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# **The Alexander Journal**

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## **Editorial**

### **Our debt to the first generation**

We record, with deep regret, the death of three teachers trained by F. M. Alexander: Wilfred Barlow, Patrick Macdonald and Dick Walker. All dedicated their lives to teaching the Technique and each played a central role in the early days of the Society, Dr. Barlow as one of its founders, Mr. Macdonald as the Council's first Chairman and Mr. Walker as its first Secretary. Dr. Barlow brought many people to the Technique through his writing and is especially remembered by us as the mainspring behind the launch of the Journal in 1962 and its editor from 1966 to 1978.

Of the same generation, but happily, still very much with us is Sir George Trevelyan, whose diaries kept while he was training are published in this issue. Reading his diaries or reflecting on the lives of his newly departed colleagues, it needs an effort of the imagination to comprehend the commitment demanded of Alexander's first trainees. For them there was no evidence that the skill of teaching could be passed on; except for F. M. and his brother, A. R., no one had taught the Technique. This was less

of a problem for students on later training courses because the presence of Alexander's newly qualified assistants gave tangible proof of the effectiveness of the training, but that teaching was a viable career had not yet been convincingly demonstrated. At a moment when death has made inroads into the numbers of first generation teachers, it seems appropriate to acknowledge their courage in the face of the unknown. It is all too easy to lose sight of the importance of their pioneering work in establishing the profession whose conditions we now take for granted.

They had one big advantage over succeeding generations in the presence of F. M. — authority speaking with a single voice; but how a teaching is passed on is as much to do with the receivers as the transmitter. This is not to criticise Alexander's trainees but to recognise what appears to be a law which governs human behaviour. The ancients had it thus:

*"The voice was to each one as each one had the power to receive it."*

This helps us to understand the origins of the various branches of the Technique and it must be clear that, according to the same principle, branches will grow branches. A practical way to counter this centrifugal tendency is for the representatives of the various branches to maintain a continuing dialogue in an attempt to find a common understanding. One of STAT's most important functions has been to provide a forum for this dialogue and it must continue to do so. It is too much to expect a complete reconciliation. It is the effort towards it that is important. It is the only practical way we know of slowing down the process of fragmentation.

#### **The Conference takes on new life**

The Society's Annual Conference last July was so well attended that latecomers had to stand. What a remarkable contrast to 1990 when the meeting was declared inquorate because too few members were present. The lesson learned from that disaster was that the event needed to be made more attractive. It was not enough to appeal to our sense of duty! Repackaging followed and in 1991 the Conference was sandwiched between a morning of displays and workshops and the Memorial Lecture in the evening. The response was encouraging, the result of initiatives by the Council and by individual members who realised the need for greater participation. In 1992 a similar format was followed but extended to a residential weekend at York University with the northern teachers acting as hosts. The success of the occasion bore witness to their hard work and organising skills and seems likely to set a pattern for the future. The program was full of interest and achieved its objective — to attract us. What we realised afterwards was that the moments between scheduled events were equally interesting but usually too brief. It has often been said, "Take a bunch of Alexander teachers, give them space, time, and leave them alone. They'll be happy for hours!" Next year's organisers please note!

## A personal view of the Alexander Technique

MISHA MAGIDOV

*The Alexander Memorial Lecture given in London on 10 November, 1990 at Baden Powell House.*

It all started quite accidentally. After last year's memorial lecture given by Dr. Ballard, while walking to the buffet trying to get some tea and biscuits, John Hunter, our Chairman, asked me about the lecture and we discussed it for a few minutes. Then he said to me, "Next year is your turn Misha." I took it as an amusing joke and said it without hesitation, "Of course I am going to do it, who else here can do it," and I forgot about it.

After a few months, John asked me if I remembered about the lecture. I was surprised and said, "You do not really mean it," and John said, "Yes I do mean it, seriously."

I've never seen myself as a lecturer and especially not in English. Although I speak and explain in my class and workshops, it is not in the form of a lecture or a speech but more of a talk with people. When I started to think about this idea, I had mixed feelings. On the one hand I wished to share my experience with a wider audience, on the other hand I did not know if I was the right person to do it, but, as you see, the decision was in favour of doing it and here I am.

What I wish to talk about tonight is the Alexander Technique as I see it now in the light of what I have learned from my teacher, Patrick Macdonald and his assistant, Peter Scott; and from my fellow teachers in Israel from the time when we worked so much with each other. I have also learned a lot from my students and from many years of experience in practical work and a lot of thinking and working on myself. No doubt the way I worked and the way I thought have changed over the years. Things which used to be very important sometimes lose their value and other things come instead.

I am not trying to enrich the Alexander Technique (as some teachers think that they are) and for sure I don't want to change it. I am not a renewer and not a reformer. I am trying to apply the Alexander discovery as I understand it. What Alexander discovered is very rich; any adding will dilute it.

Some teachers find that Alexander's discovery is not enough for them, and here let me quote my friend and colleague Shmuel Nelken in his excellent article in the Alexander Journal No. 10 of December 1989.

"Then perhaps, one day we notice that our work has become less interesting. We experience boredom. We are driven to make our work more interesting, to add more exercises, physical or mental. We might introduce aspects of other disciplines, therapies, philosophies and who knows what else. Soon our language changes in word and in content and very little of Alexander's original discovery remains. We may continue to meet colleagues, each expounding our own version of the technique and listening politely to the others. Here and there an idea might please me and I feel I have learned something; or is it another nail in Alexander's coffin in the name of progress, open-mindedness or modernisation?"

And another quote from that same article:

"Taking the hard and risky way has its rewards. Work tends to become more and more interesting. There is no need to beautify it by adding foreign elements. It is a matter of life — a constant struggle, frustrating at times, but full of life."

So what is this work? I see myself as a teacher (and this is written on my certificate), so first of all I have to teach. Now, I have to make it very clear for myself, "What do I have to teach?" And my answer to this is, "I am teaching people to use themselves in a better way in any daily activity."

Another thing, which I keep asking myself is, "What is a proper use?" For me a proper use is based on Alexander's discovery, the essence of which is what he called "the primary control" which is the proper relationship between the head, neck and back, which in practice, means to learn how to free the neck, how to let the head lead go forward and up and how to lengthen and widen the back. Now, if this is clear to me, then comes another question, "How do I do it with my pupil and how does it happen?" I shall try to deliver my thoughts to you by describing the way I teach in practice. I wish to start by describing a first lesson to a new pupil, then how I teach students in my class and then; how I work with more experienced teachers in my workshops.

#### **Working with a pupil**

When new pupils come to me, I ask them some general questions; why they came, through whom they came; what do they know about the Alexander Technique; what do they expect to gain for the money they are going to spend. Of course there might be different answers from different people. Then I explain to them what I do.

If people come because of health reasons, I usually ask them if they have seen medical people and what they have said. Then I tell them that I am not a medical person and that I am a teacher; my job is to teach them a proper use of themselves. I do say to them that many times, aches and pains, discomfort or bad feelings come as a result of bad use, physical pressure, physical and mental over-tension. If they learn how to improve the use of themselves, so the reasons for these pains and discomfort might disappear, they might get rid of them — and the general public can improve greatly. I never promise anyone that I shall cure him or her, or that after 'x' lessons they will feel better. I just promise to try and teach them good use, this is my job. I also mention that according to my experience most of those who have learned to improve the use of themselves and are using it in daily life, have gained a lot and feel much better.

I also explain to them that bad use is mostly not something new which started recently, but is a result of a long process which probably started in our childhood as a result of physical, mental, and emotional pressures and tensions. Because we grow up and live in such a competitive society, we keep these tensions and pressures — built up and absorbed into ourselves and, as a result we develop habits which are connected to this way of life. So what we try to do in our lessons is to get rid of old habits and learn a new way of using ourselves.

To get rid of habits is not easy and I always tell the pupil not to expect a miracle to happen. If he wants to improve his use, he must work hard and there are no shortcuts. Then, ask the pupil to do any activity, like getting up from the chair or sitting down or lifting some article from the floor or undoing his shoe laces. Of course, the pupil will nearly always respond automatically and will do it the way he has been used to for most of his life, which will involve stiffening the neck, pulling the head back and, of course, shortening the back.

I ask him if he knows how he used his body while doing this activity. Most of the pupils won't be able to give me a correct answer. I ask them to do it again and again and to pay attention to the way they do it. Some of them might notice sometimes and point out that they stiffened the neck or shoulders or some other part.

I try to imitate them, asking the pupil to look and see how he has done it. Sometimes I also ask him to put his hand on my neck or my lower back while I imitate him. Then I do it again while keeping the primary control, showing him the difference.

Here I say that good use is based on the primary control, which means that in any activity we have to keep the neck free, to let the head lead forward and up and to allow the back to lengthen and widen.

If we want to do it that way we have to stop the habit of doing it the old way, but if we want to stop the old way we have to learn what Alexander called 'inhibition'. When we have a stimulus to do any activity we have to

say "No" or stop, in order to give ourselves the orders for new conditions which are based on the primary control, and to continue these conditions while carrying out the activity, like getting up, sitting down, bending, picking up the telephone or any other activity. I make it very clear that without learning to inhibit there is no chance of stopping the old habits in order to learn new ones.

While talking and explaining, my hands are moving on the pupil; on the neck, back, shoulders, arms, so that the pupil gets used to the physical touch which, for some of them, takes time to get used to. This part usually will take more than half of the lesson. The second part is on the table. I teach the pupil to organise himself on the table and I expect him to learn in the future how to release unnecessary tensions and eventually to be able to send orders from the mind. We call these orders "directions", and by giving these orders, changes will take place in our bodies.

Before finishing the first lesson, I point out very clearly that I expect the pupil to work on himself. Working on himself means using in daily activities what he has learned in the lesson. I ask him to develop a good habit of lying down on his back every day. Some pupils will tell me that they do not find time to lie down. The way I try to convince them is by asking them, "Do you take a bath every day?" The answer is usually, "Of course!" "Do you comb your hair? Do you shave?" I ask women, "How long do you sit in front of the mirror to do your face or manicure? If you find time for these, you have to make time to lie down, as your back and body are no less important than make-up, hair and nails."

So you see that in the first lesson I try to mention most of the elements which the Alexander Technique is based on, like force of habit, inhibition, primary control, directions. I do not expect the pupil to understand it all after the first lesson, but when I repeat it in the following lessons things start to become clearer.

### **Working with students**

Working with students is different: the way is different, the demands are different and the skills required from the teacher and from the student are different. First it is no longer a private lesson, one to one, but a lesson in a group where the teacher must be aware of several people while working on a student. The awareness and knowledge of students is usually more than that of a regular pupil, and so is the level of questions which are asked in the class. Above all students are supposed to learn to put hands on and how to observe.

I find that mixing students, newcomers and old students is a good idea. This way they can learn from each other. The old students find it easier to explain or to make comments to a new student than to a student on the same level as them. I do not expect my students to be medical people or therapists although they do have lectures on basic anatomy, the skeleton,

the muscular system and the nervous system. But I make it very clear throughout the three years that we are in the area of education and not therapists, we do not cure or heal or treat our pupils.

What do we have to have in order to become good teachers? First of all the teacher must have his good use or his direction. Then the ability to deliver these directions through his hands to the pupil, which means skills in the hands. The teacher must be able to use words to explain, and to stimulate the pupil to think. Very important is learning to observe to see ourselves and of course to see what the pupil is doing and how he responds to our directions. Other values like being able to communicate, patience, good temper, esthetic appearance can contribute to a teacher.

### **Giving directions to ourselves**

What does this mean? We all know that the answer is sending orders from our mind to our body. The way I explain how the mind can, by sending orders, make changes in our body is by telling people about the electro-encephalograph machine. We know that, if we connect a man to the machine, the machine will show that some activity comes through the wires and the needle or the lines will move. If we are dreaming or in an emotional state we can see the changes of the needle or lines on the machine. We all are familiar with the scene in films when the patient lies in hospital connected to the E.E.G. machine and other kinds of machines, and we see how the lines go up and down, and then suddenly there is a flat line, doctors and nurses rushing to the patient, but he is dead. As long as we are alive some power, which doctors call brain waves, comes from our brain and causes activity in the E.E.G. machine. When life stops there is no power coming any more. This brain power which we call "direction" is the tool which we have to learn to use. We have to be able to cause activity and changes in our body by sending messages from our brain. This is not easy and requires a long time training and working on ourselves.

While giving directions to ourselves we deliver them to the pupil using two languages. The language of the hands to the body and the language of words to make the pupil think. We have to use these two languages. A good teacher knows how to balance them. How not to talk too much, nor too little.

Even if we do not have common spoken language with a pupil, it is still possible to teach him up to a certain level, by using our hands on the body and with the help of bodily and facial expressions.

But I think it is impossible to teach the Alexander Technique without using the hands in the lesson. The main reason for not being able to teach without hands, or with very little putting on of hands, is that the pupil does not have a proper sensory appreciation. If we do not give him the physical sensation of a better use with our hands he will never change to a better use and will always return to his old habits. That is why I object to

those teachers who claim that they teach the Alexander Technique by what I call remote control. Alexander himself did not find this possible.

