

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE ASSOCIATES

F.M. Alexander

presents

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I AM quite overpowered to see such an array of young people here to listen, and when I look at the front row and see all my own people present, I feel that I have a very formidable undertaking before me.

You want me to tell you something about the work that I have been doing. If you do not mind, I prefer not to do that in a direct way, for this reason: thirty years ago I gave up lecturing, because I had found in my daily experience with pupils, giving half-hour lessons and so forth, that we are all inclined—and I include myself—to react badly, immediately something is said which is not in keeping with our own beliefs and views, or is against our general interests. I include myself in that. I do not think for a moment that I have got past it, though I have been trying to get past it.

So if you do not mind I have a suggestion to make. Why can we not go back to the beginning, as it were, and retrace some of the steps taken by these splendid people who have worked before us in the field in which we are all interested? Let us try and remember just what has been done, and from the facts that we have to deal with, let us ourselves work out a principle which we will apply when we get to a certain point that I will mark as we go along?

I understand that it is about 700 years ago that man discovered or recognized that something was wrong with his well-being. When that was recognized, people set out, as they always do, to find a cause of the "something," and they came to the conclusion that the whole trouble was caused by a physical deterioration and that this, in its turn, was caused by the result of civilization. Whether they were right or not in that does not interest us at this point. What concerns us is, from that moment people started to evolve various methods for developing muscles and so forth, and for physical culture work in general. Those of

you who look back on the history of physical culture will remember that at one time we had weightlifting. I think that was at the beginning, as a matter of fact, and we went through a whole gamut of methods, exercises, etc., until we got [to] where we stand today.

Now here is the point I said I would mark when we got to it, the point I really want to start from. When people decided that the cause of the trouble was physical deterioration and said, "Now we are going to do something to develop our muscles," they were at a disadvantage in thinking out what to do, as compared with us today, for this reason: in the meantime the primary control of the use of the mechanisms by means of which you do your physical movements and exercises, has been discovered. Our predecessors did not know of this primary control. It was discovered at a much later period, some thirty years ago, and in recent years that discovery has been substantiated by the findings of no less a person than Professor Rudolph Magnus, of Utrecht, and generally recognized. Magnus found, by conducting experiments upon anaesthetized animals in the laboratory, that any interference with the controls concerned with the use of the head and neck in relation to the trunk modified and changed the use of the limbs.

Those of you who have read *The Use of the Self* will know how, after long experimentation on myself when I was trying to overcome my own difficulties, I found that a certain control of the use of my neck and head in relation to my back brought about a more satisfactory working of the musculature, and not only relieved my special difficulty but improved conditions generally. In working with my pupils I have used this experience and have found that as soon as you can establish this "primary control," as we call it, satisfactory control of the rest of the workings of the organism can be expected to follow in due time, according to the conditions present. I want you just to think for a moment of the difference this is going to make to all of us. Just compare the position of our predecessors who had to work in the dark, as it were, when they were trying to solve the problem of physical deterioration, with our position today now that the existence of this primary control is known and scientifically recognized. The primary control is there for anyone who cares to come along and use it.

This is the first point I want you to keep in mind as we go through.

The next point is this: from the very beginning, all the attempts that people made to put things right show that they must have reasoned

rather like this: "Here is something wrong with you. Therefore I want you to do so and so..." (what it was does not matter here)" ... to put it right."

There you have the fundamental error that runs right through everything we are doing in life today. It is not confined to our field; it is in the outside world, in politics, in social work, in every single thing we are doing. We are suffering today from the effect of that fundamental error, and I am sure [that] you will agree with me when I make it clear.

To go back for a moment, here is someone with something wrong with him. Are we to believe that some outside force, Nature or God or something else, has come and put that wrong? No. There is nothing wrong with us except what we put wrong ourselves. You all know that nearly as well as I do. Therefore, when we first began to help others who had "something wrong," what we ought to have done was—not to teach them to do something—but what not to do, to prevent themselves from bringing about the wrong conditions which were there.

I will give you a remarkable illustration of that. A little while ago I had sent to me one of the most notable golfers you have in this country. He was suffering from paralysis agitans and was brought to me by his doctor who was a great friend of mine, a pupil, as a matter of fact. I could therefore speak to him quite freely, without beating about the bush.

"You know why this is a case of paralysis agitans," I said.

"No," he replied.

"Because he has been a wonderful golf player," I said.

