

PHYLLIS BOTTOME (1882-1963)

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London

Phyllis Bottome, the novelist, died at her home in London on August 22, 1963, at the age of 81, after a long illness.

Her name is known especially well to Individual Psychologists on account of her biography of Alfred Adler, written at his own request.

Born in England, the daughter of a parson, Phyllis Bottome was of Anglo-American descent, and was equally at home in both countries. Among her closest American friends she numbered Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Sinclair Lewis, Dorothy Thompson and Ezra Pound.

Phyllis might have chosen the stage for her career had her health permitted it, but it was a gain to English letters that, confined for long periods of her youth to Swiss sanatoriums on account of a lung infection contracted while nursing a sick sister, she turned her gifts to the more durable art of writing. Her brilliant wit, her lucid, incisive style, her acute and loving perception of human character rapidly brought her fame as a novelist. Her art was also enriched by her wide experience of Continental Europe, where much of her life was passed.

Phyllis married Ernan Forbes Dennis during the first World War, while he was still a serving officer on the Western Front, and where he was seriously wounded. She experienced weeks of cruel anxiety at his bedside, but he was finally restored to her, and the marriage became one of the utmost felicity. Together, they worked through their difficulties and attained a state of reciprocal trust and love which Adler would certainly have admired as a rare human achievement. From the richness of this marriage flowed the endless good which they lavished upon others.

In her three books of memoirs, *In Search of a Soul*, *The Challenge* and *The Goal*, Phyllis Bottome has herself given the story of her life, told with touching and delicate art. All that I can add here is a personal note, based on the thirty-five years of friendship which it was my privilege to have with her. When I first knew her and her husband it was a period of change in their lives. Previously, they had been leading a brilliant social existence in Vienna, where her husband was in the diplomatic service. Phyllis' health had then broken down, and, at

the cost of her husband's diplomatic career, they had decided to retire to the mountain air of Kitzbuehel, at that time a sleepy and little known town quite unlike the celebrated tourist resort which it has since become. Here, they intended to devote themselves to educational work.

It was her husband's search for more light on educational problems that brought him to Adler. Mr. Forbes Dennis went especially to Vienna to see this doctor who, he had been told, was teaching new, revolutionary ideas. He became an immediate and enthusiastic adherent.

I think that I am right in saying that Phyllis was at first inclined to resist Adler's ideas. She was, after all, a brilliant writer and conversationalist, accustomed to the great world, and at the height of her artistic career. Adler's teaching makes moral demands, especially demands for simplicity of thought, directness of vision and humility of mind. It has proved as hard for the intellectual to enter Adler's world as for the rich man to discard his possessions in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, and many, regrettably, have failed. But Phyllis, once convinced by her husband, gave herself to Individual Psychology with that complete wholeheartedness and enthusiasm which were characteristic of her.

Just previous to my acquaintance with them, Adler had been for the first time a guest in their house, and his presence had created an indelible impression. Thereafter, they were to be numbered among his closest friends. Phyllis' work as a writer was to be dedicated to the exposition of his ideas, her best known works of this period being *The Mortal Storm* and *Private Worlds*, the latter dealing with the unusual subject of life within the confines of a mental hospital. Her husband meanwhile gave himself unstintingly to Adler's service, arranging his European conferences and undertaking much of the burden of his affairs.

Adler, that knower of men, deeply trusted this couple. He knew that they were morally as well as intellectually committed to Individual Psychology, that what they preached they also practiced. Phyllis was fond of quoting a remark of Adler: "Give. Give all. All is not enough." She gave all, and was constantly, unreasonably, dissatisfied that all still fell short of what she considered enough.

Phyllis was buried after a service of great beauty and simplicity, with only members of the family and a few chosen friends present. Among these was Dr. Ladislaus Zilahi, managing editor of the *Inter-*

nationale Zeitschrift fuer Individualpsychologie, the earliest forerunner of this Journal, which he guided from 1927 until Adler's death.

I think that Phyllis would prefer that we should rejoice with her rather than that we mourned for her. She died in the fullness of her age, having accomplished a beautiful and richly creative life, and surrounded by the love which she had inspired in all who knew her. May we all do so well and die as sweetly.

To Mr. Forbes Dennis, whose work for Individual Psychology has been so generous and so modestly given, readers may wish to extend their deep sympathy.

Editorial Note: We feel an explanation is due for the fact that Mr. Way gives 1882 as the year of Phyllis Bottome's birth and 81 years as her age at the time of her death, whereas the Library of Congress states 1884 as the year of her birth and the various death notices generally gave her age as having been 79 years. Her nephew, Nigel Forbes Dennis, writes in a letter that 1884 is a mistake: "The reason is simply that *Who's Who* got it wrong—so anyone who looks up *Who's Who* is bound to repeat the mistake and this they have done for many years. . . . The date of my aunt's birth is May 31, 1882 (see the first page of *In Search of a Soul*), making her 81 at the time of her death. Last year, she and I celebrated her 80th birthday with a joint broadcast on the BBC."