### **The use of the hands**

As I mentioned before, we deliver direction (this energy which I also spoke about) through our hands, so we have to learn how to use them. While putting hands on, they must be free, otherwise the messages which we try to deliver will not come through and other kinds of power, like muscular power, will come through instead. And of course the pupil won't respond to that in the way he will respond to free hands with directions.

I explain how directions flow from the teacher to the pupil as follows: Imagine a tank full of water, a pipe is connected to the tank, the water flows through the pipe and this water flow is energy flow. But if we bend the pipe the flow will stop. By giving ourselves directions based on the primary control, we fill up our tank which means our back is lengthening and widening. This energy from the back can flow through our hands (the pipe) only if they are free. If we hold or lock the wrists, elbows, shoulders or our neck, we prevent the energy from our back flowing.

It is not easy to work with free hands. We have to overcome habits and a lifetime's way of thinking. All our life we were taught to do things stronger and faster, and here we have to use our hands in a completely different way. Many students and also teachers still do not believe that they can cause activities and even move the pupil by using direction, and instead they use their old way of muscular doing.

### **The purpose of using the hands**

We always have to know why our hands are on our pupil and what they are supposed to give him. I worked once with a young teacher while she put hands on a pupil. I asked her why her hands were there and what they were supposed to do there? She took her hands off the pupil, thought for a few seconds and said, "Actually I really don't know why my hands were there and did not think about what they were supposed to do."

When we put hands they have to have a meaning. They have to give something or receive information from the pupil and the main tasks of using our hands which I can point out are as follows:

To observe, to see with the hands, to feel with the hands.

To release undue tensions in the pupil's body.

To give directions.

To move the pupil.

To give the pupil the experience of a proper sensory appreciation.

You might find more jobs for the hands in our work but I think that what I have mentioned are the main tasks.

### **Observation**

The skill of observation requires many years of work. I start to teach my

students how to observe when they start to put hands on. We use two tools for observing, our hands and our eyes. One can complement the other. While the hands are moving on the pupil's body they can tell if there is too much tension or a lack of tension in our pupil's body; what is happening when the pupil is still or while he is in movement. Experienced eyes can also tell us about unnecessary holding, odd tensions and of course what is happening when still or in movement.

I find using mirrors a necessity for observation, both in training teachers and in teaching pupils.

The more we observe people in general, students in the class, pupils in a private lesson or colleagues while working with them, the more we improve these skills of observation. I have also found watching videos a great help. It gives you a chance to repeat or to stop or to watch in slow motion. I've learned a lot by watching videos.

When our attention is focused on working on ourselves, giving many directions and moving the pupil we forget to observe. An experienced teacher is able to keep observing while continuing other activities. To learn to observe ourselves and our pupils is very important. But observation alone is not of much value. If we only know how to observe we just collect information. It can be valuable only if we know what to do with this information and if we have the skills to deal with it.

After three years in a school, the new teacher just has the foundation of how to use himself and his hands in teaching and it's up to him which way he goes from there. I do expect that new teachers, while taking pupils, will not cut their roots with colleagues and with their school. Isolated teachers easily build up new habits of which they are not aware. Working with colleagues and more experienced teachers gives them feedback.

### **Working with teachers**

Here we try to refine all these elements of working on ourselves: delivering the messages (directions) through the hands and with words to the pupil and observing. Also while working with teachers, they bring problems which they face in their practice and we try together to work on those issues. After we discuss an issue and I give my point of view or show a young teacher how I deal with it, I don't necessarily expect that then things will be clear and go smoothly. It is something which I wish the teacher to think about and to work with in the future.

Once, in one of my workshops with teachers in New York, a teacher who struggled with her colleague and could not move her out of the chair, called me for help. I came and saw how she locked her hands around her partner's neck and of course her partner could not respond to them. When I put my hands on top of hers, released her hands directed ourselves and sent directions to the partner, we moved the partner quite easily.

It was amusing when she asked me how I did it, I said, "I gave myself directions, I released my hands and opened my front wrist while moving

my free hands up. I demonstrated it on her partner. She watched and said, "O.K. I got it." Then she tried again and again and failed. I told her, "You said you got it. For me it took many years to learn it. What you need is to work on these issues and don't forget to work on yourself."

#### **About inhibition**

I have heard teachers talk about inhibition as if this is the top value in the Alexander Technique. The way I understand it, the Alexander Technique is about using ourselves in a better way. Therefore we have to learn to use ourselves with the means-whereby which is the primary control.

Inhibition for me is the means-whereby for the means-whereby. If we don't inhibit we won't be able to use the primary control and will come back to old habits. After all, Alexander himself came to inhibition after he failed in applying the primary control in activity. The danger of inhibition is when non-doing becomes something lifeless. To prevent this directions must follow inhibition.

#### **Losing good use**

Pupils and teachers often ask me, "Once I have learned to use myself better, will it stay with me or will I return to my old bad use?" My answer is very clear. If we stop working on ourselves, which means to stop directing ourselves, we shall return to our old bad habits.

We live in a competitive materialistic society. We have a lot of physical pressures and tensions caused by sitting in bad chairs or armchairs in long meetings, in classrooms, in airplanes, cars. Often we are rushing and we have mental stresses, fears and worries, insecurities.

These caused us in the first place to lose our natural good use which most of us were born with. We continue to live in the same society with the same pressures and tensions and physical conditions so, if we stop working on ourselves, life will force us again to lose our good use.

#### **New discoveries in the Alexander Technique**

In the last STAT news, there is a letter from one of our members, which I would like to refer to. In his letter he says:

"If STAT wants to have a good public perception of the technique, STAT should be more careful with future training course applications, it is nowhere near enough to have taught the Alexander Technique for a stated number of years. Communication skills are a particular factor which I have noticed as often lacking. The ability to explain and talk about what we were actually teaching, as well as using our hands, seems to me to be an integral part of any teaching skills."

And here he continues by objecting to the orthodox way, as he calls it, and suggests that:

"Teachers to take a mental leap beyond the confines of

their own training, so that they can find their own true way of teaching."

And he continues by saying:

"While recognising the need to protect the public and the name of the Alexander Technique, I think this is best done by encouraging the highest standards of training, which produces teachers who are able to communicate Alexander's discoveries in their own original and inventive way."

These are very impressive words. But the reality is that those who say that they are the creative ones, those who take a mental leap beyond the confines of their training often end up with something which F. M. would not be able to recognise.

As do those who work by remote control and those who mix many foreign elements in what they call Alexander Technique. I know someone who claims that the Alexander Technique is to shake, tremble, kneeling on one's knees and jumping backwards and forwards!

I am not judging whether this is good or not, maybe these new discoveries are even better than the orthodox way, but it is not the Alexander Technique and please do not apply the name Alexander Technique to these new techniques. High standards will be maintained if we stick to what F. M. taught us, each one according to his temperament, ability and understanding. Perlman will play Mozart his way, Zukerman will play his way. But they both must play what Mozart has written in his music, otherwise it will not be Mozart.

#### **About STAT**

I know that there are many important tasks which STAT must deal with. For me the most important one is maintaining a high standard of teachers. This can be done only by maintaining high standards of schools.

I was very sorry that a few years ago the Council did not agree with my suggestion, that a director of a school should have taught for at least ten years and that before becoming a director he must have been an assistant for at least three to four years. Many schools were opened by teachers without enough experience and knowledge. Some then had to be closed.

I know of some teachers whose inhibition was so "strong", that when they had been teachers for six years they put their applications to the Council to open a school for when they would have been teachers for seven years. I can say here that I have more respect for the Alexander Technique.

After eleven years of teaching the Alexander Technique extensively, I thought I might open a school one day. I came to London, stayed here for three years and visited Mr. Macdonald's class several times a week, watched him, worked with him and with the students, talked to him, and then I went back to Israel and started to assist in the Jerusalem school. Only after four years of assisting, I dared to open my own school and I started in a

small way with five students. Gradually the school grew with me and with my education such as I had.

I think that those who dare to direct a school with less than that experience either do not understand the Alexander Technique in depth or do not care about the standard of the school. A good school needs a very experienced and dedicated teacher.

A school needs an atmosphere and a tradition. How can it be expected to have a high standard if every term or two the directors and teachers are changed? There can be no clear line for the confused and frustrated students. It is essential that senior teachers and heads of schools try to find a bit of common language about what is a good standard.

Once the Council asked me to go and see a school because they had received many complaints. I knew the director and went there with a heavy heart. I stayed there every day for one week.

When I came back I reported to the head of the training course sub-committee and said that in my opinion this school should not be recognised by STAT because of its very poor standard and other reasons.

Some people did not like my report and two other senior teachers went to see this school. They gave an excellent report. So this school is still functioning, but, in my opinion, with very low standards.

A director, as I said, must be an experienced teacher, but he also must be confident in himself and foster confidence in his students. I gave a workshop last summer. Among the participants were three assistant teachers of a school. (The school was on a half term break.) I asked one of the teachers to find out whether I could come and visit the school the following week when it re-opened.

The teacher came to me the next morning and said that the director wouldn't allow me to visit the school. This was the only time that I was not allowed to visit a school. All the participants of the workshop said that the director was afraid to let me visit. I think that if a director has no confidence in what he is teaching he should not be a director. I always welcome any teacher who wants to visit our school.

We could continue talking more and more, but I think we shall stop here. Thank you.

## Training with F. M.

SIR GEORGE TREVELYAN

*Taken from the author's diary, these extracts reflect his experiences on the first training course during the period 1933-1934.*

### December 8, 1933

F. M. said "We work to undo something and to feel out what change can be made. If we know beforehand what we are going to do we are lost. If the pupil does the thinking he will not slip back quite to the point he was before. But the trouble is none of my pupils will believe that all they need do is to *think* and that wish for the neck to be free will do the trick. I could now with my hands make any alteration in anyone, but none will trust to the thought. We are so brutalised by our belief in doing and muscular tension. Our technique makes for a *control in the process* by using the intelligence to bring about a new means; it is not like so many things a superimposed control from without, a trying to control by doing or feeling."

Three of my present pupils have told me of ideas they conceived or received for improving themselves which have resulted in serious wrong use!

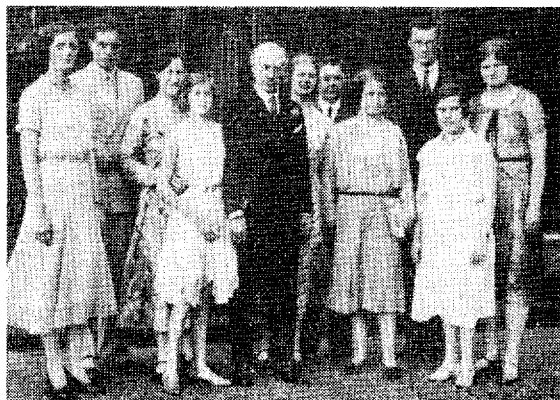
### December 22, 1933

F. M. said there was only one way of saying what the work was and what we are doing. *We are giving Nature her opportunity*. This is a definition allowing for change and growth. Mr. C. the second osteo-arthritis case, has, says F. M., no sensory appreciation for anything else but pulling himself down. He has no notion whether or not he is going up, and therefore whatever he does, does the only thing he is aware of which is pulling down. No osteopathic treatment can touch this. Mrs. L. asked F. M. whether her boy had got the new experience in his thought. "No" says he "but he's got it in his sensory appreciation which is a much bigger thing."

B. appears to have "gone to pieces" after the shock of losing his child, until then confident that nothing could lose for him the thing he had got. This often happens, said F. M., to people with perfect co-ordination; they are hit by something, a blow 'mental' or otherwise and then drop, bow under it, literally and then either fail to get back to the point of co-ordination they enjoyed before, or set their teeth to regain it and in so doing put the primary control wrong, and untrustworthy feeling begins.

### December 27, 1933

There can be no difference in kind between the act of widening the back and lifting the arm for both are brought about by contractions of muscles



George Trevelyan (early 1930's). Group Photo I, to R: Erika Schumann, George Trevelyan, Majorie Barstow, Peggy Alexander (F. M.'s adopted daughter), F. M. Alexander, Margaret Goldie, A. R. Alexander, Ethel Webb (F. M.'s secretary and Erika's aunt), Gurney MacInnes, Lulie Westfeldt, Jean MacInnes.

and relaxations of their opposites. We readily accept the soundness of doing no more than giving consent to the freeing of the neck and the forward and up movement of the head, and are in no hurry for the message to get through and the result to come about. In the same way any movement must come about in time if we but trust our thinking. Naturally consent works immediately where automatic habit is already established, but it is not to be expected that the hand, say, will move the instant we tell it to if we are ordering head forward and up as well since there is then no association of habit.

F. M. says he frequently finds that the more a person has ideas and theories the less they seem able to grasp the notion of 'thinking' directions. It seems they have no faith in the 'mind' (thought) but will go back to doing and feeling. He on the contrary believes we shall in time bring almost all things, disease and health, under this power of giving and withholding consent.

