

THE FIRST CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC AND ITS FIRST PATIENT

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It was not quite a year after the armistice of 1918 had brought peace to the suffering people of Vienna, when passing the Real Gymnasium¹⁾ on Circus Street, I read an advertisement on the bulletin board of that building that in a few days a department of the Volksheim²⁾ would open its doors in this building. I read that Dr. Alfred Adler, the founder of a new theory of Individual Psychology, would give a semester course called Healing by Re-education, which was, as I knew, the title of his newly published book.

I was at this time a young group worker at a community center in the Prater³⁾ and had to take care of nearly 100 children of every age, whose fathers for the most part had not returned from the war, and whose mothers had to work during the day to make a living for themselves and the children. It was no easy task as many of the children had been neglected during four years of war and starvation. Many problems arose which I could not solve, and although I had studied psychology (theoretical) there was no use for this kind of psychology in the education and care of children who really needed "healing by re-education" more than anything else. This advertised course by Dr. Adler thus seemed to me a fine opportunity to listen to one of the outstanding psychologists of our time, who was striving to establish new kinds of preventive measures, especially in the field of educational psychology.

- 1) A particular type of high school.
- 2) A kind of university settlement, where the working people of Vienna could study in evening classes.
- 3) One of the worst parts of Vienna, because situated in an amusement quarter and a section of ill repute.

"To lose hope for a child is the same as to stop watering plants although one wishes them to grow."

-- Alfred Adler

On entering the small classroom I found that many other young people had read the advertisement. This small room was so overcrowded that a larger one had to be opened, and this one, too, was at once filled to capacity. Dr. Adler's first lecture convinced me that I would get the help that I so badly needed for my big task. For the first time I heard positive advice of psychological importance which could be used and practiced, quite different from the usual psychological treatise.

In order to give an example of the work we were to study and to train for, Dr. Adler asked us to bring some small compositions by children under our care, in which they had described some event of their lives.

Among the children I had to train was a boy named Ernest, who was eleven years of age. I did not know him very well because he had been a member of the community center for such a short time. He came very irregularly, sometimes only putting his head into the doorway and running away the moment he recognized me. When he stayed he was invariably a little rascal who would disturb the best intention of another child, or spoil a game or play by his inadequate behavior, often driving me to desperation.

When I asked the children to write down some small event of each one's life, Ernest was standing in the doorway prepared to run away at any moment. This time I used my newly acquired knowledge of Individual Psychology and acted as if I had not noticed him. I left the room and let the children write their little themes independently. When I returned, a few papers lay on my desk and I was especially pleased to find that Ernest had

written one of them.

When I gave Dr. Adler the papers my children of the community center had written, he looked through them, chose without hesitation the paper of Ernest and read it aloud to us. He added an analysis which struck me and opened my eyes for the first time to the poor little fellow who had given me so much anxiety, previously. His story ran, "When I get up in the morning everything seems dark around me. But I have to get up to run for the milk and the bread because my sister and brother are too small to do that, and my mother feels not well enough in the morning. After having dressed quickly I swallow my coffee, and I hurry to school not to come too late. But just when I am about to enter school I see an old man who carries a heavy basket. The poor man is near exhaustion, and I have to help him carry his basket to the market. I again hurry to school, when a blind man asks me to help him across the street. I help him but at this very moment I hear the bell of the school. My heart beats faster and faster when at last I reach the door of the classroom, which I dare not open because it is too late. Sometimes I stay the whole hour before the door; sometimes I run away when I hear the supervisor coming up the stairs." This was the story Ernest had written down.

Dr. Adler analyzed the words and sentences of the child's writing carefully, one after the other, painting a personality for us which I never would have believed to be Ernest. "The boy," he told us, "has apparently not developed his sense of sociability very well. He does not seem to be able to join others harmoniously although he is longing for contact. His attempts to relate with others are very well described in his meeting twice with people who are old, weak, exhausted, or crippled. Thus Ernest, who obviously does not know how to become useful in real life, points to his heroism (which seems to be a reproduction of his daydreams) in his writings. It reveals his wish to be a helper, a **support** for others and not a rascal, as he is

perhaps in reality.

"Does Ernest have friends, chums who stick to him?" Dr. Adler continued, "I doubt it. He would not try to acquire gratitude in this manner if he could get it more easily. This is revealed in the fact that he always wants to become a helper, and he builds up situations in his daydreams in which he is superior in every way to these people he meets. That is why he describes these people as either old, weak, exhausted, crippled, or blind. He is telling us that he is young, strong, and helpful and not at all the destructive personality others might call him.

