

FRAU DR. ADLER (MRS. RAISSA ADLER)

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*London*

I was introduced to Mrs. Adler at one of Adler's lectures in Vienna in 1934. She did not rise from where she was sitting on a backless bench. She was a small, compact figure of about sixty, with snow-white hair and uncompromising blue eyes, innocent of all guile, but full of determination.

Raissa did not smile at me as we shook hands. It was a great occasion for me, and I may have said so, while expressing my deep debt to Adler's teaching. "I do not agree with all that Adler teaches," she said firmly. "Not that I am against his main principles of Individual Psychology, but I think these matters have an economic basis and should be dealt with politically, and my husband does not." By this time I suddenly found that, though disconcerted, I was enchanted by her. She was such a mixture of courage, sincerity, generosity and energetic opposition to whatever seemed comfortable, easy or unprovocative, that agreement and disagreement became swallowed up in fundamental sympathy with her living heart. It was seldom if ever a reasoning heart, but always, whatever she saw she could do to help, sustain or share with others flashed out of her at lightning speed. As Raissa looked, she leapt. As to where, or even if, she was to land, I doubt if this part of the matter ever occurred to her.

She must as a young woman have been extremely pretty, and was so full of vitality and warm-hearted kindness that I can well imagine Alfred Adler would have been swept for ever off his feet by her. As he said at the time of his marriage, "She suits me as well as if I had made her myself in my laboratory." The tragedy of their marriage was that Alfred had not made her. Raissa had already made herself, and she was one of those few beings who cannot really be either altered or indeed influenced by others. Through love and through her wide generosity of spirit she might be drawn to tolerate principles that were alien to her, but never to accept them. Nor was it easy for her even to tolerate them.

Perhaps Raissa remained at heart all her life a young Russian student, ready for any emergency, accepting any hardship, agog for any fresh discovery. She was a highly intelligent woman who knew well at least four languages, French, German, English and Russian, and loved giving language lessons to students.

She was a magnificent mother, and she loved Adler with all her tempestuous heart. I shall never forget how, when she had to be

parted from him for a few months while he was on a lecture tour and she was to return to Vienna, she said to me, "I shall be sorry if we miss my train, but you must not mind. I must just go upstairs again and look at Alfred. I will not speak to him, but I must see once more how he looks." She went upstairs, and I stayed in the doorway expecting to miss the boat train, and knowing that he already had an important visitor. But she kept her word, and did not speak to him, but came down to me after her one last glance, with her eyes swimming with tears.

She had to be told by telephone in Paris of his death in Scotland. She cried out, "No, not dead!" and fainted. It was like her to contradict even death; and from then on to make of this cruel fact a splendid opportunity for fresh devotion.

I never saw anyone who behaved so courageously and unselfishly at a funeral, which had to be a public occasion, but which was so deeply felt as a private sorrow. She gave no hint of her personal feelings; but contrived to support and uphold all who were trying to serve her.

After her final return to America, she lived in a small flat in New York, with a girl student. She liked to live independently and on her own, although her three children unstintingly supported her and gave her all the help she needed. In her little flat Raissa was a generous and loving hostess to her many friends.

Her one preoccupation after Adler's death was an attempt to get her eldest daughter, Vali, out of a Russian prison, where she was kept as a hostage for her husband. Raissa never gave up this wild hope till news of her daughter's death was at last convincingly received.

Adler's Individual Psychology, which for a long time in Raissa's life had been her burden and her rival, became her chief interest, and she gave unflagging help and support to the Adlerian Society in New York, of which she became lifelong honorary president.

She died after great suffering, brought on by a severe fall, with the same intensity of courage and consideration for her children that she had shown all her life. I doubt if she believed in immortality, but in Life itself Raissa was a great believer.

I like to think, during the last years of her lonely widowhood, that her son Kurt gave her a continuous and growing joy in his young daughter, who has shown flashes of the same insight and freedom common to both her grandparents. This immortality at least was not denied Raissa.

"I am sorry Alfred did not know of this great new joy," she once wrote to me. "He would have liked best to have a grandchild."