People will do things, both in this work and to improve themselves otherwise. They feel something is wrong unless they are doing something. Why should one? Je ne vois pas la necessite. What earthly right has one to do anything and interfere with the way things are going unless one knows it is the right and sound thing.

#### January 8, 1934

I told F. M. of our seeing *Hamlet*, where the hero, a charming lad, Olivier, so pulled himself down that in the emotional moments he was usually kneeling and couldn't remain upright, while his head became so much drawn backward that he looked goitred. F. M.'s comment was that the time

would come when people would be locked up for that; for the sheer lack of intelligence in doing such things with themselves, especially at those moments when the maximum is being demanded from them.

F. M. has seen one or two women who have been concerned with tap dancing and finds a condition of downward pressure into the hips which astonishes him. A strange business if a particular trick or skill develops, in our ignorance, particular defects. These two cases are encouraging. They suggest the very great importance of 'checking the rot'. We are at times discouraged by the smallness of change in ourselves or our pupils. The first checking of the tide must be slow; enough perhaps if we can merely hold, in ourselves, and get no worse. Those who follow will show the more marked gain.

The delusory feeling which compels the pupil to pull himself down is, according to F. M., the disease — "arthritis or any other 'itis' ". You must kill the kinaesthetic thing in him which makes him do it before you can really remedy the condition. There is no "right position". The most you can do is to order head forward and up and whatever follows from that is the 'position' for the moment.

#### January 15, 1934

Today we held the second meeting of the group which met last September to discuss the work. Then were present Irene Tasker, Lulie Westfeldt, Pite, Gunn, Best, Gurney MacInnes and myself. We talked out difficulties pretty frankly, dined and agreed we must meet quarterly. This time there were sixteen. Murdoch read a paper, we dined, formed ourselves into an Alexander Society and agreed to meet again on April 9th. Outside Murdoch's paper, which will be published, various points came up.

*N.B. I remember this was the first time we met in the room.*  
The head has not before been seen as an organ which can be used to make changes. The alteration in the poise of the head influences the labyrinth from which impulses are sent off which bring about the altered working of the various parts. It is indeed the only change which can condition the reflexes generally. Nothing else one does with the body can do the same.

The myotetic stretch or anti-gravity function of muscles — all muscles have this power and in co-ordination are working in this way right through the organism. They are then untirable. What we are doing all the time is to put these untirable muscles out of gear.

Rugg Gunn spoke of the sub-occipital muscles as the originators of each movement — or rather that they'd probably prove to be so. He considered Murdoch's observation would "probably prove to be the most important that had been made outside Alexander's own observations". He mentioned the interesting fact that in the early days of anaesthetics in dental operations, patients frequently died of anaemia of the brain through the setting back of the head and forcing down of the jaw, thus damming both blood supplies.



A tame rabbit held up by the ears dies, a wild one not, because the latter has still tone enough in its abdominal muscles to force the blood stored in the great veins up into the other arteries. We, when sagging, in like manner lose the abdominal tone which can do this. What is more, the peristaltic waves appear almost to stop when the use is interfered with. It was a keen gathering, felt to be well worth while and important to repeat.

#### January 16, 1934

F. M. said, "What we do is to help people to stop bad habits of use and to stop the ideas which do them harm. We can't do much yet, but can teach them to stop harming themselves." *These specific ideas of improving themselves* so constantly seem to be at the back of the trouble. He believes that without the fundamental knowledge behind our work, all 'ideas' are likely to be dangerous. Burgess told us of a great fencer who so used himself that his right leg had to 'be set' in an iron brace to keep him from shortening into the hip. Can we really respect the intelligence behind such a performance? We fail to notice such things in our interest in results which are important to no one.

Emphasis today on our common tendency to press down on the knees and legs when putting knees forward. To overcome this is of absolute first importance. Everything can be done with less pressure, less effort, in most spheres.

F. M. has now dealt successfully with the case of tortocolis and osteoarthritis, both held incurable and done it "*through a legitimate use of the human brain*". Our interest must be turned round and emphasis be laid on the manner of use of the self and the degree of intelligence used thereon, rather than on the results and the specific skills.

#### January 20, 1934

Today with Gurney to the College of Surgeons where we looked at the specimen showing the sub-occipital muscles. It is not hard to see how, among that complex network, these little fellows, deep buried against the skull, have been classed among the rest and their peculiar significance overlooked. Conversely it seems eminently reasonable that here, at the first connection of the skull and the vertebral column, the first and innermost set of muscles should have the function of initiating movements.

We saw as well the deformed and contracted skeletons. How clear it seems that pressure and contradiction must pull the skeleton out of shape. There was the spine of the coal heaver, bent double; it is clear he was perpetually fixing himself to get his leverage (as we all do, more or less) and the cultivated use became a set condition. If however the body can be so contorted, it can be undone again, and it is these contortions, or this contortability which will help us to make our changes. Medicine however has no experience of the slow changing *back*, and the coal heaver and his like become museum pieces.

What we must learn is how to let chest etc. go when we do something, rather than fixing everything when strain is demanded. If we can undo, the more effort we make the more the thorax will enlarge and the joints pull apart, and in this condition it would be impossible to burst blood vessels.

We must let our skeletons fall back into shape by inhibiting the messages and ideas which pull us down and fix us. If the marvellous mechanism could have been evolved to meet needs, it surely should be possible to let it merely come back into coordination without our needing to know the details of its working, and indeed too elaborate a knowledge of the body would perhaps so clutter up the mind that the simple issue would not be seen.

#### January 21, 1934

It is possible by this work to give a person a good habit whether they want it or not. You can make them take it by giving it to the kinaesthetic side of them, but in this very fact lies the danger, in that you may give a person a *bad* habit if you don't get the primary direction right. It is a great advantage that there is just the one thing to control, but that must be right. If you can give them the primary control and they will use their brains and go on holding the thing in mind so as to stop off the impulses which pull them down, the change must begin to take place. The trouble is we will not use our brains, but will try to get the end. The strength of this thing, I repeat, lies in the fact that it is being given to the sensory side of us. Today I saw F. M. working on Mrs. D., the tortocolis case. The change in the two years is beyond belief, and she had previously been sent to every imaginable sort of treatment without any effect, except to make the condition worse. The head is now still almost all the time; the back is nearly normal.

The marvellous experience is that of *movement* not as we ordinarily understand it but the condition of internal movement, when all the parts are undone and mobile in relation one to another, although no outward movement will be visible. And then the tone of muscle, such as appears in the neck when the primary control is working! This work differs from other treatments in that it enters into the very life of the pupil. We must *undo*, not hold things when using the body — as we have said so often.

When breathing we must not think too specifically about contraction of the floating ribs; rather will the entire thoracic cage, left mobile and unheld, contract and expand, for the intercostals work between all the ribs. In like manner we need not think of writing as a finger movement alone, but, by leaving hand wrist and fingers untensed can discover what movements involve for us the minimum of strain.

Regarding osteopathy, F. M. considers that in exceptional circumstances three treatments might be justifiable but not more, and that only if followed up by 'something real', for unless the question of use is tackled how could the patient keep the change brought about. The organism cannot stand much of such treatment. Similarly such violently

AROUND THE P.C.

stimulating treatment as the Swedish baths may do more harm than drink. Similarly with the uncovering of reticences by psychoanalysis. What makes F. M.'s work impressive is that he began modestly to meet his particular need and made his discovery indirectly. The science which sets out to prove a particular case should always be looked on with suspicion.

F. M. now has a pupil with conditions as bad as those of Mr. B. but as yet with no deposit or wearing of the bone, such as would pass as osteoarthritis. The 'disease' when it comes is surely merely the symptom of this condition, and medicine has no way whatever of touching the condition, since that involves eradicating the 'thing' in the pupil's brain and sensory make-up which leads him to pull himself down.

#### January 23, 1934

Today F. M. got the direction so perfectly in Mrs. D. that the breathing was released as never before, like a thing divine. You can, however, never tell exactly when such a thing is going to happen, which makes demonstration to doctors so difficult. But the instant you give waiting nature her opportunity she begins to function again.

The "righting action" in animals visible on the operating table in their struggles to bring the head back into relation to the body proved to Magnus that the postural reflexes were controlled by the relation of head to neck. Murdoch goes further and asks why does the wretched creature do it? What is the idea behind it? Clearly escape from torment. It is the reflex expression of the instinct of escape and preparedness. Every creature, not excluding ourselves has this reflex mechanism and can get into touch with this deep instinct to put the head forward and up.

We must abandon our faith in muscle. It is the enthusiasm for the games which has brought us to the wrong uses. The massed muscle is generally unnecessary now and what we must attain is a more sensitised control by our intelligence.

#### January 27, 1934

Many of the failures in marriage, F. M. contends, are due to the failure on the part of the man to inhibit and hold back. In response to his excitement he stiffens, therefore often enough preventing the connection and response from a sensitive woman, and, again, he often finishes far too soon for her satisfaction because there is no adequate control. CCC and the ability not to tense himself should in no way modify his strength of feeling or sense of pleasure and by giving *her* more chance of feeling should again bring a further response in himself. Thus a knowledge of use should not only make the man a better lover but will make the sexual processes, menstruation and childbirth incomparably easier for the woman.

The greatest proof of the power of the work is what has happened to F. M.'s organism and the amount of poisoning it has survived.

People will watch and judge by us. If we cannot use our practical wits and awareness and memory without specific training, the outlook is far from bright.

Stiffening wrists is liable to be our greatest obstacle.

Experience in diagnosis will come if we wait, wait, wait. Do not be hurried by pupils into seeing what you are looking for. Let the impressions come.

It must become habit to *wait and think* whether all is in order and all is well done before leaving a room or finishing a job.

Every simple act must be approached as if we have never done it before. Then we can find things out.

We may expect as time goes on and a few generations have grown at this work that much now buried in the depths below consciousness will come up to the level of awareness. The veil will gradually be swept away. Now we see through a glass darkly.

Most impressive in our work is the oneness, in the sense that getting one thing, one gets all the others. When one succeeds in undoing and expanding the chest, one brings the back into play as well. The proof of the soundness of our technique is that all particular needs are met in such a way as to improve the working of the whole and so give one the advantage in everything else. There comes a craving to continue with a use that is right. One knows it to be right; it is indeed a sort of sixth sense, bringing such conviction that one must laugh at the people who tell us we are wrong. We have the experience. As F. M. says "The methods which bring about changes by exertion and increase of tension are *stultifying growth*. I don't mind what they all say. *I know!*"

This was a comment on a remarkable change he made in Eric, 'undoing' chest etc. till all parts were moving freely in opposition one to another, giving him the appearance of a powerful and indeed a transformed creature. Alteration in shape of chest and back will begin to take place, at first, because of the lowered standards of tension, below the level of consciousness, but coming to awareness *after* the experience has been sufficiently repeated. Then one has it as a permanent possession in one's sensory make-up, but this process can in no way be hastened, and Nature must take her own time. The experience with Eric shows the absurdity of the remark made to me by a doctor who teaches postural exercises: "I get over untrustworthy feeling by first giving the patient the correct mental image". This must obviously follow the experience.

#### February 8, 1934

At lunch with G. B. S. I met Sir Herbert Barker, the great manipulator. He gave a demonstration of the "exercise he found most useful in curing

dropped abdomen". Clasp his hands behind, he violently hollowed his back and pulled his head back, putting out of gear every mechanism and set of muscles which we know control the general co-ordination. I would not have believed such stupidity to be possible and it shows the dangers involved when a man ventures beyond the sphere in which he has experience.

Outstanding in the effects of this work is the *tranquillity and lack of anxiety* it brings. This is to be expected for in the condition of malco-ordination you must expect worry and anxiety. They are right in a sense to the badly adjusted organism and are the protest of the deep sound instincts, above all that of self preservation.

It is the most surprising that more pain and distress is not felt, and it is natural for us to put down the condition of distress to outside agencies or to nerves. Nerves however will vanish as you regain co-ordination. It is clearly wrong that calamities should knock an organism to pieces.

Another comment on *unity*. Just as any change towards co-ordination helps all along the line, so the wrong habits cultivated in learning a particular skill, say, riding, will undermine everything and we shall pay for them as the years go on.

#### February 11, 1934

Each day must be begun in the hope of discovering something new. We must be approaching each act as if we had never done it before, for if we preconceive how it is to be carried out, we shall fix ourselves to our habitual way of using ourselves. In walking, the decision to take a particular length of stride is enough to fix us down to the old use of body since the unity in working is so complete. We need to order the head up and find what length of stride follows from that direction. So too with singing. My voice was diagnosed as bass and I was taught to sing bass, for indeed my general use of myself resulted in a voice deep down in my throat. I now find that if I put my head forward and up a higher baritone voice comes out. So long as I insist on singing bass, on gaining the end, I must fix myself to the habitual general wrong use.

