've met half an hour ago,' - replied Auer laughingly.

During her lifetime the attitude of Nadezhda to Auer had undergone several curious changes ranging between a passionate love in her youth and open hostility after twenty five years of marriage when she simply could not stand the sight of him. This finally led to their separation. Later on, in her old age, she acquired a new perspective on events. The past was then seen in a more pastel colours, and she also seemed to have realised something of the momentousness of the past. It is possible to say that she again loved him, especially after his death. Perhaps it is worse bearing this in mind while reading her memoirs. No doubt she idealised some things, but it is also worse remembering that there are some things which people, women in particular, can never forget. One can be quite sure that she described their

first disagreements meticulously, and those conversations between them are of some interest for us today.

His first visit to their home. Their house was a new one, hired only this season. It was a town villa on the embankment of the river Neva with an impressive eighteenth-century staircase, festive looking rooms with the flowery brocade on the walls (she did not forget to mention this). It was an evening, and most guests had not yet arrived. Nadezhda and Auer went to the balcony. A servant brought in the lamp...Auer was looking at the river: 'How wide and sad it is, - says he. - Our Danube is also a grand river, but it is so full of life and so friendly in comparison to this coldness and sternness.' 'Do you miss your motherland?' - asked Nadine. 'Motherland! - he exclaimed. - Motherland of a musician is l'universe. It's the country which requires his talent and his work. During my life I've known several Motherlands.' He stopped looking at the river and turned towards the room with the piano in it. 'Oh, and each of the sisters is learning to play?' 'It's Zoë who is learning. I have no talent, but Zoë is serious about her piano and she has a teacher.' 'But this is such a rare treasure for a musician to meet a young lady who is not learning to play! To have no little music after dinner, to have no little singing after tea! Oh, if only you could understand the torment of a musician condemned to tolerate the craft of amateurs, you would have pitied me. I was suffering very much from this in England.'

After a while they were sitting and talking. Sister Zoë had joined them. At the time it was regarded quite improper for a young lady to be alone in a company of a young man even in a broad daylight either on a balcony or a noisy street. By the way, while Auer spoke about his sufferings at the hands of dilettantes, there came Miss Helen, a great patriot of her country. She just managed to catch his last words and pounced on Auer. 'What? You were unhappy in England? How can this be? And why?' As soon as they had managed to get rid of her, Zoë came and declared that she wished to dance immediately: 'come, let us go downstairs at once! Papa has not come back from work yet. We can waltz before he comes.' Just then, however, the bell in the hall rang announcing the father's arrival. Zoë was very disappointed and remained with them upstairs. She started her own conversation about

the modern young men who were interested in nothing but politics, could talk only about the good of the country and did not dance. 'Are you interested in politics, Mr. Auer?' 'I? – she asked. – I would like to assure you that had I the genius of Bismarck, his brains and character, I would not hesitate to substitute my craft for his. But being as I am I prefer not to get mixed in anything, play my violin, teach the students and only know about the events. But what I really hate is those idle gossipers who disturb the young with their inflammatory talk. These types, alas, became quite numerous in Hungary after 1848. They do real harm. When I chose Russia as the country of my future activity, I reflected with satisfaction that Russia is so far removed from the rest of Europe in her reactions to many things! I like this very much! I am a confirmed autocrat.' Thus it was written: autocrat. We can only guess what he might have meant by it. Possibly something on the lines: 'I am my own boss'. If only he'd known, if only... It is strange to see that someone could imagine Russia to be a quiet backwater. It is a pity that Nadezhda's memoirs stop at this very point. She had time only to record Miss Helen's opinion about Auer: 'Oh, Mr. Auer. A very pleasant young man. You can see at once that he lived in England for a long time'. By then Nadezhda and Auer had been acquainted for a year, but only now did Miss Helen deliver herself of this high compliment. The reason for this is that this was Auer's first visit to the Pelikan sisters' home. It is an important development in their courtship. The first step is to be introduced to each other, the second is to meet on some neutral ground, thereafter a visit to the family home. Auer asked to be introduced to the General because he intended to become part of the family Mondays 'at home', but this did not happen during the first visit as the General returned from his office very tired, and the evening proceeded in a way different from what was intended. All these details were scrupulously recorded by Nadezhda as things momentous in the development of their courtship. What happened next is known from another memoir writer, a student of Auer, one Alexandra Unkovskaya, and also the memories left by one Alexandra (Sashen'ka, Sasha) Zakhar'ina, a private pupil of Auer.

To all appearances the scene described above took place after Nadezhda's return from Moscow. Everything must have been settled by that

time, otherwise Auer would not have dared to make a public announcement about the forthcoming wedding. He however, was quite jocular about it. In her memoirs Sasha Zakhar'ina wrote: 'The elder sister Zoë was a brunette and a real beauty whereas Nadia was a blonde and the most graceful creature in world. After one evening at Azanchevskii's monsieur Auer said to me:

- Sasha, I wish to marry one the of charming young ladies whom you know, but you must decide for me which one I should choose, Zoë or Nadia.

- Chose Nadia, monsieur Auer.

- I am of the same opinion, - replied he, and when grandmother came back declared to her: - Madam, I am getting married. Sasha and I have just this minute decided that I should marry Nadine Pelikan. You are invited to the wedding.' A few months later the excited Sasha and her grandmother were at the wedding as guests of the groom.

Auer also had left some memoirs entitled 'My Long Life in Music'. The title belies the contents as he wrote very little about himself. The stress is on the music and not so much on 'my'. His aim in writing the memoirs is to tell something interesting. If he does mention himself, this is only to denote a place and time of an event. He was at the first performance of Tannhäuser in Paris and gave a most detailed account of it. He also described the court of Abdul-Khamid Pasha in Constantinople, where he was invited to play, from a point of view of a European man. His memoirs is not an attempt to look in the mirror. They look outwards, not inwards. Were he to write his own account of his courtship, I feel sure that not a single word would have been said about 'lurve', but the funny and curious things would have been recorded.

It is interesting to compare the descriptions of the same man given in their memoirs by Auer and Nadezhda. For example, take Leschetitsky, the man about whom we had an opportunity to learn with some astonishment that he was 'a sworn enemy of Rubenstein'. In the end he did arrive at that evening. Nadezhda depicts him as practically a monster 'avec son visage crispé, pétillant de malice et d'intelligence' – with crinkled face, full of mischief and cunning. This is her description of Leschetitsky as he went to congratulate the singers with words 'Ah, my vestals! She contrasts this with

the attitude of Auer (Auerini) who took an active part in the recital, stood next to the piano and turned the pages of music for the singers, almost sang together with them, expressed his pleasure and practically glowed with happiness. 'What a happy character is his', she wrote in her memoirs, - what a bountiful nature always ready to love and extol beauty!' Not at all like that unpleasant Leschetitsky with his cunning and wrinkles.