ADLER'S TECHNIQUE WITH CHILDREN

A SPECIAL REVIEW¹

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By examples, this little paperback teaches the reader two very timely aspects of Adler's system: the place of community in mental health work and the cognitive activity of the clinician. Adler's invention, the open community child guidance centers, provided treatment for problems of children as well as training for parents, teachers, and professional mental health workers. Nowadays when the President of the United States is urging the widespread development of comprehensive mental health centers and we are hearing much about the "therapeutic community," Adler's theories and practices have a fresh relevance. In regard to the second aspect of his timeliness, recent psychological research literature shows much interest in how the clinician formulates his "working image" of the client and, more generally, how the process of forming impressions of others operates and how individuals differ in the accuracy of their perception of others. Adler's double emphasis on social and cognitive psychology thus has special meaning today.

In 1930 Adler published the original of the present book (4), which appears now for the first time in English. Apparently the original is unavailable since a French translation (5) was used both for this translation and for the Ansbacher and Ansbacher compendium of Adler's works (7). Now there are paperback editions of four of Adler's books, the others being *Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1), *Understanding Human Nature* (3) and *What Life Should Mean to You* (6).² The present book has an introduction by Adler's son, Kurt. There are brief expository sections at the beginning and end of the book, but the meat of it lies in the many examples of problem cases presented before the audience of Adler's child guidance center in Vienna. Incidentally, the cover photograph provides one of the most appropriate introductions to a book that I have seen—a pouting boy looking out from an old box.

¹Adler, Alfred. *The Problem Child: The Life Style of the Difficult Child as Analyzed in Specific Cases*. Trans. from the French by Guy Daniels. New York: Capricorn Books, 1963. Pp. xvii + 172. \$1.85 paper.

²A paperback edition of a fifth book (3) is planned for the Spring of 1964.—Ed. note.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE CASE PRESENTATIONS

In the twenty case-study chapters Adler candidly presented his thinking by successively working through the information presented on a child and his situation. The chapter entitled "A Spoiled Youngest Child" will serve to illustrate the method. At the very beginning we read, "The girl is eleven years old. Her father is a retired railroad man; her mother is a housekeeper. The mother is reported to have had fourteen children, seven of whom are alive. Petronilla is the youngest child" (p. 38). Adler responded in the next paragraph, "The character structure of the youngest child is very clear to us." After pointing to the biblical Joseph who wanted "the sun, the moon and the stars to bow before him," he stated, "We can affirm that the youngest child is often particularly spoiled because the parents are very pleased to have been able to procreate a child in their later years The youngest child grows up in a different atmosphere from the other children, since he is the only one who has no successor As for the others, they live through the tragedy of seeing their place taken by another child" (p. 39). Then some more information from the school referral record was presented: "She works willingly for a certain period of time; then her enthusiasm diminishes." Adler responded, "When you notice such instability in the work of a child going to school, you can conclude with some justification that the child is spoiled. He will make progress only . . . when progress comes without effort . . . As soon as the warm, comfortable atmosphere disappears, his productivity drops" (p. 39).

Thus Adler proceeded to analyze the case of Petronilla, deriving general hypotheses from the application of his theory to early information and checking on these hypotheses as the case developed. He arrived at a formulation of Petronilla's style of life: "A very active child who takes an interest in the world around her and who certainly strives to raise herself above others" (p. 40). She disturbed the class in order to be the center of attention. However, she behaved well in the principal's office, a situation in which she has won recognition. She would have liked to become a teacher herself (since she recognized the position of power that a teacher has). Much of the problem arose from the mother's failure to provide a place in the family where she was an equal partner in the family and community life. After further reports from the school personnel, Adler interviewed the mother and then Petronilla in front of the whole group. To the resisting mother he recommended that the child have more counsel-

ing contact in the center. To Petronilla after first praising her appearance and size, Adler said she could become one of the best students, but "You must always remember to tell yourself: 'I don't have to be in the front of things all the time, and have everyone notice me. It is much nicer to do good work so that in the end people will esteem me, and like me; it doesn't have to be right away, either'" (p. 51). In this way, far too abbreviated here, Adler reported directly how he conducted his counseling sessions in his guidance centers.

INNOVATIONS OF THE CHILD GUIDANCE CENTERS

Adler's child guidance centers were a very interesting social innovation. They were oriented around the treatment of children and the counseling of parents, but they served many other functions as well. They trained teachers and professional clinicians in principles of personality development and child guidance. They served as community centers for discussion of current mental health problems. By example they taught that child training and mental health are truly community problems, not to be talked about secretly with clinicians in private rooms but openly and publicly. The social force of the audience presumably would also facilitate therapeutic change. Adler stated in commenting on the case of Petronilla, "I have the impression that it is a good idea to have a child appear in front of a group of people. For the child this signifies that her difficulties are not a private matter, since strangers are also interested in them. It may be that her social sense is better awakened in this way" (p. 52).