"But he is helpful at the cost of his duties toward school, the duties of a child which have to be replaced later by the tasks of life. Apparently Ernest will ultimately approach the tasks of life with the same hesitating attitude as he does school. He does not tell us that he hates school, that perhaps he fears his teachers, his schoolwork, his comrades, their teasing, and their competition. He does not tell it because he does not know how much he hates all that. But we can assume it by reading between the lines when he stresses the fact that just when he walks to school all these events happen which force him to delay his going to school. Then it is too late, the bell has rung and he has the best excuse to escape from school, which represents his duty.

"I cannot tell you," Dr. Adler added, "why this child developed his hesitating attitude, why he removes his preparedness to help and to be useful into his daydreams instead of developing it in real life, why he does not like to bear responsibility for wrong he has done, because I would have to analyze him to discover his lifestyle. I can only point to his inadequate approach, which is pretty clearly described in his composition. I find only one fact which gives a small explanation. It is evident that he fears the new day, his little tasks of every new day, when he tells us that everything is dark around him (which is surely not the case the year around) and that he has

to go for milk and bread because mother does not feel well enough and sister and brother are too small. We can feel the burden on Ernest's shoulders pressing him down each day anew. We can understand that he escapes into the brightness of self-constructed day-dreams out of the darkness which surrounds him.

This was the analysis of Ernest's writing which Dr. Adler offered us, and it gave me much food for thought. When, after the lecture, I stood among the crowd which surrounded him asking for an explanation of one or another problem, I felt myself hesitating though longing to ask what I could do for Ernest. But at this time I was not an escaping child and my longing to know what I could do was stronger than my hesitation. When I asked Dr. Adler what I could do in this case he looked first at Ernest's paper and then searchingly at me for a few moments before he answered, "Try to help him." I did not dare to ask for more, but I tried hard at first to get into a better relationship with Ernest myself and to help him join the other children.

It was later on, after I had heard Ernest's life story many times, that I realized the value of Dr. Adler's "reading between the lines." He did not choose this story quite by accident from among the others; he recognized the interesting feature of Ernest's personality at once. He thus gave me the opportunity to learn how to heal by re-education and to adapt a child's fixed pattern of life.

Ernest was the oldest child of parents who had never developed an adequate approach to life. Both were nervous (neurotic) personalities whose actions were prompted by their emotions rather than by consideration and comprehension. In many families the oldest child experiences what Ernest felt as the first impressions of life. He was the spoiled pet of hyperemotional parents. When after four years another child was born he probably felt as a real dethronement the second role he now had to play.

It was Dr. Adler himself who asked me the next time how I was getting on with Ernest. When I told him what I had done he seemed to be very much pleased. It was on this occasion that he began to dwell on his idea of healing by re-education, working strictly with children who were victims of their education, the influence of their surroundings, and the inadequate preparedness of their parents to help in joining and adapting them to their generation rather than to the past to which the parents belonged. When I afterward described my work to him and confessed that I did not feel quite prepared to help as he had planned we should, he remarked in his short and impressive manner, "Why not begin with a child guidance place (Erziehungsberatungsstelle) for the good of the children and the parents?"

So we began. We had only a small and dark room, but it was lighted by Dr. Adler's helpful instruction. The first patient was Ernest who came with his mother, a grief stricken, worried and nervous woman who did not believe in her child and did not want to believe. She had given up hope and thus darkness began to surround Ernest. "When a mother gives up hope," Dr. Adler told her, "who else in this wide world can give him hope? To lose hope for a child is the same as to stop watering plants although one wishes them to grow."

His mother's statements were confused about the great and important change in Ernest's life when the second child was born. She claimed that when her little girl, the third child, was born, and Ernest was eight years old, she began to feel that she was unable to handle the boy any longer. As so many mothers do, she changed her attitude toward her firstborn child, so much so that she became strict, determined, nervous and impatient with his troubles, her complaints being especially concerned with the boy's malicious behavior. Wherever he could, she stated, he tortured his younger brother, beat him, struck him with every instrument he could, pinched and punched him on every occasion. Although she punished

him he did did not seem to mind but continued his bad conduct and became worse and worse.