Let us now compare this description with that of Auer. He touches on Leschetitsky when talking about his colleagues the professors of the Conservatory. 'Leschetitsky...was possessed of frankness, hearty character and the true Viennese gaiety because, although of Polish descent, he spent his youth in the Austrian capital. With true St. Petersburg's hospitality he kept an open house...'

A somewhat different picture, isn't it? It was a way with Nadezhda to create a character of a person, often making a caricature of one, and then to decide either to like or dislike that character of her own creation, not the real person. From this stems her method of giving strange nicknames to her acquaintances which, at times, irritated her faithful friend Rachel Goldovsky. She was also capable of bestowing her affection on a person quickly and just as quickly withdrawing it.

These short extracts help to illustrate the considerable differences in the spouses' attitudes towards life and people. It is rather difficult to see what it was that they had in common apart from youth. However, if one had to choose between the Pelikan sisters, Auer had made a better choice as Zoë, soon after her own marriage and the birth of her daughter, went to a clinic for nervous disorders. Rachel recorded in her diary after a visit to the clinic that Zoë 'was undoubtedly mad. Erotomania'. The keeping of her sister in the clinic and looking after her niece became Nadezhda's duty for many years to come.

### III

The Auers were married on the 23 May 1874. She was nineteen, he was twenty nine. Although at the time he was just one of the best professors in

the Conservatory, he also had made important steps for the promotion of his career. He became a Concert Master of the Mariinsky Theatre: 'placed under the auspices of the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres as an artist-violinist with the salary of 1,300 roubles per annum'. He also received the rank of a Soloist to His Majesty. The Conservatory at that time was governed by the RMO, the Russian Musical Society, an amateur organisation, which enjoyed the royal patronage. It was, therefore, a private institution and a fairly new one at that for it was only twelve years old. Working there was less prestigious than having a position in the Imperial Theatre, particularly in the capacity of soloist which was regarded as a very important position because it was under the royal protection. Before Auer it was occupied by Veniavskiy. Such a position meant that one was settled and secure for years to come. His work consisted primarily of playing a violin solo in ballets. The operas were regarded as second class shows, and violinists were not invited to take part in them.

The rank of His Majesty's Violinist was given to Auer on 20 March 1874, two months after his marriage. This was, probably, the last argument that won General Pelikan over. As a loyal subject of His Majesty he could no longer harbour any resentment for his son-in-law. There was also one delicate detail in this story. It is known that at about that time Auer was baptised into the Russian Orthodox church. There were two reasons for his conversion. Firstly, 'people of Jewish faith' were accepted to serve in the Imperial Theatre only in exceptional cases. Secondly, unless Auer were to convert to some Christian faith, his marriage could never be regarded as legitimate.

Russia at that time was much more a police state than it is today. The Pale of Settlement was strictly observed. For being in the capital illegally a Jew could be deported home in manacles and under guard. It is improbable that such a thing could have happened to Auer, but there were people around him who were directly affected by the laws of the country against the Jews. Rubenstein had to insert a special provision into the Conservatory statute which gave the Jewish students the right to reside in the capital. Their parents, however, had no such right. Many extremely talented young boys of

eleven or twelve years old started to come to Auer for tuition. Not many parents would have been prepared to let so young a child live the capital on his own. The system of issuing the resident permits was already fully in operation. On arrival a stranger, after he had found his lodgings, had to be registered at his new address. He would surrender his passport to a house caretaker whose duty it was to deliver the passport to the police for registration within twenty four hours of the person's arrival. None compliance with this regulation resulted in much troubles and a large fine for the landlords. People had to surrender their passports to their house janitor when they travelled to the countryside for a few weeks. The rule was applicable not only to the Jews. The passport of Chaliapin, for example, is full of the police stamps. It might have been an irritating thing for him constantly to surrender his passport to the police and thereafter collect it, but for researchers of Chaliapin's life and career his passport makes it possible to trace his peregrinations with a considerable degree of accuracy. As one might say, 'any cloud has it's silver lining.'

It would appear that the change of religion was not difficult for Auer. The indirect information for this could be found in writings of Sasha Zakhar'ina: 'My grandmother who was very pious was greatly troubled by the question of Auer's faith. On one occasion she could contain herself no longer and asked him directly what his faith was.' 'La religion de l'humanité, Madame,' - replied he gravely, and then smiled faintly, and grandmother reddened to the roots of her hair.' It's a curious situation. One might ask why was the grandmother so worried about his faith as to ask him a direct question? He was a private tutor to her granddaughter and gave his lessons under her strict supervision since Auer was still a young man, and the grandmother was vigilant. But the grandmother was really troubled in her mind. What would have happened had he replied differently and told her that he was of the Jewish faith? Would he be shown the door? This seems unlikely. If she did not mean to dismiss him why put such a question to him?

One could attempt to look at the situation from a different perspective. Sasha's memoirs are written with great sympathy for Auer. It seems that the grandmother also liked him. Elsewhere in her memoirs Sasha noticed that his

presence moved her grandmother to a much more elegant and witty conversation. Had it become clear that he was, as she suspected, of the Jewish faith, it would have destroyed her pleasure in his company.

But what of Auer? He was in the respectable household of a noble woman. The grandmother, properly dressed and with a wimple of black lace fashionable for a woman of her age, asking an impertinent question the only logical reply to which would have been 'mind your own business'. Instead he managed to answer in such a way as to preserve his own dignity and lead her into confusion. In our language he's got a tick in every box. One would like to return to his words about the Hungarian revolution and gossipers. It seems that we need to call him a backward looking and a conservative man. And why not? It is scarcely a crime to be a conservative. But for some reason one does not like him to be one as if there were something offensive and improper in this word. In reality this episode shows Auer as a man who prefers peace to quarrel. He seemingly refrains from sharp encounters. What would he have been thinking about the Revolution? That, despite the spilt blood, everything had returned to the previous position? The peaceful solution would be found some five or six years later (it was a revelation for me to learn that serfdom lasted in Hungary for almost as long as it did in Russia). And there is much in that irritation with which he talked about the 'gossipers troubling young minds'.

In all probability he was a conformist who saw his surroundings dispassionately, adapted himself dextrously to every situation, not so much for profit, as to make himself invulnerable because he needed all his time for more interesting things. If he had to follow some rules, he would prefer them to remain unchanged. Otherwise he would have to rebuild the framework of his independence every time the new rules were to come into circulation. In his memoirs he talked much about the troubles of the Jews in St. Petersburg, but he never voiced an open indignation. He took the Russian state anti-Semitism in his stride and accepted it as he accepted the weather which one cannot change, or frost for which the only remedy is a fur coat. He preferred to tell a curious or comical story such as that of the father of Heifitz who had to be enlisted as a pupil in the Conservatory in order to provide him with a

resident permit. Else he recorded incidents that shocked him. One morning he was awoken rather early because uninvited visitors had turned up: Zimbalist (one of his pupils) with his mother. They had spent all night walking the streets of St. Petersburg because there was nowhere his mother could find lodgings. They were frozen stiff as it was a cold and damp October night. Auer was stunned when he learned that this was by no means the only night spent by them in constant peregrination around the capital. But again he voiced no complaint or indignation. He only recorded that after the State Duma was opened the rules restricting the movement of Jews were no longer as strictly observed as previously.