As to this business of the attitude of discovery, of adventure, the idea came this morning as I woke. I got up and before five minutes were out had made a new experience as to what it means to pull off the ankle joints. Definitely it seems there can be a lengthening pull off the joints in which state no arthritic condition would be possible. Exactly how this pull is explained I do not know but it is a fact and must be worked for. F. M. can lengthen the fingers to bend them. We tend to contract the joints together by the overworking of certain muscle sets. Thus in lying down work we tend to shorten the leg by over contraction of thigh muscles when we lift the foot. The message, the impulse to the knee to go up to the ceiling must get in *first* and will naturally prevent the overworking of the thigh. At first

of course it will make the movement impossible but will in time itself pick the foot off the ground. No form of physical exercise could get you a like experience.

In making physiological tests they are working so much in the dark for *lack of a standard*. To observe the working of the stomach or the arm is one thing; a very different thing if you can see the difference in working that comes as a result of general conditioning through a primary control.

Contraction and pressure on to joints is brought about by *overaction* of certain muscle sets. The message gets first to the wrong set. When it gets first to the right set you get what we loosely call a pull off the joint, for that is certainly what virtually happens. To change the message involves inhibiting the end and sending the order for the *use* which involves the lengthening pull. It all turns on which order gets in first.

When we really get the lengthening pull off the ankle the foot and toes genuinely begin to "take hold of the floor" and this use is inherently part of the co-ordination of the breathing mechanism. Presumably the arm, made on the same reflex pattern as the leg gives us the same essential use so that the more we grip the more we can pull off the wrist.

The more you pull on a pupil the more he'll tend to fix against you. First you must undo the holding of the neck. When you pull it must be as one holds a horse, holding and releasing, holding and releasing with sensitive variations of touch. Watch this idea in all things; the fast driving of a car particularly on bends, the use of a pen, one's own direction to the head . . . *give and take*, not a steady hold. Hold and then let wrist go. This is the way the impulses from the brain work. The *myotetic stretch* is brought about by thousands of irregular impulses to different nerves in the muscles, contracting and releasing in different parts of the muscle so that the general result is a steady and untiring pull. The tetanous condition of a muscle is "the state of prolonged contraction of a muscle under stimuli repeated quickly".

It will turn out, F. M. believes, and so do I, that the technique has its exact counterpart in natural principles such as the above. An example is the sustaining of impulses to the head forward (impulses from the teacher's brain as well) while it is taken up. This will hold good because the thing was worked out so simply and like all great discoveries from a chance observation, the theory following the experience. Where you know what you intend to prove you will see what you are looking for and you cannot know the unknown.

Physiology, contends Murdoch, will have to be rewritten for they overlook *the extensor power of joints and muscles, which is an actual fact*. F. M. himself is the living proof and they can take him as standard, for what one human organism can do, another can. The trouble in their observations is that so much has been done without a standard to check up by and on badly used organisms.

We are, F. M. says, too imbued with the idea of flexing, an act involving too much of collapse and shortening through bringing into play only the contractors or flexors. In fact both extensors and flexors must first come into play together, the balanced pull extending the joint and this pull be maintained during the movement.

*Nerves:* F. M. questions how you can treat nerves as such, these being the things through which impulses are sent. What is wrong is that the impulses from the brain are sent to all the wrong parts and through wrong nerve channels and become all jangled. It is this reaction, this misdirection which manifests itself as nervous disease and the wonderful thing is that these troubles come back to the human brain and can be overcome by its intelligent use through knowledge of primary control.

*Yoga:* The trouble with Yoga is that it assumes (tacitly) perfect people aware of what they are doing. F. M. repeated he had no quarrel with anything as such and was ready to believe in anything and that there is no idea without something behind it, but that these ideas are so often defeated by the fact we are so imperfect and our feeling is so untrustworthy. Let us right that and then see about the ideas.

Asked by Dr. Moss 'what is your interpretation of Parkinson's disease?', F. M. replied "Messages sent out from the brain to the wrong parts of the body in activity".

NB • *What you need to become a teacher of this work:* There are only two things necessary: to be able to put your own head forward and up and to make less and less tension in hands arms and what you do. You must think more of what you are doing with yourself than what you are doing with your pupil. If you "know" beforehand what you are going to get you'll never get the unknown. You can never foretell when a thing will come to you. The experiences come mysteriously. The difficulty we experience is that we will demand to know whether we are right, whether changes are coming about etc.. But change must be to the unknown. We must work into the unknown not knowing what we are working for, and this is what makes our work revolutionary for we will in the ordinary way demand to know. F. M. said "I've made myself a teacher by refusing to know what I was working for".

• *But you must know the inhibition and direction to the primary control.*

We won't grasp this principle of not doing and not knowing because it is against habit. People tend to hold breath by closing the vocal chords. Hence the difficulty of control of voice in song and speech, and the sudden and harsh beginning of articulation. If we can create our own vacuum by control of the movement of the thorax we can keep the chords separated and open, for in articulation there should never be a beginning or end to the sound. It should grow and cease like a wave flowing. The whispered 'ah' was evolved to meet this need, the whisper being a cunning side track to habit. Thoracic contraction is undoubtedly on the increase, and can well be inherited and is certainly encouraged by the sedentary life.

## February 16, 1934

Mr. B. complained of pain in the arm whenever he attempted to lift it. F. M. showed him the arm could be raised painlessly if he went on with the direction to the head. "You must master that and maintain it and never waiver from it for a year or so. Otherwise things will go wrong in all parts of the body, and the remedying of them will never be a real cure". Always the trouble with feeling. Though an intelligent man, Mr. B. has practically no awareness of what he is doing, and it is for this reason that the processes of change cannot be hastened. For this reason we must prevent wrong tendencies before they have seriously become established, which might be done in a very few lessons. If the pupil could learn not to do and just to remember steadily not to pull the head back, wishing it to go forward and up he could really check insidious tendencies.

Concerning *investigation* of the thing, F. M. protested that the only investigation necessary was something like the radiology tests which confirm scientifically that changes in the right direction are being made by orders to the primary control. That much established, we must *teach*.

Crawford and the rib movement; F. M. rightly says there should be no need for specialists like himself in a well ordered society. We must reach the point when we can help ourselves and others without needing too astute powers of diagnosis. That will however only come about in children who have learnt to watch use in all they do. To assume we only need to teach them things will never do the trick. He believes if he had met Mr. B. thirty years ago he could have spotted the tendency responsible for the trouble and checked it easily.

When we are right in general use we commonly fear to go on, because it feels strange and we fear to be wrong. When wrong, nothing can stop us doing and we commonly go mad on the end however unimportant. H. today, in a condition of co-ordination such as she had not yet experienced, dared not for sheer funk move her pupil lest things went wrong. F. M. coaxed her back to courage and action, and pointed out that had she allowed that doubt to win she could never have got beyond the point she had reached. There can be no place in the experimental attitude for fear of being wrong.

The plan is to decide what one is going to do with one's pupil and do it, and even if one is wrong one can begin to make the necessary experience.

Until one wakes in the morning with the knowledge of what it is to have a widened back one doesn't know what it is to be alive. This F. M. said with an almost passionate fervour.

## February 17, 1934

The artistry in this work lies in the undoing of parts in relation to each other and feeling out the antagonistic actions. The more you pull, the

more the pupil will resist. In time the hands will get to know the sensation of the real pulls. So subtle is the tone and pull of the neck, so hard to detect, that almost inevitably the more violent methods must put this vital central factor wrong. The more strenuous work on head will narrow the back; specific widening of back will upset the primary control.

There is little enough danger of harming the pupil if one always begins from the primary control, uses the hands to feel out and undo, and without preconception, making a change only when the sensitivity of the hands calls for it, while at the same time the pupil sends the messages. One must not pull the head too far or the pupil will not be able to keep the direction. You can easily overdo the pull and fail to establish the co-ordination which enables him to go on with what you have given him. You have got to feel out that you have established the co-ordination after each change.

F. M. rightly says that where *psychological trouble* is associated with good conditions of use, then there is hope for real help being given by analysis etc.. Otherwise you risk transfer.

The secret certainly lies in the fact that most of these defects in use arise directly from *ideas* and preconceptions and in process of working it should increasingly be possible to uproot these ideas. Since however in our technique this is coupled with the change of habit of use and is not done by probing into the depths of a person (particularly when their awareness of themselves is all wrong) it differs very much from psychoanalysis. Of course changes in manner come through ideas, through falling in love, getting a job etc., but there is no proof that the messages sent from the brain for the general use of self are in any way different from before, when such changes are made.

When *hurt* we must learn to let the part go. Many troubles following on accidents arise out of tensions in response to pain which become fixed as habits.

How ridiculously simple. Stimulus sends impulses to the brain, consent is given and impulses are returned down the different nerves. Simply not wanting to respond and wishing neck free etc. redirects energy. The withholding consent is the most powerful procedure and the knowledge of primary control, the primary activity of sub-occipitals, gives a positive counterpart to the inhibition and non-doing. On the animal plane, stimulus and consent are automatic, like reflexes. Man has evolved the power of conscious inhibition and therefore re-direction of the nerve impulses.

In the ordinary way, not training this power we are slaves to the multitudinous stimuli which assail us these fast living days. Less harm was done when stimuli were less various. I come to think that only the development of

inhibition can release us from the bondage. Slow at first, but in time a wonderful release of power. Redirecting the neural impulses at the centre is an enthralling conception! '*Doing*' to make a change is obvious folly. It merely means giving a consent which directs these impulses into the channels of habit and past experience.

Fixing of throat and larynx is 'fatal'. You can't get past it and it must be undone.

We say that this is an age of despair and that we see no ray of hope in the future. We individually who are concerned with the work are sometimes depressed. Then think, taking a very long distance view that we are trying in a very few years to make a very big change in ourselves. Most trouble seems to come down to messages sent from the brain to the wrong parts of the body. They get transferred, jangled. A stimulus inevitably starts up neutral activity and the *whole problem* is to redirect the response when the messages reach the brain and before they are sent out again. Naturally we end gain and have a sense of being unfulfilled until the particular end suggested is achieved, for the stimulus initiates activity towards the particular end. Think then of the power and control when the activity can be used towards another end, particularly the primary control.

If the pupil begins to hypnotise himself you are absolutely done, and it's no good going on. You must watch this in his eyes.

You must go on pouring the message through to the head. In teaching, your hands will reveal what is happening if you go on with the head. But we will make a break in the direction. Physiologically it means all the sets of muscles, both contractors and extensors are brought jointly into play — a new conception.

F. M. point out that when in the class something goes wrong with the 'subject' he always goes first to the teacher's condition. The trouble nearly always lies there, and if we can maintain conditions in ourselves we can leave the results to the reflex workings and sensitising in our hands.

### March 16, 1934

During intensive work at the conditioning of your own reflexes, give yourself a stimulus, say to go on to the toes; inhibit it and really cease to mind whether you get the end; give the impulses head forward and up, back to widen and go on with them until you are bored and beyond. Then walk away and do something else. All the time the old tracks will be being obliterated and new ones formed and you will find you have been building up a condition of improved use which will help you in whatever you then choose to do, and one which will make it easier to go on to the toes when next you *have* to do so. If you *decide* at what moment your new means

should work and then do the thing, you have no belief in 'means'. This intensive work before a mirror will be laying a groundwork of new tracks, re-canalising the nerve tracks so that when in action your thought will have more chance of being translated into impulses. During such active times the first job is to check the immediate desire to do the end suggested, to break oneself from the slavery to the stimulus. It matters very little if for the time being, while working on the plan, the impulses you give to lengthen are not always and altogether right.

That will come in time with the repeated wish, *so long as the desire to gain the end remains inhibited*. The important thing is that all the time while the impulses are being given, the old track is being obliterated and falling into disuse. This would be happening in a crude way if one merely changed the end, i.e. used *any* other new track, but just imagine the force released through re-direction into a primary control which conditions all other reflexes. Practising getting the end right becomes in this light the sheerest stupidity. The process outlined above is one which would in time obliterate almost any brain track and one must go on with it until, through disuse, the track is obliterated. *Then* there will be no question of the act not being carried out by the new co-ordination for it will be impossible to revert to the old. To reach this point the fewer times one goes for the end the better, the wonderful thing being that every improvement in use brought about while inhibiting the particular end improves the manner of carrying out every other end. Nothing is therefore lost by inhibition. It is not suppression.

#### March 18, 1934

Dined Athenaeum with Aldous Huxley and Robert Nicols to meet Dr. Russell Brain, neurologist concerning Alexander. Much good talk. A pleasant and wideminded man — By what authority? — Truth.

There is the whole great question of disappointment and sense of lost opportunity. If one had never had the particular stimulus one would not have regretted, vide Burns 'Aye fond kiss'. One would have been no worse a man. It is presumably the reflex response to the stimulus which is harrowing. If one could inhibit this, nothing would be disturbing. The things that go wrong, the disappointments can be looked on, then, as things to be used as training in inhibition.

Went with Murdoch to see the Medical Officer of Health at Board of Education. Couldn't attempt to deny it, but what was he to do with his 15M children? Once in the machine it is very hard for him.