It was interesting for me to see the second boy, who was at this time eight years old. The mother stated that the younger boy was an especially obedient child at home and in school and that he had to suffer very much from his brother. It was significant to hear that Ernest never did anything to his sister, that on the contrary he was very fond of her, and tried to protect her from the assaults of his younger brother. It appeared to me that the younger boy played the role of the nice and obedient child at the cost of Ernest who, as he once expressed it, "was punished whether he or his brother was the mischief-maker." Even though we might not believe that he was al-ways punished and the scapegoat for his brother, we are able to understand his feelings from this statement which he repeated often as a kind of excuse.

His mother said that later he began to demolish not only the toys of his brother but his suits and belongings as often as he could reach them. His behavior was definitely aggressive as he met the people of his surroundings with a rather hostile attitude. Facing strange people he made a shy impression, stood near the door with his cap between his hands, his head turned away. When he was sitting, he occupied only a corner of the chair thus offering **the** picture of an individual who is always prepared to escape. At the time I first met him he was sent to the community center by the social service because he had run away from home several times, although after a short time he always came back. It seemed as though he wanted to frighten or threaten his mother, whose nervousness he realized very well.

This was the start of the first Child Guidance Clinic. But another event disturbed once more my unceasing attempts to give Ernest new hope and thus new confidence in himself. After a time I succeeded in dividing the children into groups where they would be better suited to each other in age,

interest, and school duties. Ernest felt better in a group of boys his own age; he even found among them one who became his friend, the first friendship of his young life. He too began to join the others in their gym and games as up to this time he had always refused to do. Nevertheless, not all his rudeness and bad conduct disappeared. I had to consider every day new ways to keep him up and in line. But I felt as an artist who is about to straighten a figure and who again and again has to draw a line before it fits perfectly with the others. I felt more and more the truth of the words which Dr. Adler had repeated so often that helping to form a personality or in particular to change one is an artistic work and needs imagination and patience. That I at last acquired some of these qualities, I owe to Ernest.

I stuck to my chosen task. I did not at first see an objection to having Ernest around me, a kind of objection which later on I so often met with in persons who want to command but not to comprehend. Then one day it was proposed to me by the staff of the community center to remove Ernest from our community because some of the mothers had sent complaints and wondered if Ernest was the right company for their children.

It was just at the time when the community center could work more smoothly because the children could again go to school regularly. American food had begun to pour into Austria, which actually created miracles. The children began to grow and to look better; they made up for lost care not only physically but also psychically. American physicians added their bit to these achievements. It was a great and convincing experience to see how quickly the children gained strength and vitality. Thus they too had greater enjoyment from joining the community center where they not only ate healthful food but were under the care of young, psychologically trained group workers whom we quickly educated and taught in our Child Guidance Clinic. Thus the group served by the community center became

more exclusive, and it was then that mothers sent the complaint to the staff. I was really much disturbed by the thought that I would have to deliver Ernest again to the darkness of his home life, just now when I could see day by day that he was growing more and more into our community. He came more regularly, he did not attempt to run away any more, he joined his group, and he began to do a bit of the work for the center. But I knew that not all was yet accomplished which could be done for him and his future. After a few days of consideration I declared that I was unable to send the boy away because I considered this act as a great danger to him. The staff was of another opinion. They joined in the viewpoint of the mothers who feared that their children would be influenced by Ernest and that he was a real danger to the other children. Neither the staff nor I could find a way out of this dilemma, and we called a meeting of all the mothers where I tried to convince them that the danger for Ernest was definitely greater than that he offered to all the other children. I proposed that I should do my best to separate him from the younger children; I painted his torn inward life, the great help he had found in our community center and convinced the greater part of the mothers. But as always, some of the mothers resisted and asked for an expert on the matter who would tell them that there existed no real danger for their children in having Ernest among them. By good luck for Ernest, Dr. Adler was chosen as the expert, and it was his opinion which at last convinced the mothers to allow Ernest to stay on. The letter Dr. Adler wrote on this matter, ran:

"I do not consider the case of Ernest as a danger for the other children. He is physically and mentally a normally developed child, who because of many circumstances has become negative and aggressive apparently against an imaginary world of adversaries whom he wants to overcome. In the community center, under the care he fortunately came to, he experienced for the first time surroundings in which in spite of the poor impressions of his childhood

which made him consider everybody an enemy, he felt a friendliness to which he is slowly adapting himself. This fact promises a great improvement of his mental and psychical attitude, which will benefit not only himself but also the community in which he will live and work. To thrust him out of this community which he now joins voluntarily and in which it seems to be his longing to remain would mean to deliver him to a greater mental and psychical hardship than ever before. He who for the first time in his life has felt the security and reliability of a group to which he belongs would be thrown into a hostility, which, I assume, would be incurable. It is the darkness of broken confidence which is most hurtful for every child but in particular for a child who revolted against confidence because he had never come to know it.