One would like to avoid creating an image of him as a person with his head in the clouds because this would be a false image. Quite the contrary. He was a very practical man and as 'the Chief Violinist of St. Petersburg' wielded considerable power. Raaben wrote that his distinctive quality was 'to launch his former pupil's careers'. In this he could scarcely have been successful had he not the profound understanding of human nature, intelligence, tact and desire to help.

After the arrival of the Zimbalists at his house at five o'clock in the morning he did not ignore the situation. He wrote a letter to the Chief of the St. Petersburg police adding an interesting remark to this story in his memoirs: 'although I did not know him personally as the chiefs of the police changed so frequently in 1904'. Mme Zimbalist needed a resident permit just for a few days and after Auer's letter she was given her permit. In helping the father of Misha Elman, his other pupil, he went to much greater lengths. Through his numerous acquaintances he secured an interview with the Minister of the Interior, Pleve, (the very man who was later blown up by Sazonov, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party). Pleve gave Auer a cold reception, spoke through clenched teeth and kept shuffling his papers. Auer had left his office with a feeling of complete failure of his mission. Yet, to the general astonishment some three weeks later a large envelope was delivered to him by post containing the permission for the elder Elman to reside in St. Petersburg during the period of his son's education.

In 1906 Auer left the Theatre pleading impending old age: he was sixty one at the time. His place was taken by one of his former students, and by another one after him. The same happened in the Conservatory where his past students made up the core of the teaching staff. His students were to be found in the quartets and in orchestras.

And what about his family? He was a man of integrity who disliked abruptness and sharp changes. Despite a great deterioration in his relations with his wife, the separation was initiated by her and not by him.

At the beginning everything seemed to have been going well. For their honey moon they went to Hungary to his parents. On their return they took a splendid flat and entered into a lavish lifestyle with many servants, banquets and the Tuesday evenings 'at home'. They entertained almost the entire elite of St. Petersburg including Conservatory professors and famous lawyers like Koni. Nadezhda was a gracious hostess and he had plenty of charm which allowed him to attract people in minutes. It was if he knew himself to be a good man, and all others were infected by his certainty of this. But his work load increased. He continued to teach, work in the Theatre and play in his quartet which even Kui, an extremely sharp critic and a person naturally hostile to everything 'conservative and German', praised enthusiastically; he also started conducting in concerts and operas. *Per Gynt* was heard for the first time in Russia when he conducted it. (Blessed were the times when the composers, the performers and the public all spoke the same musical language!) He also took part in the creation of a new orchestra for the RMO who previously hired the theatre orchestra. Later he conducted it. Such work entailed the necessity to chose a repertoire, hold the whole organisation together, find the instruments (the harp, for instance, was borrowed from the Chief Conductor of the theatre, Napravnik), engage the soloists, negotiate terms with them, etc. All these in the days when, if there was a telephone, it existed probably only for the use of the Tsar. Auer's surviving correspondence (his archive was abandoned in his flat in Petrograd and subsequently lost, it seems) contains mainly short notes written on fragments of paper to the same Napravnik, for example, with the time for an

appointment. One can just imagine the servants trudging around the city with these notes some fifteen times a day, and more.

#### IV

Nadezhda was also quite busy. She produced three daughters in quick succession and the fourth one some time later. As a part of her dowry she received an estate in the Samara province, but the Auers preferred to spend their summer holidays on the Riga Rivera in Dubbenaa where they had a large country house situated in the middle of a pine forest. They had plenty of visitors, and even during his holidays Auer continued to work every day, and also give concerts. Nadezhda was a fulfilled woman, a mother, a hostess of a hospitable house, and the wife of an extraordinary man. What more could one wish for? Was she happy? Rachel Khin-Goldovsky described in her diary chance meeting in a train which led to their lifelong friendship. This description is reminiscent of a scene in *Anna Karenina*. Most of what we know today about Auer comes from Rachel's diaries. She is the source most quoted by Raaben for the appearance, character, and habits of Auer. Let us have a look at the beginning of Rachel and Nadezhda's friendship and at a young woman, once madly in love, nineteen years after the wedding.

'I have just come back from the town of Tula, - wrote Rachel in 1894 quite excited by her new acquaintance. - I travelled with a very interesting lady. It was a hard going in Tula, and on my return journey I dreamt of a private compartment so that I could spend a few hours in silence and not looking at anyone. No matter how I pleaded with the conductor and the porter, there was no private compartment to be had, and the one I finally found myself in was occupied by a very elegant lady. She greeted me with a welcoming smile and gestured me to the divan opposite as if wishing to say 'please feel free and never mind my being here'. I thanked her with a bow (perhaps she overheard my pleading with the conductor for an empty compartment) When the train started to move away from the platform I produced a cushion and a book, covered myself with a rug and immersed myself into reading so as not to give the lady a chance for chatting. She too was reading. It was a French

novel in a yellow cover. Her sumptuous coat with a red silk lining was swinging on the hook by the door. On the table between our two divans there was an enormous bunch of flowers; and instead of the usual unpleasant compartment's smell the whole compartment was filled with the smell of good perfume and powder as if it were a boudoir. I thought her to be an actress travelling back from the South after a tour. ...Our eyes met. Her whole face was lit up by a smile, but I lowered my eyes lest she would start talking. Thus I was trying to avoid her for a good hour, but at last she won. When the ice was broken we felt, the both of us, like two sisters after a long separation, and we could not have enough of each other. We talked about everything: the literature, life in the Moscow and St. Petersburg societies, Paris, and the Scandinavian writers. The understanding between us was perfect. Never before had I such a hearty conversation or felt so much at ease. ...When we were approaching Moscow I thanked Mme Auer for our 'carriage romance'. We kissed each other soundly. She promised to come to Moscow just for my sake, invited me to St. Petersburg and promised to write to me as soon as she recovered from the journey, and said that she would never forget me... This was an incredible adventure in my bleak life. I and such a fortunate woman as Mme Auer, a wife of a famous person, a society lady. I am immensely grateful to her for those six hours. It is as if I were immersed for a while in to my own element.'