#### April 9, 1934

F. M. said he'd spent four years on nothing but putting himself wrong and righting himself in the process of gaining the end. That is the perfection of control, and after the new conditions are well enough established we may

work any amount at that. Pupils are much too much concerned about keeping a right condition and feeling. When you get something good, throw it away in order to get it again for that *getting* is the important process. Once you really have the experience of the primary control you can use it so easily. The whole framework begins to drop into place, the relationships become apparent. The whole difficulty is to make certain the pupil has inhibited; F. M. worked for years to ensure that in himself.

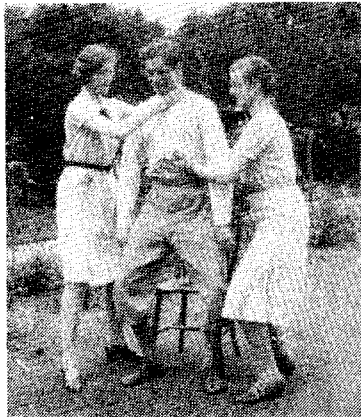
The beauty of this work lies in the *incentive it gives to improve the Self* —only by bettering one's own use of oneself can one hope to help others. So often people in their day's work, ignoring themselves have been harming themselves to help others.

You are lost if you try to know beforehand how changes of adjustment will come about in your pupil's body. You can only start with your primary control and go on working at that seeing head is adjusted forward and up and neck remains free and then watch out in general and without knowing what you are looking for until your eye spots the necessary link in adjustment. *Then* it is a real and living thing. This process however would be unthinkable without a primary control. You would be in a maze of data and possibilities with no standard. To the primary control we must constantly return. In teaching we often get changes which are not real because we don't really get the lengthening. We can get a widening of back and readjustments but *there is always danger if you are not certain of P.C.* If one has a headache the attitude should be what have I been doing to let myself get a headache.

The hand must stretch. Cultivate the habit of stretching between fingers and thumb as you work on a pupil. The arms and wrists must be kept free. If stiffened the hands lose sensitivity. The hand must come on to the pupil as if to sooth him, particularly keeping the 'lockjaw' part between finger and thumb in touch with pupil, not feeling merely with the fingers. Don't lock elbows into side except for special levering.

The hand should as far as possible get a real touch on head or neck with the palm. The spread between thumb and finger is vital. While it is essential always to do less and less with the hands, the fingers and feeling must nevertheless establish a firm and sure contact for when the pupil is in any way undone and thereby taken to a new equilibrium, he will need assurance which he can get only from the teacher's hand. The problem, as ever, is the sustaining of that directive decision to undo and to lengthen. There lies the secret of control and the real inhibition.

We are concerned with making structural changes which naturally take an appalling time. In my own case the whole bony framework of the back and thorax was wrenched out of place and only now, after so many years, is it really beginning to fall back. Once in its place and the musculature in tone you could hardly help developing yourself, for in all



Erika Schumann (now Whittaker),  
George Trevelyan, Irene Stewart.



Erika Schumann,  
Marjorie Barstow,  
George Trevelyan.

you did there would be a toning up of the body. Self development has no relation to 'physical culture' and the development of muscle. The days of muscle are past.

Asked what he considered the essential way for a sedentary worker to keep in condition, F. M. said without hesitation "The whispered 'ah' particularly over the chair." Also putting knees away till you reach floor, slowly, and in full control while length is kept. Fresh air of course must be had, and for this walking should give all the necessary tone if the primary control is not put wrong. Anyone can discover exercises for themselves. It is absurd to lay down for another what and how much he should do. That must surely be left to the discretion of the individual, as must food to a great extent and the ideal state of sensitivity is when the body has a real and true craving for a particular food or of clearing the blood by perspiration and exercise.

The interest which Sir George conveys in his diaries continues to this day, although his training did not lead him to become a teacher of the Technique. After a career in adult education Sir George formed the Wrekins Trust in 1971, an educational foundation concerned with the spiritual nature of man. This same concern was the theme of the Alexander Memorial Lecture given by Sir George in July, 1992, with the role of the Technique defined as the most effective means of caring for the body, the spirit's essential vehicle.

## The Alexander Technique in the kindergarten

LAURA HARWOOD

*Attempts to include the teaching of the Technique in the formal education of young children have been remarkably few and not notably successful. If the work described here becomes established it will be an important first step in understanding the place of the Technique in schools.*

As well as being a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I teach a half day kindergarten. For the past five years, I've been observing children and experimenting with how I wanted to use the Alexander Technique in my class. After much thought and consideration, I decided to start the school year (1990-91) attempting to have the Alexander Technique as an integral part of the children's education focusing on two main areas: The first area relates directly to science, mainly anatomy and physiology, and social studies. The second is that the Technique forms a foundation for all learning and it can prevent future psychophysical problems. In the former area, having children individually experiment with their bodies and others, in addition to discovering more about themselves through a hands-on Alexander experience, can make science come alive! Part of the kindergarten curriculum in social studies is developing a positive self-image and recognizing and accepting likenesses and differences in each other. Working on children gave me a specific time to talk about the condition of a child as well as have them notice changes in themselves and each other.

In order to help me reflect on my teaching, a friend videotaped the class on a weekly basis. Although it ultimately was extremely supportive and helpful, it initially took courage each week for me to watch my personal experiences. The tapes eventually stimulated me to persevere with my ideas.

I teach in Brookline, Massachusetts, in a state-run school located within five minutes of several of the Harvard affiliated hospitals in Boston. Consequently, many of the parents were doctors and scientists. At least seven nationalities were represented in my class of twenty-one children. Half of the children were either learning or spoke English as a second language.

Since the Alexander Technique is an abstract term for five year olds, I decided to refer to the process as body thinking. At least two mornings a week, body thinking was part of the morning meeting, the time we all gathered in a circle to discuss the day's events and personal issues children wanted to share. New subjects and formal learning also happened at this time.

At one of the initial meetings, I told the children that along with many other subjects, they would be learning about their bodies and seeing how their whole selves could help them in learning other things. Since it would not have meant much to talk about bodies without giving children an experience, I proceeded to give each child a brief hands-on turn, while they were seated on the carpeted floor.

At different meetings, I experimented with letting the children give me the weight of their arms, or I would get them to move from their hip joints and explore the weight of their heads and the purpose of the neck muscles. At the beginning of the year, since English was a second language for so many children, I talked a lot about body parts as I worked on them. For instance, as I worked on a child's arm, we would all observe how it was possible to achieve movement. Then we would discuss what joints were and the names of them. During the year, I sporadically did group experiments such as having the children pair up, feel each other's backs and show with a long pipe cleaner the shape of their partner's back, or notice what happened to a person's body in the horizontal position. For some children, anatomy and physiology was a way for them to start thinking about their bodies as whole beings. In order to support the children's intellectual interests, I had anatomy and physiology books readily available. As a result, children pursued the subject on their own. When a boy in the class celebrated his sixth birthday, he showed us his present of a miniature wooden skeleton, his "favourite" present.

Through the Alexander Technique children learned to accept observation as an ongoing process. Social studies, the formal term used for a curriculum area, became richer and more meaningful. Children compared likenesses and differences in familiar areas such as facial features and skin colour, but in addition they were able to develop more subtle skills in being able to watch what happened to individuals when they began to quieten themselves or during movement.

Personally, I thought I could learn a lot about each child's conditions and their potential for changes by introducing chairwork. Eventually, I worked out how to introduce it in order for children to seriously consider the activity. At the end of the morning, after the kindergarten children left, I did chair work with former students who were now seven years old. They came on a voluntary basis during their break. Since the classroom had no inner walls, the kindergarten children who were in the after school program saw me working and knew it was some form of body thinking. In February, I introduced chair work to the kindergarten. Many of them were familiar with it and were eager to try it. The tradition had been established. I put a chair in the middle of the circle and had the children observe each other as I worked. Turns were sought after by most children.

The other strand in which I developed the Alexander Technique with the children was to introduce it as a basis for learning. Learning begins as a

discovery process for a child before birth. Through infancy and toddlerhood, individuals are praised for discovering hand movements, picking up objects, creeping, crawling, and walking. What happens when a child is finally able to grasp a crayon or pencil? The wonder of self discovery starts being interrupted by parents or teachers who ask children to draw specific objects or symbols.

One area in which I decided to focus was how children write letters and numbers. I realised that most children come to school already having been taught how to make them. Narrow pencils are commonly used with standard-sized paper. Parents are mainly concerned that the symbols are legible. Unfortunately, four and five year olds are not necessarily physically ready to produce the desired finished product. All kinds of contortions are made to produce something that will ultimately be praised. Psychophysical patterns slowly begin to develop as children compensate for their undeveloped small-muscle coordination. Preventing this undue effort at an early age may help to avoid future problems.

When the children were going to make numbers, I told them to forget everything they already knew and make believe they knew nothing. I wanted to eliminate any possible feelings of fear or anxiety. I asked for volunteers who individually stood in front of chart paper on a tiled stand. As the child stood with arms hanging, I proceeded to help coordinate the whole body. Eventually, still telling the child to do nothing, I lifted the child's arm and helped to make long strokes without excessive effort. Most children were soon making numbers. The focus was diverted from the finished product to the process involved. The first formal learning experience turned out to be fun for most children. One child, however, who was highly strung, became extremely upset when he had to write numbers in a calendar. I found out from his mother that in nursery school, as a Christmas present, he had to write the numbers for all twelve months of the year. Much time passed before he was able to calmly write a calendar.

Two boys in the class had particular trouble with numbers, letters and drawing. For about three weeks, I worked with them about three times a week for ten minute periods. They knew that first they had to focus on their bodies and quieten themselves as much as possible. Sometimes I would begin the process from the standing position. With my guidance, each boy sat down and made lines and circles. As they both calmed down, their coordination improved. Throughout the year I approached children as they sat and sometimes worked with them in making changes. At other times I would actually have children stop what they were drawing or writing and have them first focus on their use.

In June, the last month I would be with this group of children, I caught myself falling into a trap common to many teachers. I started abruptly telling the children they were to fill in the numbers of the calendar and of course by now they should know how to write them. As I



looked at them for a reaction, I got subtle, blank stares. There was silence and then I calmly posed the question, "Do any of you need help in forming any of the numbers?" Several hands were enthusiastically raised. I started working with each child as he or she began to quieten down before ever attempting to lift the marker. Although I was initially ashamed of myself, I realised that if I stayed attentive to individual needs during any kind of learning, it could continue to be an ongoing and exciting process.

Towards the end of the year, I asked the children what they liked about body thinking and what they had gained. The comments were: "It's fun. It helps me." "I can teach others body thinking by helping them not to have muscles so tight." "I like how my arms let go." "I like to balance my head on my neck." "I like to get my back straight." One child who was particularly resistant at the beginning of the year had a dramatic change of attitude about halfway through the year. When I asked him what had happened, he said, "At the beginning of the year I was very tight, but then I was ready to change."

I also got feedback from some parents. A Hungarian child, for whom English was a second language, was very serious and observant, and never wanted to be the centre of attention in the group. One day she was fooling around with my arms and I asked her if she wanted to do body thinking in the circle. She said yes. It was the first time that she participated in any way. After that experience, she became playful and extremely chatty. Her mother said that she had been struggling with the fact that every word could be represented in two languages. The kinaesthetic experience of body thinking was only one language. Another child who was a leader and had a strong presence, but was shy, frequently expressed himself in a silly manner. When I started chair work he often volunteered and approached it seriously. When I asked his mother about it, she said he could be the centre of attention without talking. One comment a babysitter told me was about a child who occasionally wet his pants at home. When his mother asked him why, he said, "Laura tells us to let our muscles go."

Parents became familiar with the Alexander Technique because early in the year I presented a lecture-demonstration. As a result of the talk a parent wrote a letter to the Assistant Superintendent saying how important it was to introduce this work to children in the formative years. She wanted it to be expanded into the school system. Many parents signed the letter.

The Assistant Superintendent was delighted to receive the supportive letter, because she already was aware of my work. During my Alexander training I initially told her about the Technique. She, in turn, helped me receive funding. I have sporadically told her what I am doing with my class. Presently, she would like the Alexander Technique integrated into all the kindergartens in eight schools — a wonderful vision for the future! Laura Harwood qualified to teach the Technique at the Alexander Institute of Boston. She has an M.S. degree in Education from the Bank Street College of Education, New York, N.Y., and teaches in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## "Alexander's gloom" — a case history

LINDA GILLARD

*Can we be better prepared to face the psychological effects of the major changes in tension patterns brought about by Alexander lessons?*

Mine is, by any standards, an Alexander success story but it might not have been. I have been an Alexander pupil for about a year. After only a few months practising the Technique I was free of the back pain and headaches from which I had suffered for many years. Nowadays my life is quite pain-free and I am a confirmed Alexander convert; but there was a point after I had been having lessons for some months when I feared I might give up, even though I was still enjoying my lessons and becoming more and more fascinated by the Technique. I became confused and afraid as a result of what was happening to me psychologically and it is this experience that I wish to share with other Alexander pupils and teachers in the hope that they might benefit from my experience, which I suspect is not uncommon.

