

Pages for All Ages: Friendly Medicine

Some words and phrases to know before you read

- according to
- principle
- anxious, distraught
- movement
- charities
- poverty
- assembly lines, factories
- civic duty
- window boxes
- strike
- research, researcher
- democracy
- outraged
- diseases
- religious
- agnostic
- tragedy, grieving
- public office
- conscientious objection

Ada often said, “Act according to truth and principle. Then you will never need to be anxious or distraught.”

This was the woman that Alfred Salter fell in love with. They met in the Bermondsey Settlement in 1898, when Ada was thirty-two and Alfred was twenty-five.

Bermondsey Settlement was a successful example of “the settlement movement,” which was active in England and the United States around 1880-1920. Charities would build “settlement houses” in poor neighborhoods. Then they would hire well-educated young adults to live in the houses to serve as “settlement workers.” The goal was to bring rich people and poor people together to solve the problems of poverty. Leaders of the movement believed that those problems could only be solved if rich and poor worked together. They also believed that poverty was caused by greedy businesses and by unfair laws.

Ada moved to London when she was twenty-seven – away from her childhood home in the country – so that she could join “The Sisters of the People.” This was a brand-new group that gave women in the Methodist Church an unusual chance to be leaders. A few years later, Ada started working for the Bermondsey Settlement, where she ran the Girls’ Club. The young women in the Girls’ Club were tough. They spent long days at hard labor – chopping wood, pounding tin, collecting garbage, and packing food on assembly lines. Often, when the women came to the club, they were drunk. But they grew to love Ada, and they supported her projects. Ada believed that true humans



are people who care for nature and for each other. She would say, “Growing flowers and trees is a civic duty.” She helped the women of Bermondsey build window boxes and plant flowers in them. And she helped them do much more. (For example, she helped with the factory women’s strike of 1911.)

Before he met Ada, Alfred had been visiting the Bermondsey neighborhood for almost eight years, ever since he started his medical studies at Guy’s Hospital at the age of sixteen. Guy’s Hospital was just a mile-and-a-half away from Bermondsey. As a doctor-in-training, Alfred made hundreds of home visits to sick people in Bermondsey. He was an award-winning student, and

he became a famous researcher. He was also a person who held firm beliefs about healthy living. He was against alcohol, against war, and for democracy. He was outraged by the crowded housing in Bermondsey. Often, three families lived in a home built for one family. He was outraged by the lack of running water and the lack of heat. And he was outraged by the diseases that came because of the crowding. The people of Bermondsey caught smallpox, tuberculosis, typhus, and scarlet fever far too often. Far too many people died just because they couldn't get medical care – especially pregnant women, babies, and children.

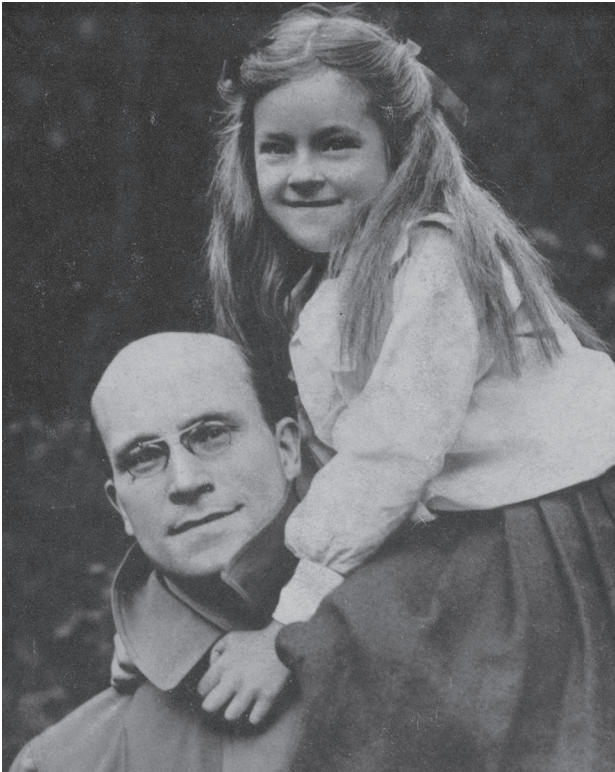
Right after finishing his medical studies, Alfred took a research job at the Lister Institute. But he still worried about the people in Bermondsey. He became friends with the man who started the settlement house there, Scott Lidgett. Alfred decided to live in the settlement house in Bermondsey. He planned to work regular hours at the Lister Institute, and then in his free time, he would help in Bermondsey.

Alfred had been raised as an active Christian, but during his medical studies, he stopped believing in God. So, when Ada met Alfred in 1898 at the Bermondsey Settlement, they made an odd pair. She was quiet and religious. He was fiery and agnostic. But Ada often said that Alfred acted more like a good Christian than many people who said they were Christians.

Ada Brown and Alfred Salter married on August 22, 1900. They joined the Religious Society of Friends that same year. Then Alfred left the Lister Institute and became a full-time doctor in Bermondsey.

Tragedy came to the Salters early in their marriage. Their only child, Joyce, died of scarlet fever at the age of eight. This tragedy bound Ada and Alfred even more tightly to the people of Bermondsey. After the early months of their grieving, they worked even harder to help turn Bermondsey into a healthy place for families to live.

Ada and Albert both ran for public office many times. Sometimes they lost, but often they won. They both served on neighborhood councils and the London City Council. Ada served as a mayor of the neighborhood



council. Alfred served as a Member of Parliament. They both pushed government bodies to support public health projects and decent public housing. They also led many volunteer organizations for women's rights, labor rights, and conscientious objection to war.

Ada once said in an interview, "I don't know what it would be like to have two politicians in the home who take opposite views, but we two, who have the same opinions . . . find it very satisfactory indeed."

Ada died on December 5, 1942, at the age of 76.

Alfred died on August 24, 1945, at the age of 72.

- Who is somebody you usually agree with, and who usually agrees with you?
- What are some ways to learn to understand another person's problems and needs?
- What are some basic human needs that all of us should work to make sure that everyone has a fair share?

Portraits of Ada, Alfred, and Joyce Salter are by (an) anonymous photographer(s) and are in the public domain.