'7<sup>th</sup> of January. Received a charming letter from Mme Auer. How strange it is! In the train she impressed me as being an educated, well mannered, immensely charming woman. Her whole being exuded that freedom which is achieved only through a complete faith in one's own abilities. Now she is writing to me about herself as being a shy, weak woman, lacking in initiative and will power...She is dreaming about a life somewhere in the South, in a small house next to some great talent to whom she could "dedicate herself". Incredible! Her husband is a famous artist, one of the greatest violinists in the world, if not the greatest... Why go on looking for another talent when you have one right next to you? She writes that "he is very curious about women"... it must be rather trying to live in the rays of such a talent. ...It would have been interesting to observe this union at close

quarters. I know Auer only through his concerts. An incredible violinist. He is of small stature, grey haired, with a clever Jewish face and magnificent black eyes. He is best at playing Bach, Mozart and Beethoven...'

A chance to 'observe this union at close quarters' presented itself to Rachel on a number of occasions. Nadezhda at once invited her to visit them in Dubbena. She came, lived near by and dined with the family every day, attended the Auers' evenings and saw everything for herself, spending much time with her new friend while discovering, to her amazement, that she was used as a sort of a waistcoat for Nadezhda's tears. They secluded themselves in the verandas, in Nadezhda's room, and all the while Nadezhda was wailing and complaining endlessly. She was not a happy woman. Partly her husband's attention to the ladies was to blame, although he did warn her about this streak in him even before the wedding, expressing a hope that she would be a sensible girl and ignore his lapses. She was so much in love that she promised to be sensible. After nineteen years of marriage, however, she seemed to have become disenchanted with him or, perhaps, grew too tired of being 'sensible', or both.

She talked about her love for him only in the past tense. She told Rachel about her own mother explaining that she saw herself repeating her mother's fate. Zoë Pavlovna Perlikan, née Azanchevskaya, was in appearance and character a true young lady from a Turgenev's novel and could not forgive her husband, General Pelikan, his many infidelities. That was why she took her daughters and went abroad. There was not a word said about her mother having tuberculosis, the reason officially given for her trip abroad. In her turn Nadezhda herself managed to get attracted to a number of persons each time selecting for her adulation people of note, those in the public eye, famous men. Evidently her dream 'to give herself to a great talent' was a dominant feature of her life. One of those great men was a fashionable Danish writer and critic Georg Brandes, another was a lawyer Prince A. Urusov, a Russian Chysotstom, as he was called, whose court speeches caused the ladies to faint in ecstasy.

Some scenes from her affair with Urusov retold by Rachel make one think again of *Anna Karenina*. Initially Auer, engaged with his successes,

failed to notice anything amiss, but eventually, at some evening where Sarasate (a Spanish violinist famous at the time) was present, he perceived that something was going on and, when the guests had left, said to his wife that it was quite improper on her part to pay so much attention to one guest when a hostess should be equally attentive to all. The verbal exchange that followed did not resemble scenes from *Anna Karenina* as neither Nadezhda, nor Auer resembled Tolstoy's characters. She told him then and there about her new love pointing out that, unlike others, when she fell in love it was a serious thing. Auer had suggested that in this case she should choose between him and Prince Urusov.

Nadezhda at once summoned Urusov and, when he came, without much ado told him what happened. 'What should I tell my husband', - she demanded from Urusov. Caught completely unawares the famous lawyer, general favourite and darling of the public turned ashen, was rendered speechless and became almost comatose. He mumbled something to the effect that it was an utter madness, that he had a wife and a child ('I have three', - reasonably retorted Nadezhda) and that there never had been any firm agreement between them... A few days later Auer enquired whether his wife had come to a decision. She replied that she was staying with him. He nodded and said: 'I knew how it would be'. The poor woman was desolate and, having no confidant, elected to unload her disappointment and despair onto her husband. For the following three weeks every evening she related to him the details of her affair. He listened, consoled her, wiped her nose and tears for her and as a man experienced in such matters assured her that this was a usual and natural course of events...

Rachel was taken aback by this story and said to her friend: 'It seems that he is a kind man.' 'Oui, il est bon,' -replied Nadezhda. It needs to be said that had it not been for Nadezhda's stories and complaints about her husband's adultery Rachel would not have had an inkling that there was something amiss in the family. 'At home Auer is a pleasant, affectionate and attentive husband, kind although a strict father', - she noted with a mild surprise in her diary. Auer's youngest daughter Maria, known at home as Mukha (literally a Fly) was his favourite child. She was everything to him. He

spoilt her terribly, found her every word amusing and forgave her every mischief. In her diary Rachel snidely remarked that he was 'a real Jewish father'. One might conclude that despite all the adventures had by both spouses at that time their marriage was not in any real danger.

Prince A. I. Urusov, cast in such an unattractive role, managed to avenge himself for the embarrassment Nadezhda had caused him. (After that unfortunate conversation with Urusov Nadezhda told him that he would not be able to attend their evenings for a while. 'How is that? – exclaimed the astonished lawyer, - not even the day after tomorrow when Sarasate is to play again?' 'Not even then'. He pursed his lips as a disappointed child might do and looked offended. 'I see now that you never really loved me,' – he said to a woman whom he had chucked just a minute previously.

Yes, about the revenge. It turned out to be a petty and a petulant one quite unbecoming a man. It happened in the following way. Joachim, a favourite teacher of Auer, came to St. Petersburg. Auer had organised a lavish supper in his honour. It was known that Joachim drank only Mosel wine of two special kinds. One was to be served in the green glasses, the other in the black ones which the Auers did not have, and Nadezhda was asked to fetch them from a shop. On the way there she encountered a little Italian beggar boy trembling with the cold (it was a winter time) and holding a monkey. 'Madame please buy my monkey', - he asked her in French. She could not stand seeing the pathetic look in the pair of sad black eyes: 'How much do you want for the monkey'. The boy asked for five roubles but she gave him ten and immediately returned home with the monkey where the children at once took charge of the animal. They washed it, fed it and made fuss of it, and by the evening the monkey was skipping and hopping around the house. A second trip was needed to purchase the glasses. Later in the evening Urusov came visiting and was told the monkey story. 'This is very much like you, - he said suddenly, - you were asked for five roubles and gave ten. You always give twice as much as the others want to accept from you.'

He told her many other impertinent things that made her cry but she forgave him in the end as she always did. 'I am his slave, I agree to everything that he says or does, - she told Rachel with some coquettish pride.

She did not forgive her husband anything, but she forgave Urusov of whose endless love affairs both Moscow and St. Petersburg were buzzing with gossip. The only person who judged Urusov correctly was Zoë, Auer's eldest daughter who was seven at the time. She intuitively hated him. She had a dog named Bravo whom she trained to bite Urusov's legs. The dog liked doing this very much and as soon as he entered the house rushed towards him and chased him around the house. It never caused him any serious harm but it irked Urusov who took to giving a warning prior to his arrival so that the dog could be locked up. Once he tried to make friends with Zoë and said something like this: my lovely child, your charming dog, it seems, does not like me very much. Looking straight at him with her Auer's eyes Zoë replied: 'Like mistress, like dog, Sir.'