I was an enthusiastic and conscientious pupil, highly motivated by a desire to use my body more effectively and free myself from pain. Even before having lessons I had reached the conclusion that although I had had disc trouble and suffered from osteo-arthritis I was almost certainly causing my own pain by misuse; one lesson with my teacher, Jonathan Drake, confirmed this. Embarking on a course of lessons was a "road to Damascus" experience for me, a revelation, but at the same time a revelation of things that I somehow already knew. The Technique made such sense to me and I began to feel the benefit after only a few lessons, as soon as I stopped doing what I now know to be wrong.

I had no major physical problems with the Technique but the mild depression referred to by Patrick MacDonald as "Alexander's gloom" (1) descended as I came to understand more and more what I needed to do, what refinements were possible. I went through the usual reaction about "doing everything wrong" but I persevered because of a gut feeling that I was getting somewhere, even if at times it didn't feel much like it. My teacher was encouraging and sympathetic and his lessons would be punctuated by the reassurance "There's nothing to get right", a key phrase for me because I was such a perfectionist.

As I became more proficient in the Technique and more confident that I was improving as a pupil I became paradoxically less and less confident as a person. I felt confused, exposed and more vulnerable than I had ever felt before. I couldn't understand why this should be. I hesitated before talking to my teacher about it because I thought what I was experiencing

was almost certainly outside his province as an Alexander teacher. The phrase that surfaced as I thought and talked about my problems was "I don't know who to be!"

With hindsight I can see that I experienced the Technique as a shedding of many old attitudes and habits, physical, mental and emotional. I was a tense, end-gaining person, given to extravagant gesture and fast talking. I had been an actress for eight years and stillness and relaxation were almost unknown to me. I was interested in self-improvement but believed this could only be achieved by exercise and hard work, mental or physical. In learning the Technique I was required to throw overboard all the habits and characteristics that I believed constituted the essential me. This might not have seemed quite such a sacrifice if I had been able to substitute another set of habits, another regime of exercise. I was prepared to throw away the map with which I had navigated a painful way through life but I expected someone to give me a better one in exchange.

There was no map. There was however the possibility of non-doing through inhibition and direction. I gave my directions and clung on to them because there seemed to be nothing else to guide me other than the support of my teacher who was at all times sympathetic and accepting of my difficulties. But the directions were not enough to make me feel safe. On the contrary, I felt as if I were adrift; as I had been such a "controlling" person this feeling was very uncomfortable. The concept of "non-doing" was alien to my nature and I became depressed and frustrated that there was nothing I could do, only a thousand things I should not do!

As I gradually let go of my physical mannerisms and learned to relax I discovered a great fund of mental and emotional energy that I can only presume had always been there but which had been depleted by thirteen years of pain and tension. Again this discovery, although gradual, was very frightening. I felt as if there was a mental and emotional maelstrom inside my outwardly calm and poised exterior. The inner woman was completely at odds with the outer woman and I found this distressing.

A large part of my confusion was that I did not know who I was once my mannerisms, my tension and most particularly my pain had been taken from me. I had suffered for so long that my personality had become in some ways defined by it. Even now, when I have been pain-free for almost a year, friends and family will still usher me to straight-back chairs and admonish me if I lift heavy objects or carry my children. They find it hard to credit that I am cured and have had some difficulty in changing their old image of me as suffering victim.

So I was in a sort of limbo, wondering if, when all the onion skins were finally stripped away, I would actually find anyone inside. In the meantime, how could I react to people if I didn't know who I was? How could I deal with emotional problems if I didn't have my old stand-by

responses? Supposing people didn't like me once I had got rid of all the old stuff? I had already noticed that some people seemed to back off from my new improved posture and open demeanour, as if they found it threatening or an implied criticism of their relative dis-coordination. This only added to my sense of feeling odd and isolated.

As I dropped defensive body language from my physical repertoire and adopted a more balanced way of moving I began to feel angular and somehow "unfeminine". (This has led me to wonder whether it is more difficult for women than men to maintain good use in the face of cultural conditioning. Popular Western ideals of female attractiveness depend heavily on a gross misuse, epitomised by the model girl's catwalk slouch and the anorexic fashion plate with her crossed legs in high heels.)

If it hadn't been for the support of my teacher, I might have quit but within the context of my Alexander lessons I was given the space to discuss my problems and my feelings. Jonathan listened attentively but made no attempt to counsel me. He acknowledged that I might need some counselling and recommended appropriate therapists. I couldn't in fact afford personal counselling and so I plodded on alone, determined to see it through. (I am not and have never been a quitter. The Technique has not changed that!) The Technique had made such sense to me, I had such faith in it and in my teacher that I felt if I could only stick with it, light might dawn.

It did. One day it occurred to me that the Alexander Technique could perhaps be applied to other areas of my life apart from body use. Well, why not? If only I could stop doing what I knew to be harmful, perhaps good mental and emotional use would reassert itself without any help from me. Even if it didn't I would at least be inhibiting behaviour and responses which I knew from long and occasionally bitter experience to be unhelpful. I still didn't know who to be but I knew who *not* to be.

It was only a hunch but it made some sort of sense to me. I felt I had been poised on the brink of something for many months, uncertain as to how I should proceed. I decided to plunge in, to push Alexander's principles to their limit and see what happened. Alexander talked about the "control of reaction" — surely this referred to both physical and psychological responses?

Physically and emotionally I continued to let go, to "not do", to give directions and have faith, in the Technique and myself. At the same time I indulged in an intense examination of my life and my relationships, trying to break emotional bad habits in the same way I had broken physical ones. It was difficult because I had nothing new to substitute for the old habits, no new dogma, just a determination to open up my heart and mind and spring-clean my personality.

I stopped trying to manage (i.e. control) my relationships and once again this made me feel vulnerable and afraid. In trying situations I gave

my directions and tried to stay calm and centred. To my utter amazement I found that I coped, that the Technique held up well under duress, that I sometimes felt good about myself and how I had handled a situation (a novel feeling for me). Most important of all I discovered that even in the most taxing situations I was able to maintain some sort of mental and emotional clarity — I said what I meant to say; I did what I meant to do. I did not get angry or defensive or blurt out something foolish because I was tense or trying to make a good impression. By maintaining good physical use I was able to improve my mental and emotional use.

And then it all began to come together . . . I began to feel open, not vulnerable. I began to feel in control of myself, but not of other people. I discovered there *was* someone inside the onion skins, someone whose voice and feelings had been muffled for many years by the physical and emotional accretions of a lifetime. I became aware that not everyone warmed to the new me but *I* did. After thirty-eight years I discovered I quite liked myself. I felt I had found a new me who was the *real* me, the me I would have been if I had not spent half a lifetime swaddled in the protective clothing of pain, tension, end-gaining activities and a craving for approval and affection.

I am sure the Alexander Technique must raise issues like these for other pupils, even if only at a subconscious level. I would imagine that many pupils give up lessons when they realise what could be on the emotional agenda. As MacDonald puts it: "You cannot change and yet remain the same, though this is what most people want." [2]

I hope that teachers will recognise these difficulties and offer support. I gather some teachers deal with the problem by referring their pupils for personal counselling. In some cases this may not be necessary. I found that the tools I needed were already in my possession — the Technique had a wider application than I realised, I had only to trust and persevere. (I must emphasise that my ability to do that depended very largely on the support of my teacher who could easily have washed his hands of my psychological confusion.)

The body cannot of course be divorced from the heart and mind and I do not believe that the Technique can be taught effectively without taking this into account. I have adopted Alexander's principles wholeheartedly and found my life and my relationships enriched. I continue to give Alexander's directions and I hope I always will, but occasionally I have the temerity to substitute my own version:

"Let the mind be free

To let the heart go forward and up . . ."

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- [1] MacDonald P. *The Alexander Technique As I See It* (Rahula Books, 1989)
- [2] MacDonald P. *ibid*

## Obituary

WILFRED BARLOW

4 June 1915 — 21 October 1991



Photo 1991

Wilfred (Bill) Barlow, who died last October aged seventy-six, was born at Ashton-under-Lyme and brought up in North Wales. His father died when he was three, his mother when he was nineteen. When Bill next returned home he learned that his elder brother (who became his guardian) had sold the family home without letting him know. In spite of this, the brothers remained on friendly terms, though the relationship was never very close. From this time onward, he was very much on his own. Resilient and optimistic by nature, he seems at all times to have felt able to cope with whatever life had in store for him.

He went to school at Shrewsbury, where he at first read classics. He was seventeen before he decided to become a doctor and turned to science, thereafter studying medicine, first at Trinity College, Oxford, then at St. Thomas's Hospital in London. He was an excellent sportsman, gaining a half-blue for squash at Oxford and playing tennis for Wales. During vacations, he travelled widely in Europe, alone or with friends. It was during a skiing holiday in 1937 that he read Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means* and first heard of Alexander (it was not a skiing accident which first took him to Ashley Place, as the blurb on one of his books suggests). He was at once struck by the significance which Alexander's work might have in the field of medical diagnosis.

He wrote twice to Alexander from Switzerland, on the first occasion receiving no answer, while on the second he was sent a copy of an article by A. Rugg Gunn titled *A new profession for women*. On returning to England, he rang up and eventually got to see Alexander. He had many private lessons, steadfastly refusing to be shunted off to other teachers when that was suggested.

At Ashley Place he met Marjory Mechin, Alexander's niece, who had qualified as a teacher in 1937. Bill entered the training course while he was still a medical student. He and Marjory married in 1940; he received his teaching certificate in 1941. Once he had qualified as a doctor, he was soon called up. According to his own account, he spent a boring war, seeing little either of the enemy or of medicine, though he was able to carry out

some research on groups of men and women under stress. During the latter war years, Stafford Cripps, who regarded the teaching of the Technique as of prime importance for the future of the nation, arranged for his return to London so that he could spend some of his time teaching. He was the first doctor to have trained as a teacher.

After demobilisation, he held several hospital jobs while continuing to work with Alexander. In 1948, he went to South Africa to appear as a principal witness for the prosecution in the libel trial which followed the appearance in a government publication of an article by a Dr. Jokl decrying Alexander's work. In the outcome, Alexander was awarded damages and heavy costs. I am fairly sure that Bill's hand can be detected in the opening address of the prosecution's leading counsel, reproduced in *More Talk of Alexander*, p.38-52.

The British medical establishment, however, were outraged that one of their number should have stood up in public for a practitioner of 'alternative medicine'. Bill had to give up his hospital work, and for some years could obtain no new appointment. In time, the rift was healed, and he spent many years as consultant in rheumatology at Wembley Hospital, on excellent terms with the medical staff, finally retiring in 1980.

By the 1960s, Bill and Marjory were established in their basement flat at Albert Court, just behind the Albert Hall, where they were to remain for most of their working lives, and where in 1963 I went to Bill for lessons with only the vaguest idea of what I was in for. By gentle stages, Bill introduced me to a body which I had hardly known before. Like all first-rate teachers, he made the process of learning absorbingly interesting and entirely delightful. Work on the couch was generally conducted (more or less) in silence. But during the latter part of one's lessons, any subject under the sun was liable to come up for discussion, and one expanded in the warmth of his personality. He was infinitely patient and considerate; I can only remember one occasion when he seemed to have been seriously put out (by a previous pupil who had contradicted everything he had said).

The speculative, inquiring, often sceptical side of his character was generally very much to the fore. On one occasion he wondered aloud what, exactly, it was that he, as an Alexander teacher, was up to, and likened himself to a butcher laying out pieces of meat on a slab. At different times, he came up with all sorts of new ideas: became interested in instrumentation processes as a means of tracking the course of change during Alexander work, or suggested that a whole family of subsidiary orders might be evolved to supplement the three basic orders. But he was never didactic in such matters; he loved to ask questions, but never claimed to know all the answers.

I am sure that he never lost sight of the basic orders, but his way of keeping his work alive and moving was to question, to experiment, occasionally to play devil's advocate. Though Bill and Marjory each

followed their own ways as teachers, to some extent they complemented each other, and anyone who had the luck to have lessons from both would have had a wonderfully comprehensive Alexander education.

I suppose that there was a connection between his talent for games, involving so many delicately-balanced acts of coordination, and his subtle understanding of his pupils' physical states — I often felt that he could read my state of mind when I came into the teaching room through reading my body. There was also fruitful tension between his instinctive, non-verbal understanding of the human physique, and his constant desire to analyse, clarify, and explore using scientific methods and unambiguous verbal terms. Airy talk about body-wisdom was not for him, and he deplored the tendency to attach magical significance to the idea of 'primary control' or to base biological generalisations on fragmentary evidence.

The publication in 1973 of his first book, *The Alexander Principle*, was an important event both for Bill and for the Technique. He had always had the urge to write; this stylish, witty, often passionate account of the Technique and its many applications provided for the first time a comprehensive introduction to the Technique that was as clear and readable as the popular scientific writings of Thomas Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane, or Peter Medawar, as gripping as the novels of Graham Greene. It was translated into many languages and acted as a catalyst in the great spread of interest in the Technique in the following decades.

