

## A VIOLIN MASTER'S CONTRIBUTION

By Albert Spalding

**W**ITHIN the covers of a volume of some two hundred and twenty-five pages Professor Leopold Auer has made the most important literary contribution to the violin world that I can recall. It is the worthy fruit of this great master's long and distinguished career, and its appearance today is most opportune.

The work is concisely presented in a simple and unpretentious style. Every page carries its lesson, every anecdote its application: it is the last word as a textbook on violin technique. But it is more than this, for Professor Auer has succeeded—where so many have failed—in making his book readable, even entertaining. It can be perused with profit not only by the violin student and teacher, but also by the musical layman. Personal experiences and anecdotes of more than half a century rich with great memories, color the pages. No music lover can fail to feel his pulses quicken at the simple but eloquent drawing of such portraits as Joachim, Wieniawski, and Vieuxtemps. The pages devoted to that period of Auer's life spent at Hanover studying with Joachim, are particularly interesting. The following picture, so modestly presented, is an example in point:

At the first lesson Joachim gave me I played Spohr's Concerto, the "Vocal Scene", for him, and I think my intonation was dubious; he told me as much, criticising my style as well, and advising me to pay more careful attention to it. Then, in order to test me at the following lesson—our lesson time was never fixed in advance—he gave me Rode's third étude, in the

second position, to prepare. We hardly ever played any scales or études for him during the lesson, with the simple exception of some of the Paganini Caprices. Anything which had to do with the technique of the two hands we were supposed to attend to at home. . . . Throughout the lesson he kept his violin and bow in his hands, and whenever he was dissatisfied with the way the student played the passage or a musical phrase, the master would draw his bow and play the passage or phrase in question himself in a manner truly divine.

This is an experience which the young Auer never forgot. And the magic of his name as a teacher is due, in large part, to a power all *too rare* in teachers: the power of demonstrating in a superlative manner on his instrument what he has already explained orally.

We in this country at least know Professor Auer chiefly as the master of such famous virtuosi as Heifetz, Zimbalist, Elman, and Parlow. What we do not sufficiently realize is the fact that he was one of the supreme violinists of his age. I can recall his performance several years ago, in Petrograd, of the Beethoven Concerto. In nobility of style and eloquent utterance it more nearly approached Joachim's playing than that of any other artist before the public. The present volume is as much a result of Auer the interpreter as it is of Auer the teacher. The chapters dealing separately with each technical detail, progress in logical sequence; violin teacher and student alike will find the correct answer and remedy to many a painful problem. Hints on Bowing will prove especially valuable. Another chapter which should be read and reread is the one on How to Practise—everything in these three words. The question is not, "How much do you practise?" but, "How do you practise?" Let us

consider for a moment what Professor Auer says on this vital subject:

...the main essential is for him [the student] to cultivate the habit of close self-observation, and above all to accustom himself to direct and control his efforts. For it is this mental labor which is the true source of all progress. The young student is prone to allow himself to be carried away by the impulse to execute a passage in a precipite tempo, intoxicating himself with the sheer pleasure of his own digital dexterity. This makes it impossible for him to follow each note with his ear, to hear the intonation of what he is playing.

Especially true is this of players gifted with a natural facility. Place ten talented violinists in different rooms with the understanding that they are to practise a certain piece to be performed an hour afterward. Unknown to them, listen to each in turn. What will be the probable result?—you will hear certain passages played over and over again at top speed—and frequently at a greater velocity than the piece itself requires (owing to the fact that they have not the steadying rhythm of an accompaniment). And with each repetition the initial error of intonation or lack of rhythmic accent increases instead of being corrected. Ask one of these ten how the work in question should be practised and he will blandly tell you, "Very slowly and carefully until you have perfect control over all the technical details." He says this, believes this, knows this; but when it comes to putting it in practice, human nature and the eternal ego step in—he cranks his car and starts downhill at fourth speed believing a miracle will happen. Well! Such miracles do not happen; things generally end in a pretty bad smash.

Professor Auer has done a great service to the violin world. Every technical and tonal detail is presented with loving care and devotion, nor has he neglected the more subtle and elu-

sive qualities of the artist such as Style, Nuance, and The Soul of Interpretation. He gives also some practical hints on Repertory. Everyone interested in violin playing will be eternally grateful to him for the perfect performance of so difficult and necessary a work.

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Violin Playing As I Teach It. By Leopold Auer. Frederick A. Stokes Co.