It appears that after a sad youth clouded by the death of her mother Nadezhda had become slightly peculiar on account of this lavish life she led because undoubtedly Auer had spoilt her, especially in the early days of their marriage. One can well imagine that after the father reluctantly let you marry his daughter you would like to prove that she had gained rather than lost. If at the age of sixteen Nadezhda was sceptical about society life and promised herself never to enter it and appear only at the musical venues, at thirty she had scarcely spent an evening at home being often 'at one theatre or another'. Her daughters were with their nannies. She maintained a large circle of friends among whom at different times were Anatole France, Vladimir Solov'ev, Maximilian Voloshin, as well as the famous lawyer Anatolii Koni, whereas Auer's guests were mainly musicians. In time she had amassed yet another group of friends. The truth of the matter was that Nadezhda had always lived at a point of financial crisis. Reading her letters, one realises that she was spending thousands of roubles which she had to procure from somewhere and always at the last possible moment to forestall the crisis. In those days these were enormous sums. At times even Rachel, from whom Nadezhda also borrowed, was quite puzzled. Nadezhda always had to have everything of the best, most expensive and elegant. Anything else was regarded as beneath her dignity. Presumably, at the beginning, Auer liked this attitude of her's, later he must have tolerated it until his patience had run

out. The recriminations followed that she was simply exploiting his labours which does ring true because whatever money he had was procured through his constant work. She began to incur debts of which she was afraid to tell her husband.

One episode took place quite a while before their formal separation. Some time in the early 1880s Nadezhda had acquired a friend, one Ivan Bliokh (variously known as Johann von Bloch, Jean Bloch, Jan Gottlieb Bloch, etc.) He was a millionaire who had made his fortune on the railway concessions. He was also a writer on the subject of economy, was regarded as a clever man and once was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Again an outstanding personality in her entourage. Although he was of a mature age he had fallen in love with Nadezhda. It is difficult to say how far matters went and, to tell the truth, one does not like to look at this affair too closely. In all probability the relations were of a platonic nature. Bliokh had started to supply Nadezhda with 'pocket money'. To diminish the embarrassment it was construed as a debt to be repaid when, some time in the future, Nadezhda were to sell her Samara estate. That 'some time' lasted for quite a while and, as it happened, she sold her estate only after his death when his heirs had immediately come to demand the repayment of the debt. During their father's life they took a dim view of the arrangement. It is unknown how the affair was settled. Nadezhda herself always avoided talking on the subject.

At the very beginning of the arrangement between Nadezhda and Bliokh Auer came to know about it. If her love affair with Urusov was viewed by him with leniency, the affair with Bliokh simply incensed him. Judging from the careful tone she had used in telling this story, the relations between her and her husband had cooled down considerably because of this. She was very sorry about it. From that time onward it would seem that Auer kept aloof and freed himself from at least some of his moral obligations. He did maintain her, as we know, to the end of his days but when it came to the subject of 'thousands' explained that he 'was not so rich as to pay the debts of his wife' letting the so called friends do so.

By the time of their Silver anniversary the tensions between them became extreme. 'Mr. Auer has come, - she wrote in her letter to Rachel (thus she always referred to him in her letters) – now we have aggravated exchanges and explanations every day.' She too had something to reproach him with. The first alarm bells rang soon after their marriage. Later things went further when, at his request while he was at Dubbena, she was to open his letter, purportedly an important one from a foreign impresario. Instead of the expected letter there was a perfumed sheet of paper with the words 'Mon Cheri! Your room in Marienbad is all ready. It's barely five minutes away from me'. Such occurrences did not seem to anger Nadezhda. They only produced a customary bitterness. Now and again, naturally, she would cry after the receipt of such a note. Even the academically inclined Raaben mentions Auer's Don Juan's streak, albeit in passing and as something quite understandable and excusable. He also attempts, somewhat clumsily, to excuse him on the lines of 'Boccaccio's healthy spontaneity' which, as he thought, was a characteristic of Auer. Be that as it may, they did celebrate their Silver Jubilee. In 1899 they were still together, and she had to bite the bullet and present herself as a happy mother of the family to everyone. The words she used to describe this jubilee to Rachel seem, initially, quite strange. 'Soon it will be a quarter of a century since my conversion to Judaism', and this notwithstanding the fact of his baptism.

One needs to understand something about Rachel. The understanding becomes easier when one learns that she too converted to Christianity. In her case, however, this was from a conviction rather than career motives. Despite her conversion she was a known campaigner for Jewish emancipation and a fighter for the rights of the oppressed. She was also a writer and a dramatist. With her own Jewish culture her relationship was difficult, ranging from a sort of painful pride to an equally painful sort of pity which was at times unbearable. If she wanted to denigrate someone she would write that he 'was a typical Jew'. Her diaries which she wrote during almost forty years are a true encyclopaedia of Russian life of her time because she was also a landowner and possessed and managed the Katino estate. She tells us about everyone and everything. It seems that she knew

Tolstoy about whom she wrote a great deal. She wrote in her diaries about Solov'ev whose untimely death was a blow to both friends, about the renowned lawyer Koni who often stayed on her estate and who was her friend, about the 1905 Revolution which she witnessed and saw the shooting in Moscow, and about the Russian-Japanese War. She had an audience with the Minister of the Interior and put on paper their entire dialogue, and she also wrote about her friend 'Nadine'. Therefore Nadezhda's enigmatic phrase about her 'conversion to Judaism' is simply a reference to her marriage, meaning, perhaps, that despite his conversion Auer remained very Jewish in essence.

On the 22 December 1899 Rachel wrote: 'Sad letters from Nadine. It seems that she wants a complete separation. This appears to go contrary to her philosophy of tolerance in the family. Accustomed to luxury and free spending as she is how will she manage?' Further in January Rachel wrote: 'Nadine wants "to move out". Given her relations with Auer and their age I cannot understand such a step. She is not close to any of her daughters.' By that time Nadine had no close relatives left. Her parents had died, one sister was in an asylum, the second died of diphtheria having caught it from her own child. Nadezhda could either move to her daughter Zoë who had been married for four years and lived in Koliyshovo, her husband's estate, or live independently. She selected the latter. She would visit Zoë from time to time, but she would live in Paris with her two younger daughters. There they would learn singing with Désiré Artôt ( the very woman who once was close to becoming the wife of Tchaikovsky). They would also become acquainted with the young Voloshin (a son of poet Maximilian Voloshin) who would immediately fall in love with Mukha. At the same time Auer had moved to a new flat and from that time onward never lived with his wife and daughters. One could say that the family had succeeded in falling apart.

By the age of forty fives Nadezhda's health began slowly to deteriorate. She complained about constant headaches and painful knees (arthritis?) which precluded her from going out but above all she realised that, like her father, she was gradually becoming deaf.