As more and more pupils came to Albert Court, he became increasingly involved in diagnosis, handing on pupils to his assistants though still teaching many hours every week. He continued to work almost non-stop until he suffered a heart attack in January, 1991, after which he spent five days in intensive care. Later, he would hardly admit that he had had a heart attack — his way with difficulties was often to ignore them — but was obliged to take things more easily for the last months of his life. He was working on another book at the time of his death.

Bill loved to be with his family and loved to entertain in his own home, but did not much care for outside sociability. Many of his Oxford contemporaries were killed in the war; in later life he made few close friends. Though he founded the Society of Alexander Teachers and edited the Journal for many years, working hard for the success of both, his relationships with other teachers were not always easy. He liked to have his own way — Alexander was the only person to whom he would ever defer. He could be autocratic, prickly, unpredictable, and was sometimes unreasonably suspicious of other people's motives. Yet in the teaching room, we met a man we could admire and love without reservation. The two hundred or so letters from former pupils recording gratitude and deep affection for the man who changed, and sometimes saved, their lives are the best possible tribute to this brilliant, often inspired, teacher who devoted his life to the furtherance of Alexander's work. ©HUGO COLE



Patrick Macdonald (left) working with students Guy Foster and David Dalziel in 1982.

## PATRICK MACDONALD

6 March 1910 — 23 November 1991

"I promise nothing complete; because any human thing supposed to be complete must, for that reason, infallibly be faulty." Moby Dick

To know a man is not necessarily to understand him, but to understand him is to know him. Patrick Macdonald may have been fortunate in the timing and circumstances of his birth. Born in 1910, the year of publication of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, he was taken in 1920 to Alexander for his first lessons. Encouraged and motivated by an intelligent and enthusiastic family Patrick had been, in his own words, "well steeped" in the Technique by the time he joined the first training course in 1932. Being allowed to watch Alexander giving lessons helped him to find his own understanding of the work. His grasp of principles was aided by a remarkable sense of rhythm which turned his work into a unique experience. He worked with ease and precision and his eloquent hands enabled the pupil to move with a graceful flow which became a notable feature of his work.

As a teacher he was reluctant to compromise and this produced varied reactions in others. To some he was strict, a purist, difficult, inflexible, to others just doing a good job. He was not a teacher for the faint-hearted and his school was often described as "hard", which quite amused him and certainly raised no objections from him. There were those students who could find no fault with him and others who just persevered in spite of doubts.

"Whatever it is I'm against it," was probably Patrick's favourite line from a song in which Groucho Marx expresses his irreverence towards the

establishment. Patrick loved rebels and he had his heroes. He admired Henry James for advocating the abolition of taxes and Immanuel Velikovsky for his radical views on the origins of the Earth. He was drawn to innovators and those who stood up to convention; after all Alexander was one himself.

At the same time he was a man of simple principles which he applied to his work and which gave him a firm grasp of the essentials. He expected his students to adhere to Alexander's principles and make use of the instruction they received. Though he was willing to concede that one forgets, he expected his students to remind themselves; if not all the time; certainly some of the time and he did not like repeating himself. He would acknowledge with a grin; "We are born idle," but he did not take kindly to idleness in others. He would often recall how Alexander would send his assistants to get pupils up off the table with the remark; "They are only lazing there." To assume that Patrick did not appreciate the difficulties encountered by his students would be unfair as in early days he had had to overcome difficulties of his own; and he had continually to work on these, but he expected a certain amount of zeal from his students. His view of the teacher-student relationship can be summed up in this quotation from the guide to Zen practice, *The Hundred Verses of the Spear*, "If you feel that the teacher is a real teacher, then give up your own ideas and learn."

His comments on students' work ranged from the indefinite "not quite" to the definite "that's it"; admittedly the latter phrase was not heard too often. This is not to say that encouragement was lacking in Patrick's teaching but the difficulty of earning it would make some students resentful. The occasional failure of communication would occur causing Patrick to snap at his students. His irritability could have its funny side. I have never known anyone rush so quickly to find a pen to write a response to some annoying piece of writing. It would inspire him to unleash a succinct and biting reply of which he would be quite proud.

He believed that the pupil's initiative is vital, that the role of teacher is to open the door; it is for the pupil to pass through. He wrote;

"The causes of an individual's malcoordination are many. They may be attributed to fear, to shock, to imitation in youth; to instruction; to working conditions; to heredity stretching back into the past perhaps for generations. All this notwithstanding; a pupil should accept personal responsibility for getting himself out of it."

Although this passage may have a Spartan ring, it is an expression of a claim often made by Patrick: that he dared not think what his life would have been without the Technique. As a teacher his approach could seem harsh; however, when one understood that the demand he made on you as a student was an extension of the demand he made on himself, there was encouragement and hope. He was not without compassion but he just

would not let it override his work. Indeed, his ability to carry on in the face of personal difficulties and failing health was extraordinary.

"You must learn to get out of the teacher's way, learn to get out of your own way, then learn to get out of ITS way."

The spread of interest in ways of self-development, physical, spiritual and psycho-physical which has characterised the last thirty years and which has seen the Alexander Technique gain widespread recognition was not unreservedly welcomed by Patrick. This comment from a letter written in 1986 just after the First International Congress may be a reaction to the euphoria generated at the Congress; it could be seen as pessimistic but for Patrick it was simply a statement of fact.

"There is a belief among some teachers that "progress" or "advancement" in the understanding and instructing of the Alexander Technique is being made, and they quote F. M. to support that belief. This is a belief to which I do not subscribe. Once removed from the essentials, there is regression not progress. To dress it up as different styles of teaching is merely to confuse the issue, and there is a lot of confusion . . . .

To be specific, what is the meaning of:

1. A free neck
2. A head going forward and up
3. A back lengthening
4. A back widening

It is quite possible to agree that these words contain the essence of the Alexander Technique, but if they mean different things to different people, we are no further forward in repeating them, unless agreement is reached as to their meaning. This agreement seems hard to find and has not yet been found. We must choose the view that makes most sense to us individually, and hope that we are not too far wrong. This decidedly unsatisfactory conclusion leaves us exactly where we are."

Patrick did not consider himself to be a "thinker" and he was ready to admit when certain material was, as he put it "above his head". His attitude to learning anatomy and other related sciences was not, in principle, negative. He thought that to undertake the study of another science was an enormous task which in the end, was not conducive to learning the skill needed to teach the Technique. He was at heart a modest man, yet aware of the value of his knowledge and skill. He was outspoken and had no taste for the deviousness of politics. His criticism of teaching methods and other teachers (he was hardest on those whom he trained himself) needs to be seen in the light of his tireless search to maintain the integrity of Alexander's principles. In his words:

"My experience leads me to fear that the real substance of what

Alexander taught is getting progressively lost. There are teachers who strive to purvey what I call the real thing, but they are becoming a minority compared with those who talk Alexander but fail to accomplish it . . . It should be remembered that verbiage is not a substitute for the real thing. There are lots of different ways of teaching the Technique and some are better than others and some suit some people and some suit others. It does not matter so long as what is taught is true. Each teacher must find out what approach will be beneficial to which pupil. This is one of the reasons that renders mass teaching both inadequate and misleading . . . the absolute accuracy of Alexander's skill should be maintained. Without that the Technique loses its justification. After sixty-six years of learning and teaching the Alexander Technique, it seems remarkable to me that what he discovered is still unfolding and forever being revealed to me."

Patrick Macdonald was not concerned about being known but he sought to be worthy of being known. He will be remembered for his masterly work, the twinkle in his eye and his pithy sayings, for example, "Talking is often a substitute for thinking, and a very bad substitute!"

SHOSHANA KAMINITZ

*Shoshana Kaminitz trained with Patrick Macdonald and qualified in 1963. She assisted him in his training course from 1973-87 and is now head of the Victoria Training Course.*

## My teacher as I remember him

It is not easy to write about Patrick Macdonald and do justice to his rich personality. I do not pretend to have known him in all his aspects, but having spent three years as a student on his training course and then, after qualifying, having continued to have lessons from him and to visit his course, the image I formed of this remarkable man is a very clear one.

For me, and maybe even for those who did not agree with his way of teaching, he was *the* master of the Technique. I have worked with many, very experienced teachers over the years and found none as clear as Mr. Macdonald in the direction conveyed by the hands. The way he used his hands left no room for any misunderstanding.

It was not easy to get him to talk academically, he never gave lectures in class but somehow he always succeeded in putting across his message both in theory and in practice as he worked on us. If we wanted more theoretical understanding of the Technique we had to tease it out of him.

He would then say what he had to say, using simple language to express the most simple and subtle ideas.

There were always students who were afraid of him because of his strong personality, his determination and his persistence. He would never compromise his principles and he never tried to be nice in order to please others. When he laughed you knew his enjoyment was whole-hearted and not put on, out of politeness. He never pretended to be what he was not, and although he had many fine qualities he was not a show-off. He was a humble man with great integrity.

I remember how, as we struggled in the class to work with visiting "bodies" from the other end of the room Mr. Macdonald would see, with great accuracy, what was going on and remark, "You are pulling his head back." or "You are fixing your wrists." or "You are taking him down." His extraordinary power of observation ensured that his comments were always right and to the point. When working on each other, again struggling, he would come and put his wonderful hands over our own hands and, miraculously, the body beneath them would start to respond.

The first summer I spent in England was a very hot one. Imagining England to be cold, rainy and misty I had come from Israel ill-prepared, with heavy, long-sleeved shirts which made me sweat and feel uncomfortable. Noticing my discomfort Mr. Macdonald asked me why I did not wear a light-weight shirt. I told him I had none and he said, "So go and buy one.", to which I replied that I had no money. The next day, at tea time he called me over, gave me a parcel wrapped in newspaper saying, "Take it." I asked, "What is it?" and he said, "It's OK, just take it." I opened it and found a heavily creased white shirt. I said to him, "Mr. Macdonald, you should not give this to me.", but he said, "It's an old shirt. I haven't worn it for years and don't like it."

A few days later I discovered, through another student, that Mr. Macdonald had gone out and bought the shirt, and then rinsed it and rung it out so that it would not appear new. This was an example of his sensitivity and concern for his students.

Many years later I visited him when he was in great pain, suffering from shingles. When I asked him how he was feeling he said with a smile, "It is quite painful, but there are people who suffer much more." He never complained about his physical suffering.

I feel that his passing leaves a huge vacuum in the Alexander community. What he really wished for was that the Alexander Technique would continue, according to the principles he taught us, without compromise or dilution. I hope that we who were his students, will do our best to work faithfully in the direction in which he pointed us.

MISHA MAGIDOV

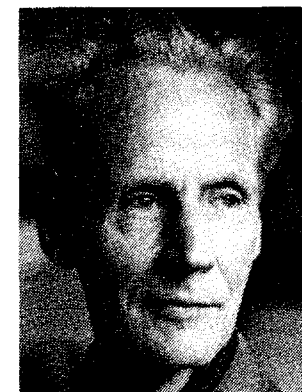


Photo 1983

## RICHARD SUTHERLAND WALKER

8 April 1911 — 16 January 1992

My acquaintance with Dick Walker began in 1970 at the Alexander Institute, where I was training and he was teaching. I formed an opinion of him then as a quiet, gentle, approachable person, obviously dedicated to the Technique. This opinion sufficed until I attended the celebratory party given after his death, which he requested as an alternative to a funeral. It was only then when so many aspects of his character came to light, that I realised I had been taken in by his talent for self-effacement. Behind it lay a wealth of interests and a many sided character which inspired affection. The testimony of friends, colleagues and his sons and daughters bore witness to his courage, physical and moral, his seriousness, his shyness, his sense of humour, his spirituality and his dedication to his family and to his profession.

He had the gift of physical co-ordination. As a schoolboy at Winchester he captained the cricket and football team but thought little of this and did not take a serious interest in sports at Oxford, where he read philosophy at Magdalen college. His father, who was chief constable of Worcestershire, intended an Army career for Dick but at Oxford he espoused pacifism. After university, in his own words:

"I had decided to make a career of playing golf — slightly ahead of my time as it was not then such a respectable and moneyed employment as now. I was making reasonable progress as an amateur (he had won the Northern Open twice and been top amateur in the German Open two years running) when I read a review of *Conscious Constructive Control*. The reviewer, a distinguished golfer made it clear that golfers could usefully study Alexander's principles. So I descended from Aberdeen on London for a course of lessons, thinking this would be easy, because I had a good games-playing co-ordination. I was soon disillusioned. I was about the worst pupil

I've ever encountered being in Alexander's phrase an "end-gainer" and an advanced "kinaesthetic debauchee". Returning to Scotland to apply what I had learnt to golf, I soon found that although to use Alexander's principles was undoubtedly possible the misuse I had developed needed quite a bit more undoing than I had managed so far. So I got myself accepted on the teachers' training course in order to have plenty of Alexander work and still with the main aim of playing golf. Teaching the Technique to others was then secondary and only became a main aim later."