In this time in the United States when we are looking for ways to improve mental health practices, certainly the Adlerian center provides a method very worthy of recognition. It needs to be put on the stage of scientific scrutiny along with other approaches such as individual interviews, treatment by marriage counseling alone, half-way houses, residential treatment centers, etc., to see what kind of treatment is effective and with whom.

By directly presenting his methods in the child centers in this book, Adler tried to communicate his clinical art. He pointed out two aspects of that art: *empathizing* with clients and their situations, and *teaching* his knowledge to them. He asserted that both arts are social functions:

Pedagogical tact signifies the attitude of one man toward another, which is determined by a desire to raise the level of the others' feeling in a kind manner. How can we explain this attitude? Briefly, one has to reproduce the same feeling in oneself, one has to establish contact with the other person. One must see with

the other person's eyes, hear with his ears, and feel with his heart: one must identify with him (p. 162).

Frequently in discussing cases he indicated that the child's behavior is very reasonable if one can put oneself in his situation and assume his built-in goals.

By means of these progressive case analyses, Adler laid open his thinking to public view. The central importance of certain ideas came out over and over again—the striving for superiority, the importance of position among siblings, the early construction of the life style and its subsequent active determining of life's activities and the resultant emphasis on “becoming” and not “being,” the misdirected and socially destructive goals arising from rejecting or pampering a child, the importance of the *use* a person makes of his abilities and organ inferiorities. The guiding principles of the clinician and counselor are to reveal mistaken goals and encourage the development of social interest.

EVALUATION OF THE BOOK

For the person wishing to steep himself in the Adlerian conception and treatment of child cases, this book is indeed valuable. Because of the limited exposition of theoretical background, it would be helpful for a neophyte to read first in Ansbacher and Ansbacher(7), especially the chapters on life style and the problem child. The recently published book by Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs(8) would offer an additional and up-to-date source for understanding Alderian approaches to the pedagogical and treatment problems of children.

For scientific reasons, I wish *The Problem Child* had been more carefully constructed originally. The reader is not told just how the cases were recorded. Presumably a student or secretary kept notes as Adler went through the case in front of the audience. But we cannot be exactly sure of the stimulus configuration and his responses. Now with phonographic equipment readily available, skilled counselors and clinicians could keep more precise records. Such records if kept systematically might be analyzed by research methods related to Duncker's (9) “thinking aloud” technique and to studies of impression formation. Also clinicians with different theoretical orientations might be presented the same case material bit by bit, making it possible to analyze the differential development of their “working images” of clients.

In another way I am disappointed with the sketchiness of the book. Adler's thinking is presented on cases, but only rarely is there

any follow-up information. His conclusions would be much more convincing if we were told of changes that were observed when the child returned a month later, for instance, and even more convincing if there were a systematic follow-up interview by a trained interviewer. It is unfortunate that no one took the trouble to check even informally whether the families and teachers followed Adler's advice. It is to be hoped that the new Adlerian centers will be more systematic. Without evidence for success Adler's diagnosis smacks in places of easy application of formulas based on snap judgments—rather than an individualized interpretation of each case as Individual Psychology wishes to do.

STIMULATION FOR CLINICAL RESEARCH

Another aspect of the book which will stimulate the clinical researcher are the many hypotheses scattered throughout the book. These hypotheses need to be sharpened and defined operationally, of course. The holistic nature of Adlerian theory makes it difficult to extirpate all hypotheses from the interacting whole, but as research methodology becomes more sophisticated this can be done. Some of these hypotheses are very basic to Adlerian theory, e.g., the notion that a person has courage only if he has belonged to a group (p. 71), or that a person can change his style of life after the preschool years only if he is enlightened about his errors and encouraged (p. 160). There are also some very specific hypotheses, e.g., that children who have trouble with arithmetic are usually pampered children (p. 93), or that there is a greater incidence of deviation among left-handed people (p. 124). Much could be done to relate Adler's ideas to more contemporary work in the social sciences.

Adler himself was very cognizant of the developing nature of his system. In several places he mentioned that his ideas if not confirmed would need to be revised. There is much evidence of deep knowledge and wisdom about children, parents, and teachers in this book but the true strength of Adlerian propositions will need to rest ultimately on scientific testing, not on the pronouncements of an expert. The last words of Adler's book (p. 172) are “. . . don't blindly believe any 'authority' — not even me!”

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LEWIS WAY is the author of *Adler's Place in Psychology*, reviewed in this *Journal*, 1963, 19, pp. 83-89. He knew Adler first in Vienna, when he was staying with Phyllis Bottome and her husband, with whom he had a life-long friendship.