For the last years the family, when it was still a family, lived near the Kriukov Canal in number 7, flat 6 on Torgovaia Street (now the Soiuz Pechatnikov Street). The Auers moved there on the 1 July 1896, although previously they preferred to live somewhere in the proximity of the Nevsky Prospekt. This was because at long last the new building of the Conservatory on the Teatral'naia Square had been finished. Prior to this the Conservatory was On Teatral'naia Street (now the Zodchii Rossii Street) which was close to Nevsky Prospekt. Now all places of Auer's work were within a five minutes walk from home. 'Just imagine eight people in the cramped Kriukasha plus the visitors', - complained Nadezhda in a letter. Kriukasha was the name she gave to her new home. Sometimes one cannot help thinking her a strange woman full of originality, with an sharp taste, if one could use such a word. But if relations had deteriorated to the breaking point any flat would seem cramped.

There was a last decisive conversation during which the separation was agreed, but for a while everything seems to drag on, things were still being sorted out. Nadezhda tried to cure her impending deafness with the help of Dr. Poliakov, presumably a famous specialist. A few months elapsed and Auer told her that he had found another flat and carefully and confusedly asked his wife's opinion. Nadezhda knew already what sort of flat this was. It was next door to the flat occupied by a lady with whom Auer conducted such open relations 'that the whole town was talking about it'. Nadezhda shrugged her shoulders and replied that it did not matter any more. However, should the flat be rented, the daughters would be unable to live with them as it would be quite improper. 'I was of the same opinion, - replied Auer, - all right. I shall not take it.'

## V

Who that woman was is not apparent from our sources, but one might speculate that it was the pianist, Vanda Stern, who often accompanied Auer's students during lessons. If this was so, in his mature age he transferred his

interest from the young ladies who did not play to those who did and with whom he could talk the same professional language. Vanda was much younger than both Auer and Nadezhda. Vanda and Auer were married years later in America where the puritanically inclined took a dim view of their 'cohabitation'. It seems he was not the only one who had problems in America because of the irregular life style. Gor'kii, for example, had to leave the country altogether, Chaliapin who was due to tour America had to divorce in a hurry his wife who remained in Russia.

In the end Auer did take the flat he wanted. The address was 26, Angliiskii Prospect at the corner of Ofitserskaia Street (now Prospect Dekabristov). There he spent the last seventeen years of his life in Russia. From this very flat his archive and library had disappeared. The house survived unchanged by any major restructuring. Then, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the building was rebuilt, looked festive and was as handsome as it was comfortable. The flats were expensive and the landlord quite particular in the choice of his tenants. At present, alas, Angliiskii Prospect (given old name back after being called Prospect of Maklin) is not a very prosperous part of the city. The front door to Auer's stairwell no longer has a uniformed commissionaire but an obligatory iron armoured door (which makes one think of a beer kiosk of Soviet times), the staircase is dirty and littered with used syringes which crunch under foot. The door to Auer's former flat, number 6 on the third floor, is also clad in iron, and if one looks from the courtyard at his windows, they are UPVC double glazed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century building. At present it is a communal flat. According to G.V. Kopytova, a contemporary Russian writer, in the 1960s in Auer's former study there lived a sixty-year-old pensioner who dismantled and threw away the Dutch tiled fire place because it took too much wood.

His daughters never lived there but they came to dine with their father, although by that time the elder ones had their own stormy lives to live. The eldest, Zoe, was, as we know, already married, gave birth to two sons and lived in Kolyshovo situated in the Kauga region. The second daughter, like her mother also Nadezhda, was a pianist and at the time of her parents' separation was finishing at the Conservatory being taught by the above

mentioned Malozemova. Then came a scandal. As Rachel wrote, 'Mr. Auer was told that his daughter has compromised herself by an affair with one of his own students'. That student was a twenty-one year old Boris Lifshitz. Young Nadezhda was then only seventeen years old. Shamed by the general knowledge of their affair, both expressed the intention of getting married but Auer categorically refused his consent. That is to say he did not reject the idea of his daughter's marriage to Lifshitz but the timing of it. Auer thought this marriage would not be good for his daughter as the bridegroom was from a poor family. For him, who was a talented violinist, such an early marriage would be detrimental to his career which he was yet to make. As Auer put it, 'lui couper les ailles' were he to marry that early in his career. He decided to remove his daughter from St. Petersburg. Auer who had half of the country's musical world as his friends, wrote to many people explaining that due to some health problems he would like his daughter to leave the capital and asked for her a position as either a piano teacher or an accompanist. The desired position was found in the town of Tambov. It was a resident post in a college for young girls where the seventeen-year-old reprobate would be well looked after. Young girl started to pack her suit case.

This, however, was not the end of the affair. Two years later both Nadezhda and Boris turned up in Paris and repaired to her mother. As Nadezhda the mother wrote to Rachel, 'he is a nice modest boy and, it seems, really loves her with his whole heart.' They could not have married in Russia because she was an Orthodox Christian, and he of the Jewish faith. Auer continued to oppose the marriage. The girl's mother, however, took the side of the young people, mainly because for once here was a chance to do something against Auer's wish. With her blessing, they went to a registry office in Paris but returned quite abashed. It is not clear whether they did not have all of the needed documents or that in France they also took a dim view about marriages between Christians and Jews. The last resort was Germany. The young people thought of a cunning manoeuvre. When they were married they would tell everyone that they married in church. Only his elderly parents would know the truth because the conversion of their son to Christianity would have been quite a blow to them. After that Nadezhda junior would help her

husband with his conversion at leisure as there was no hurry for it because they did not plan to return to Russia for at least the next two years. For living abroad the civil marriage was sufficient.

In a letter to Rachel Nadezhda wrote: 'If the deception is necessary in a case that should concern only the two of them, it is better to deceive the world and pacify Auer for whom they would be married indeed and beautifully'. The logic of this is somewhat obscure, but this is Nadezhda Auer all over. She also expressed her fear that, despite the deception, Boris might still incur Auer's displeasure 'which would be very detrimental to him whereas his favour would have furthered his career.' Rachel consoled her by saying that Auer would accept the fact of their marriage. This is exactly what happened. When, as they planned, the Lifshitzs returned to Russia, no quarrel ensued, Boris got a place in the Conservatory and started to give concerts. As there was no one else to obtain for him this position except Auer, we suppose that he did in fact help. For his artistic career Boris Lifshitz took the pseudonym of Sibor by transposing the letters of his name, and we now know him as one of the founders of what is termed the Moscow school of violin.