War put a stop to training and as Dick was experienced as a yachtsman he joined the River Fire Service while studying for a Yachtmaster's Certificate. In 1941 he found himself crewing a ship's lifeboat which took part in the evacuation of the British forces from Dunkirk. He then joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and commanded the *Llanthony*, a motor yacht built for Lord Astor which was used as a patrol boat on the Solent. When he recounted wartime experiences, and he did so with enthusiasm, he seemed unaffected by danger; he enjoyed being taxed to the limit. Another great interest of his was mountaineering and as well as in Wales and Scotland he had climbed in the Alps, the Caucasus and the Sahara. The attraction of mountaineering was not only the mental and physical challenge but his relationship with his fellow climbers. "I sometimes liken this (teacher/pupil) relationship to the feeling I have for people I have been rock-climbing with, perhaps by a mutual helping towards life."

After the war Dick resumed training at Ashley Place and following his qualification in 1946 he became an assistant to Alexander. He taught there for three years and then an opportunity to work in South Africa presented itself. This came about through the return to England of Irene Tasker and the need for someone to replace her. Dick, his wife Elisabeth (also newly qualified as a teacher) emigrated with their children and set up practice in South Africa in 1949.

In the 1960's, they returned from South Africa to London and Dick assisted Marjory Barlow on her training course and taught at the Alexander Institute. He and Elisabeth both taught at the New College of Speech and Drama (later incorporated into the Middlesex Polytechnic) in the late 1960's and early 1970's. He and Elisabeth took an active part in the affairs of STAT and Dick was elected Chairman in 1970. Later in the 1970's the Walkers moved to Oxfordshire where they built up a successful teaching practice. It was only in 1985, when they were in their seventies, that they opened their training course for teachers, which still continues.

The pleasure he took in family life and the enjoyment of physical challenges was complemented by a life-long enquiry into the meaning of existence. For many years he studied the teachings of Gurdjieff and Krishnamurti and at the end of his life he was receiving instruction in Tibetan Buddhism.

When he gave the Alexander Memorial Lecture in 1971 Dick used the

occasion as an opportunity to express his gratitude for the privilege of being able to teach the Technique.

"Teaching has been a most extraordinarily rewarding experience. Because, firstly, communication by touch is probably the most basic form of communication. And what is one communicating? The answer very simply is "life". This sounds a rather grand claim but every teacher will bear me out. The pupil becomes more "alive" no matter whether he is sunk in a state of collapse or stuck in a condition of over-tension. But whether the pupil is aware of this greater aliveness or not, the teacher is, and this is what is most rewarding. Because one knows with absolute certainty that what one is communicating is good."

The truth of this last statement is borne out by the testimony of countless pupils.

"Dick was such a splendid person whose integrity simply asserted itself without any consciousness on his part. It was just there for everyone to see, feel and honour."

"He always knew what mood one was in, and, if necessary was supportive, but never intrusive."

"What will stick in my mind is that he would listen with interest to anything one said. It didn't seem to matter that I was barely half his age."

After his memorable memorial celebration Jill Tappin, one of Dick's students was moved to write the following lines:

DICK TEACHING 1991

Quietly, thoughtfully, standing, observing,  
Watching our working, correcting our use.  
The power of gentleness guiding, supporting,  
Strength radiating from stillness within.  
Helping, encouraging, endlessly giving,  
By his life teaching us more than he knew.

ADAM NOTT



# Book Reviews

*BODY KNOW-HOW* by Jonathan Drake, Thorsons (£7.99)

Jonathan Drake has written *Body Know-How* for use as an adjunct to Alexander lessons; or, in the absence of a teacher, as a partial substitute for them. It is presented as the practical self-help manual he believes he would have benefited from during his own re-education, when appropriate guidance, in written form, might have shown him, in a way that his teachers apparently did not, how to apply the principles of the Technique to everyday life.

For those who want it, the author provides all the necessary information: the formal work areas — the chair, the wall, the floor; and the standard applications — semi-supine, monkey, the lunge, the squat, the whispered ah, hands on the back of a chair, etc. The logical way of applying these procedures to the various activities of ordinary life is shown; and the crucial need to inhibit and direct, at each and every juncture, in order to inform the subsequent movement with appropriate thought, is emphasised throughout.

Whether a thorough reading of this book, or even a course of lessons, is enough to enable a person, in any real sense, to “work on themselves” in the way Jonathan Drake suggests, is debatable. Certainly, I was well into my training course as a teacher before I had any notion of what such work implied. Had I had the chance to look through *Body Know-How* earlier than that, I might have grasped sooner than I otherwise did the importance of certain concepts; but I doubt if this knowledge would have increased my awareness of what I was doing that was wrong, or enabled me to do it any less often.

Despite all advice to the contrary, as a pupil there appeared to me a right way of doing things, and that that was what must be learnt. The more variety my teachers introduced, the more that seemed to be the case. The average reader will hardly respond any differently, however dedicated he or she may be to putting the ideas of inhibition and direction into practice. Any subsequent lack of progress would not be the fault of the written instructions in *Body Know-How*, which are admirably clear, but of the near impossibility of executing them without adequate objective feedback.

However, the accompanying illustrations are a different matter. The model cannot be blamed, since she has been given the unenviable task of trying to convey quality of movement in what look like — and I suspect, at the time of exposure, were — still poses. However, if she had been photographed carrying out ordinary daily tasks, with the best and worst of these being employed to highlight the two extremes of good and bad use, there might have been more of a chance of portraying the hoped for “directed activity”; rather than what looks like a series of “Alexander

positions”.

To contrast these illustrations with those in Michael Gelb's book *Body Learning*, which also attempt to convey the essence of the primary control working without undue interference, but in this case in people who are not knowingly applying the principles of the Technique, is almost to wonder what those principles are.

The unfortunate implication from the photographs in *Body Know-How* is that we should seek to avoid bending the back or twisting it or moving the neck about or in fact doing anything that would appear to compromise a “NHB” relationship which, however well defined it may be in the text, is difficult to perceive visually other than as a general immobility. The clear danger to readers is that instead of allowing the spine to lengthen, in itself, during a given activity, they will try to hold it, throughout that activity, in whatever position they have learned to associate with a lengthened state; leading inexorably to the stiffened appearance that can be the bane of our work.

The key to successfully applying the Technique to ordinary life must be not to look as though you are. This should lead, in time, to not looking as though you need to. There is a photograph of F. M. Alexander, sitting reading a newspaper, with his legs crossed, of which it has been said, “He doesn't look, as you might say, sitting doing the Alexander work. He's just reading a newspaper”. It can hardly be the case that by uncrossing his legs — as many teachers recommend, including Jonathan Drake — and by getting down on the floor and using a supportive reading device — as suggested in *Body Know-How* — F. M. Alexander would have become more able to apply the principles of his Technique than if he had remained seated as he was.

There is a clear distinction here between good use, resulting from a particular mental attitude, and sound body mechanics, which is the attempted emulation of that use, but without regard to the attitude that brought it about. Although it is easy to confuse the two, the challenge for teachers must surely be to avoid giving pupils the impression that it is what they do that matters most, so much as the way they habitually do it. Jonathan Drake does, in fact, touch on this in his text. Unfortunately, his book has an overwhelmingly visual impact; and since most of the nearly two hundred photographs are of the way things ought to be rather than of the way they actually are, the average reader is likely to end up trying to imitate good use, instead of discovering and avoiding the habits that prevent it from occurring naturally. *NICHOLAS BROCKBANK*

*THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE in conversation with John Nicholls and Sean Carey.* Available from STAT Books (128 pages £12.00)

This is a new edition which has been extended to include material on the historical background of Alexander's discovery, a definition of good use and a discussion on the nature of a lesson, and the transcript of the 1986 Memorial Lecture given by John Nicholls. The material is presented in the form of a dialogue led by Séan Carey who puts questions that appear deceptively straightforward but which encourage an enquiry to be opened and sustained. John Nicholls, in his responses deals articulately with subjects which do not lend themselves to verbal expression. He is reluctant to give answers in black-and-white terms. When asked to comment on whether a certain teacher "pulled down" he replies in terms of "how much" and "how often". In his own words, "We tend to be brainwashed by absolute concepts — right/wrong, success/failure."

Reading this book as an Alexander teacher, I found it helped me to question my own teaching procedures and attitudes. I welcome the emphasis on the use of the hands, which is fundamental but I think he underestimates the potential for re-education within group work. I have been surprised when running groups just how far the students can explore their habits by observing each other if the non-doing aspect of the work is stressed. These discoveries have the added advantage that there is less dependency on the teacher's hands. Where I do agree is that any in-depth understanding of the Technique comes through one-to-one work.

One of the refreshing aspects of John Nicholls's approach is that it is not stereotyped. He stresses the importance of producing an explanation that is appropriate to the student. He refers to inhibition as a quietening of the neuromuscular system and a quality of stillness rather than the exercising of will-power to control one's habitual reactions. He has a nice quote from Alexander passed on to him by Margaret Goldie: "Choose to be quiet throughout your whole body, with particular attention to the neck and head." He also refuses to regard direction and inhibition as totally separate activities: "If one is inhibiting any interference with the primary control, then the direction side of things is implied by the fact that if someone inhibits all the wrong things, the right thing will do itself."

I found helpful his views on direction: "Directing is having the wish, the intention, the aspiration to be going in those directions that are expansive rather than contractive, but the wish must be expressed through muscular release rather than tension and effort. We should also be careful to emphasise to students to release and direct in a particular order — neck, head, back and limbs. This process works like a combination lock."

He is very much a pragmatist, "There's one thing a teacher can rely on — if it works it's okay." So he is open to visualisation although he stresses that "seeing pictures in one's head runs the risk of simply using the visual

mechanisms of the brain and not the sensory-motor connections to the whole body."

His thinking on the importance of chair work not only demonstrates its relevance in terms of movement, balance and reflex development but also stresses that we are not simply teaching people how to sit and stand but rather it is about learning conscious good use, and chair work is a good point from which to start.

Carey and Nicholls touch on power relationships and the connection of this to the needs of the teacher's ego and I feel this is an area that could be explored further. The importance of this book is that it not only covers basic concepts and procedures in a clear articulate way but it also expands an understanding of good use into a broader version which is of significance for all teachers and students of the Technique. It opens doors rather than simply trying to provide final answers. **MARK TOLSON**  
Mark Tolson trained at ATA and qualified in 1986.

*EXPRESSIVE MOVEMENTS: posture and action in daily life, sports and the performing arts* by Alexander and Roger Pierce. Plenum Press, New York and London. (\$19.95 235 pp.)

The Pierces are directors of the Center of Balance, Redlands, California, where they work with professional movement teachers and bodyworkers. The book is based on twenty-five years of the study and teaching of the basic principles of human movement. The authors acknowledge as major influences Ida Rolfe, Judith Aston, Charlotte Selver and F. M. Alexander.

This book has much to offer to Alexander teachers, especially those who do not have the opportunity to exchange work with other teachers or who are just beginning their practice. Movement is seen as the way we express who we are, as we go about our daily activities. To study it "calls for an aesthetic approach to ordinary actions that we don't think of as artistic — walking and sitting, driving the car and taking out the garbage — and for seeing that we do constantly what dancers, musicians and painters do: we make a track through space and time."

While working with students in order to get them to experience their own weight, the teacher comments: "... the very tensions which hold up weight also conceal themselves; muscular tension is white noise in the nervous system; and we become habituated to it... If you then continue giving attention to the experience of weight, you will find that the muscles can continue releasing, not because you are actively doing something to or with them but purely in response to your awareness of weight. You are using your perception of weight to reduce tension below your habitual operating level. By repeating the experience you can progressively lower that habitual level."

Further on in the same chapter, which is about gravity, the authors strike a chord that should be familiar: "... a body is in balance, release of weight leads to greater buoyancy and facilitates an upright carriage. By nature the body is a pendent structure. It hangs on its supportive framework, and the less one interferes by chronic tension, the more efficiently the supportive framework operates and the more peaceful a home it provides ... Body weight, by pulling downward, activates the integrative network."

The chapter on balance also has some interesting passages: "We respond not only to our environment but to our own responses, changing course on the basis of our experience." As Alexander teachers we are familiar with the many contradictory variations of muscular or movement patterns possible within a human being: "And so a person is not unlikely to be afflicted with chronic forms of both aggression and withdrawal: we can droop our shoulders forward and at the same time pin them back ... Indeed, it is the nature of such patterns of tension to embody self-contradiction — to waste energy pulling one part against another in order to negate or water down the resulting expression ..."

In later chapters there are comments about the problems bound up with "getting it right"; about finding the "inherent design to the musculoskeletal system" in order to allow it to function optimally; and about crouching (or squatting) — "The essence of crouching is to flex the knees and hips. This lengthens the strongest muscles in the body and sets them up for a contraction which pushes the feet against the ground. Just like the spring in a pogo stick."

Perhaps these quotes are sufficient to tempt some Alexander teachers to try to obtain this book — or to ask the STAT bookstore to order copies. The book contains a generous and rather unselective biography including all of Alexander's books and several other items from the Alexander community. *JANE R. HEIRICH*

Jane Heirich lectures in music at the University of Michigan and trained as an Alexander teacher with Joan and Alex Murray.

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