

Interviewed by Frederick Martens, 1919



AUER AS A TEACHER

"Take Auer for example. I may call myself the first real exponent of his school, in the" sense of making his name widely known. Auer is a great teacher, and leaves much to the individuality of his pupils. He first heard me play at the Imperial Music School in Odessa, and took me to Petrograd to study with him, which I did for a year and four months. And he could accomplish wonders! That one year he had a little group of four pupils each one better than the other—a very stimulating situation for all of them. There was a magnetism about him: he literally hypnotized his pupils into doing better than their best— though in some cases it was evident that once the support of his magnetic personality was withdrawn, the pupil fell back into the level from which he had been raised for the time being. "Yet Auer respected the fact that temperamentally I was not responsive to this form of appeal. He gave me of his best. I never practiced more than two or three hours a day —just enough to keep fresh. Often I came to my lesson unprepared, and he would have me play things—sonatas, concertos—which I had not touched for a year or more. He was a severe critic, but always a just one. "I can recall how proud I was when he sent me to beautiful music-loving Helsingfors, in Finland—where all seems to be bloodshed and confusion now—to play a recital in his own stead on one occasion, and how proud he was of my success. Yet Auer had his little peculiarities. I have read somewhere that the great fencing-masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were very jealous of the secrets of their famous feints and ripostes, and only confided them to favorite pupils who promised not to reveal them. Auer had his little secrets, too, with which he was loth to part. When I was to make my debut in Berlin, I remember, he was naturally enough interested—since I was his pupil—in my scoring a triumph. And he decided to part with some of his treasured technical thrusts and parries. And when I was going over the Tschaikovsky D minor concerto (which I was to play), he would select a passage and say: 'Now I'll play this for you. If you catch it, well and good; if not it is your own fault? I am happy to say that I did not fail to 'catch' his meaning on any occasion. Auer really has a wonderful intellect, and some secrets well worth knowing. That he is so great an artist himself on the instrument is the more remarkable, since physically he was not exceptionally favored. Often, when he saw me, he'd say with a sigh: 'Ah, if I only had your hand!' "Auer was a great virtuoso player. He held a unique place in the Imperial Ballet. You know in many of the celebrated ballets, Tschaikovsky's for instance, there occur beautiful and difficult solos for the violin. They call for an artist of the first rank, and Auer was accustomed to play them in Petrograd. In Russia it was considered a decided honor to be called upon to play one of those ballet solos; but in London it was looked on as something quite incidental. I remember when Diaghilev presented Tschaikovsky's Lac des Cygnes in London, the Grand-Duke Andrew Vladimirev (who had heard me play), an amiable young

boy, and a patron of the arts, requested me—and at that time the request of a Romanov was still equivalent to a command—to play the violin solos which accompany the love scenes. It was not exactly easy, since I had to play and watch dancers and conductor at the same time. Yet it was a novelty for London, however; everybody was pleased and the Grand-Duke presented me with a handsome diamond pin as an acknowledgment.