The tone towards Auer used by Nadezhda and Rachel in their correspondence is not exactly pleasant and, for the greater part, ironic: "this violin of his has opened for him many a door, even the most intimate ones", - remarked Nadezhda jealously. 'As usual Mr. Auer is first rate', - she said peevishly having read about his triumphs in the paper when she was already living in France. 'Had I been able to share Mr. Auer's way of thinking I would have been still in a brilliant situation as his one and only lawful wife', - noted she irritably after yet another financial embarrassment in which Rachel had also been involved. Rachel, naturally, saw everything through the eyes of her friend who complained all the time. On her part she did not like Auer very much. This dislike developed even when they first met in Dubbena. To her he looked too much of a pleb unworthy of his aristocratic wife and too much of a Jew. One may not believe one's eyes while reading this, but there it is. He had, apparently, 'greedy' nostrils, and his teeth were too white. She used all manner of epithets for him, the milder one being that of an egotist. All sorts of things were laid at his door. Once he was travelling with his daughters from

Düsseldorf back to Russia. At the border he changed to a fast train going to St. Petersburg leaving them to fend for themselves. They were going to Koliyshovo via Moscow. It took them two days in some terrible slow trains to reach that city, Rachel retold crossly Nadezhda's tale in her diary. She concluded that he was a confirmed egotist who did not think of his children.

Here is another story. Nadezhda, who had been separated for three years, was visiting Rachel in Moscow. 'Yesterday when we were in Ostankino with Mark Mironovich, - wrote Rachel, - Auer came here and with his luggage (underlined). Fedor helped him with his suitcase and just as they reached the front door told him that there was no one in but Mme Auer. At this point Auer became agitated, waved his hands and shouted: "No, no, take the things back (in the original his incorrect Russian accent is reproduced). Thereafter he left. When Fedor reported to me about this visit he said laughingly: 'the old man was terribly frightened'. This account, having stresses 'the old man' she concluded: 'oh, le neant de la gloire en ce bas monde!' (oh, the worthlessness of glory in this miserable world).

A few words need to be said about the glory. What year are we in, 1903? Joseph Achron, the first of the cohort of prodigies, was already his pupil. He created such a sensation that he, a ghetto boy, was invited to the palace to play for the Empress. Elman and Zimbalist were to follow as Auer's pupils. Notwithstanding the great talents, Auer had already created that very school of violin playing, the fruits of which we are enjoying today. In every city of note there worked at least one of his students. Among his finalists there were several notable soloists, and by that time he also had his 'violin grandchildren' (those who were taught by Auer's former pupils). He was on the threshold of his most renowned achievements. His pedagogical mastery was about to reach zenith, that almost mystical level of mastery which years later was described by Pavel Stasevich (a former student of Auer who later accompanied at his lessons). When Auer was already in America Pavel's American friend was having private lessons with Auer, then rather an old man. 'He does absolutely nothing', - complained the American after two weeks of lessons. 'He does nothing, - continued to insist the American a couple of months later, - but I am absolutely sure that I play much better.' Back in the

early 1900s Auer was wanted everywhere. 'I lead the existence of a renowned professor with receptions; I give my advice to the musical youth, have students at the Conservatory and the tiring correspondence', - wrote Auer to his daughter. Apart from all this he continued to give concerts and conducting, and to play solo in ballets in the Mariinsky Theatre. Despite his sixty years of age, his popularity as a musician was enormous, and he had devotees of the sound of his instrument all over St. Petersburg. He had not a spare minute, and he did travel by fast trains only. But Rachel and his former wife did not take any of this into account. One is painfully reminded about the prophet in his own land and that no man is a great man for his servant.

However, let us be grateful to Rachel at least for transmitting through her diaries his live voice and his accent in Russian. It is possible, by the way, that the accent was exaggerated to make a caricature of him. Auer wrote letters in Russian rarely, but when he did, his Russian was reasonable albeit somewhat laboured.

After the actual divorce Nadezhda for a while tried to live in Russia as well as abroad. Sometimes she stayed in Koliyshevo with her eldest daughter, and sometimes she travelled to the Crimea. Her relations with her daughters were not good. Rachel thought this could scarcely be otherwise since they were much more like their father. When she had left for France she stayed there for some four years living in a small village. Once a year she met with Auer who, true to his word, continued to provide for her and give her money during those meetings. Thereafter she returned to St. Petersburg where she had rented a room for herself in a boarding house.

By this stage the tenor of her letters became softened. The irritation had abated, and she wrote to Rachel that now and again she and Auer dine together. When he had neuralgia or a bronchitis this was also reported to Rachel. In the August of 1914 when, during his usual summer master classes Auer was in Loschwitz near Dresden, he was placed under house arrest as a Russian subject and had to observe the curfew. He was not allowed to go back to Russia, the postal service between the two countries had stopped working. Nadezhda's short note read: 'There is no news from Mr. Auer'. At last through some friends he managed to send a message to his eldest

daughter. He returned to St. Petersburg only in October. For those who did not want to remain in Germany under police supervision until the end of the war there was a 'Russian train' which took people to Sweden, from thence to Finland, from thence to St. Petersburg. Two months later the Heifetz took the same route. The authorities in Loschwitz did not want to let them go because the elder Heifetz had not reached the age of 45 and, therefore, could still be called to serve in the army. The train service had deteriorated so that in Finland they had to travel on sledges.

There is an old Russian noble family, the Unkovskie. Auer had become related to this family through the marriage of his eldest daughter, Zoë, to one Semen Unkovsky. The internet provides some information about the history of this family. On reading it one is surprised not to find any mention of Zoë's youngest son Mikhail who later became a reasonably well known Hollywood comic actor with the name of Misha Auer. Even in the Wikipedia in English he has an entry which says that he was née Unkovsky (spelt as Ounkowsky) , but is omitted from the family history of the Unkovskys. The answer could be found in Nadezhda's letters which clearly state that Misha was not the son of Zoë's husband. It is unclear why she gave him this surname. It might be that by the time of the child's birth she was technically still a Mrs. Unkovskaya and had to give him this surname. She could have done this out of spite and in anger if her official divorce was completed in the space of fifteen months which elapsed from the time of separation to the time of the child's birth.

Zoë married Semen Ivanovich Unkovsky in 1895. He was a marine officer and one of the dashing young men of his time. This marriage had created something of a stir among the Moscow nobility. 'But this marriage was not, however, regarded as a misalliance because the father of the bride was the Soloist to His Majesty, a professor of the Conservatory and had the rank of a General', - remembered Princess Trubetskaya later. Here we may conclude that after some thirty years of life in Russia Auer was still regarded as a stranger. To own the truth not only the Moscow nobility but Rachel as well thought them an odd couple. Zoë was a fiery beauty who had inherited her father's famous eyes. She was slender, lithe, audacious and self-willed.

Semen Unkovsky was of a very Russian appearance with a potato like nose, a reddish bristle on his head, was inclined to bad temper and insobriety. Rachel described them as 'a Kaluga horse and a Jewish quivering doe'. The union did not seem to have been a happy one. Zoë had many admirers which provoked the wrath of her mother-in-law who tolerated Zoë only because of the two grandsons. Nevertheless, Nadezhda and Zoë's sisters did visit at *Koliyshovo* and stayed there for long periods of time.