"As to all the other ninety-nine children, it must be stated that their lives will be consummated among various and very different personalities, many of which, I assume, will not be handled easily. I therefore maintain that it may be an advantage for them to learn to handle Ernest as one of the first individuals they will meet in their young lives who is a so-called outsider, who with their help may be brought back to the community and to sociability. Besides it should not be forgotten that Mrs. Kramer does a work in supporting and helping educate Ernest, which she can execute among other children. However, it seems necessary to stress the fact that all the other ninety-nine children who enjoy her care do not need it so much, for they are all going along fairly well, while Ernest, deprived of her help and support would lose the only light which would lead him to a brighter future."

These were the words of Dr. Adler's letter, which I can repeat only approximately from notes because the letter, which I kept faithfully for years, had to be burned (to save it from misuse). If the wording is not exactly his, the thought is, and this is what I wished to stress.

When, after some time under my care, Er-

nest stayed at the recreation center during the summer, I had the opportunity to watch him during his sleep. He offered a strange picture which added a few lines to the sketch of his personality that fitted the other lines very well. He slept, covering not only his body but his face and head as well, so that I could only see a small part of his scalp. I tried to arrange his blankets by uncovering his head, finding when I returned after a short time that he, without interrupting his sleep, had again slipped under the blankets. It was futile to uncover him, for he always went back to his accustomed position during sleep. When I asked him why he slept in such an uncomfortable way, because he perspired terribly during the summer, he told me that he was frightened and could not sleep uncovered.

A dream of his gave me more explanation for his fearful attitude. He said that his dreams were usually concerned with the figure of the devil. It was a typical kind of dream. He was in a room alone, or in a dark street, or at an unknown place where he became frightened and had to run to reach his home, when suddenly the devil appeared dressed in his black costume with his red fire-tongue hanging, and pursued him. He sometimes felt his breathing and his claw hands on his neck or head. He started to cry and awoke. This was his type of dream, which was altered only in some small details. I have to add that at this time he was thoroughly undeveloped and that he developed three years later without any difficulties. But he never lost his devil dreams completely. Only after a time he realized what they meant in his psychic constellation. He knew afterward that his aggression was a kind of compensation for his fearful attitude, which he apparently had acquired when he felt himself pushed into the background by another individual, his brother, who by means of his greater tenderness and greater helplessness took his place in his mother's lap. This mother like so many others was unable to impress upon Ernest the first social task, that of becoming one of two and later of three, so he

took for granted that he was pushed out of her life. It was a great mistake that she confirmed his wrong and childlike idea by her impatient attitude toward him. She thus pushed him into the darkness through which the light of sociability, of comradeship and friendship, and the warm feeling of love could penetrate no longer. A child who does not learn in the first relationship to his parents, sisters, and brothers the sense of sociability and cooperation cannot afterward know how to develop these two precious qualities harmoniously in his relationship with other fellowmen. Ernest not only remained in the darkness of hostility and aggression but he hid himself behind it, feeling that it supported his wrongly developed personality better than any other way of life which he had come to learn until he, by chance, came into the community center.

Ernest remained in the community center and continued as a patient of our Child Guidance Clinic, which was, but not for long, the only one in Vienna. Many followed soon, such as the Child Guidance Clinics of Ida Loewy, not likely to be forgotten, since they became the pattern for the many that were started all over the world. When Ernest was fifteen years old he had easily overcome the stress and strain of puberty. He became a hairdresser, which was incidentally his wish, the compensating wish of a neglected child striving not only for equality but for superiority. As a matter of fact, he became the support of his mother, who too had changed very much by our common efforts.

I saw him for the last time when he was twenty. He was a nice looking young man whose past troubles were only recognizable to the few who knew about them. An uncertain look in his eyes, a little awkwardness in bearing, that was all even I, who knew him so well, could observe. But it was perhaps I to whom this uncertainty, this bit of awkwardness was directed, because I knew too much of his troubles. I heard later that he progressed very well in his approach to life as well as to his fellowmen.