When Nadezhda with her daughters had the money, they lived in Paris, but their income was an uncertain one. Ivan Blioch who had been so munificent in previous times died in 1901. There was no one else who could help. At last they decided to stay in Sevastopol. Auer gave them letters of recommendation and detailed instructions concerning the notable musicians of that town (among whom the wife of the military Commander was a talented singer). He sent them 400 roubles per month which, it seems, was a generous sum considering that a teacher's pay was at the time 30 roubles per month, whereas a low-ranking officer received anything between 50 and 60 roubles.

Early in December 1903 Nadezhda went to the station in the town of Simferopol to meet her daughter Mukha (the favourite of her father). Mukha was staying in Koliyshevo with Zoë and was returning to Crimea. Her mother received a telegram that she had boarded the train. It had arrived but Mukha was not on it. Nadezhda was frantic with fear, especially because by now her hearing was quite impaired. Some hours later Nadezhda, quite beside herself by this stage, received another telegram where Mukha announced that she and Zoë's husband, Semen, were on their way to Germany. It transpired later that he waited for her in some small station where they changed to a different train). Mukha begged her mother not to worry about them.

What Auer thought about all this is not known as Nadezhda, engrossed in her own problems, never recorded his reaction. Some months later after the scandal she went to *Katino* to stay with Rachel. The latter barely recognised Nadezhda. She looked a shadow of her former self. She kept crying and asking what was happening to 'them'. Zoë took her two boys, the youngest was only three at the time, and came to Crimea to stay with her

mother. It is known the Semen Unkovsky intended to divorce Zoë and marry Mukha. How he could have managed this is a mystery. He was guilty of infidelity. A second marriage of an adulterer would never have been allowed by the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, they had succeeded. His mother called by Rachel 'she-admiral' simply ordered a military priest to marry her son and Mukha. (The military priests were applied to in difficult cases. They were not subordinate to a consistory and risked less than ordinary priests. For example, when Rachmaninov wanted to marry his first cousin it was the regiment priest who married them.) For extra protection and surety the 'she-admiral' applied for support to Pobedonostsev himself (the Procurator General of the Holy Synod). Although the attempts were made to keep the matter secret from the military command, all was in vain. In 1906 Semen Unkovsky had to resign from the fleet. Two years previously Mukha gave birth to a son and settled in Koliyshovo instead of her sister.

In the end Zoë had settled in St. Petersburg. The older boy was placed in a military college, the younger one stayed at home. In 1905 when she had been divorced from her husband for a year and three months she gave birth to a son whom she also named Mikhail, just as a year previously Mukha had named her first born. It is unknown who the father of the boy was. It is however, quite clear that it was not Semen Unkovsky. In some of Misha Auer's biographies one can find a mention that his father was a marine officer who had died in the Russian-Japanese War 'leaving his family without means'.

This Misha Unkovsky, the future Misha Auer, was a long suffering creature. As is well known Auer was in Russia for the last time in the summer of 1917 and left directly for Norway, from whence he went to America. In 1962 Raaben was reservedly critical about his hasty departure justifying his actions, however, by the importance for Auer of his work and his students who took precedence over his family. That family was no more. His daughters, apart from Zoë, were married. Zoë could take care of herself reasonably efficiently. Were he to return to Russia he would scarcely be in the position to help them in any way. The only things he had was his violin and his teaching. In 1917 the Conservatory was never properly opened. Auer waited in

Norway, but nothing happened. He planned for a long time to settle in Loschwitz where in summers he had his master classes. But Germany was still at war. He opted for America.

It would appear that for a long time he had no news about his family in Russia. Just before the revolution the Sibors went to Crimea where one of their daughters had died from some infection. Mukha was either in *Koliyshevo* or maybe in Kaluga where Semen had died in 1921. Life there became quite impossible, and she moved to Moscow to stay with her sister. With the stream of refugees Zoë and Misha found themselves in Constantinople. Zoë who was now over forty, helped to look after the sick in a Russian hospital. There she died of typhoid. Misha Auer later described how he had buried his mother, digging the Turkish sand with his bare hands. He was thirteen at the time and in a foreign land. He became a drifter and ended up in Italy where as if by a miracle he was found by a former student of Auer. She took him to the Russian embassy, the Bolsheviks had not yet grabbed the embassies abroad. The embassy got in touch with Auer, and Misha was sent to America.

Well, this is it. The rest we know in general terms. Perhaps a few lines needed to be added about Misha. In his biographies a word 'adopted' often crops up. It is difficult to discern whether he was actually adopted by his grand father or was simply brought up by him in his family. Auer encouraged Misha to learn music, and to please his grandfather Misha entered some musical establishment. Soon, however, he realised that he was much more inclined towards theatre. Through his numerous connections Auer procured for him a début in a film. Misha's comic type was 'a mad Russian'. He was not unlike his grandfather in appearance and also in temperament (he was married four times and not two like his grand father) Misha's grand daughter lives at present in New-York. She has a daughter who is learning to play the violin.

In all this story the main thing has been barely touched upon. Very little has been said about his teaching method. This is because, firstly, no one knows anything about it any more. Secondly, it is like something holy, and the holy thing is best be left alone. One can only glean from hints that he

managed to get to the very core of the musical and human essence of every pupil and through his teaching bring this essence into the open for all to hear. They say that every personality is so unique that in Heaven it is that uniqueness that will be recognised by God. He acted as a revealer, if it is possible to use such a word, of this uniqueness. That is to say, like God he looked directly into a person's soul.

Heifetz, almost always accomplished and somehow superhuman, his play deafens and stupefies like the eye of the Basilisk; but now and again some little door becomes ajar letting out something deeply personal, tender and quivering. Just listen to Gluck's *Melody*. Elman, the aesthete of the sound, the creator of the spicy, multi-coloured pastel Renoir like world, the ambassador of fun du siècle in the mad twentieth century... Poliakin playing Mendelssohn's concerto – one must be terribly grave, naïve, truthful and a believer in justice and goodness, at least at the moment of playing, to be able to play like that. Otherwise it is impossible to denude one's soul to such an extent. One would not dare. Else it is equally impossible to like this slightly silly bourgeoisie, the world of white garden benches of Turgenev's novels and daguerreotype portraits... All this was done by him, an elderly man, 'with an intelligent Jewish face'. He taught them all not only to play the instrument. Naturally talented, and some outstanding ones, they would have got there without him. He taught them to be themselves, allowed them this and blessed their individuality. Milstein in his old age once said: 'the most fantastic moments of my career were not my concerts, but when I was studying with Auer. Milstein was taught by Auer no longer than a year.

It is a pity to conclude. It feels like we have spent a few days with him. Sometimes, due to human psyche for which the past is no more real than things artistic, one doubts: did it happen, or did one dream about it. No, one had not dreamt about it. One of Moscow orchestras has a score of the Tchaikovsky's sixth Symphony. On a part for the fifth viola stand there is a stamp, one and only in the whole library, a violet oval stamp with letters inside it reading 'Auer'. Who knows how it got there, but one can see and touch it.