"How could that cause it?" asked my friend.

"It is quite evident to me," I replied. "The first thing he was told, when he began to play golf, was to keep his right shoulder down or his left, I do not know which."

"How could that do it?" he asked.

"Come and put your hands here," I said, and getting him to place his hands on my pupil's chest, I went on to explain, "Our friend must have been a beautifully built man in his young days, but immediately he was

told by his teacher to put his shoulders down, guided by his already untrustworthy sense mechanisms—as we all are—instead of putting his shoulder down, as he intended, he knocked the side of his chest right in. He went on playing golf for a number of years, and became one of the champion golfers of this country. And all the time he was playing, he was pulling his head back and interfering with the primary control"—of which I spoke just now.

"If you could find some magician," I went on to the doctor, "who could restore the primary control for him and put him back to the condition where I say he should go, the paralysis agitans would stop immediately."

As a result of the interview, the golfer decided to come to me for lessons, and I will tell you what happened. But please remember that I am not putting this case forward on account of the result, because I would not take any notice of result if we did not know what had happened to bring it about. He worked with me for some time and as he went back to the condition—the "reflex activity" condition of use that was there before he was told to put his shoulder down—so the paralysis agitans disappeared. And I would be pleased to demonstrate to you that this will happen with any form of difficulty that you can show me. So I want you now, straight away, before we go any further, to ask any questions you like on this most important point. May I repeat it for you?

If anything is wrong with a person's use of himself, the first thing is to find out what it is he is doing that is causing the trouble, and to get him to stop doing that. Any other work to help him comes after.

If there is anyone in the audience who does not see this point, to whom it is not quite clear, please ask me now, because we cannot go further if we do not see it. All we are going to do today depends on it. It is a point that is demonstrable. It can be demonstrated any time you like, and if any of you would like me to demonstrate it to you now, I will show you. Perhaps I had better give you an illustration. Twelve months ago a well-known scientist came to see me, with one of your leading people in education. I realized that he would be accustomed to observe experiments closely, so I said to him, "Let me demonstrate."

"Very well," he replied.

I got a chair and asked him to sit down, and he sat down very much like this [Alexander demonstrates]. That is a complete interference with the primary control that Magnus has worked out. I pointed this out to him, and he knew enough of physiology to know that I was right.

"Look here," I said, "if I tell you I can teach you to stop that at once, will you believe me?"

"No," he said, "I won't. I have been doing it all my life and I am fifty years of age. If you have had a habit for fifty years you can't stop it at once.

"My dear fellow," I said, "if, when I ask you next time to sit down, you give consent and say 'yes,' you will do it exactly as you have always done it, won't you?"

"Certainly," he replied.

"You do not want to go on doing it like that?" I asked.

"No," he replied, and got up from the chair.

"Very well," I said, "next time, when I ask you to sit down, do not give consent to sitting down."

His friend over in the corner here put in, "Oh, but he is not sitting down."

"Please give us a chance," I said, "do not go too quickly," and I continued with my demonstration.

"It is agreed between us," I said, "as two people who are trying to reason something out, that if I ask you to sit down, you simply do not give consent."

Here he stopped me and said, "Stop, please. May I put that in my own language?" and, turning to his friend, he said, "That is a wonderful truth. Is it not? So simple, so effective."

"Very well," I said, "try it. Sit down."

"No," he returned, as we had agreed.

Now we come to the point where I come in.

"Instead of sitting down," I said, "I want you to give certain orders which will affect the primary control, and then let me, with my hands, do the activity side of it. Allow your knees to go forward and you will find you will be sitting down."

[Alexander demonstrates.]

You see it now, all of you, don't you? Perfectly clearly. A perfectly simple principle that you can work out in everything.

Another thing about sitting down. When we sit down, we do not sit down at all. We put ourselves back into a chair like this [Alexander demonstrates], don't we? Isn't that true? That's not sitting down, of course, for you know by your physical culture work what a strain it means to put your body back here to get into that chair, whereas all you have to do to reach the chair is to allow your knees to go forward.

The next thing is, when we touch the chair—immediately we touch the chair—we sit down again. Test it, if you like with one another. Therefore we have that trouble to get rid of, too, but we do not do any exercises for it. All we say to a person is, "Remember, when you sit down and touch the chair, simply say to yourself, 'I am not going to sit down. I am just going to allow the chair to support me."

In a word, what we have to do is to learn to think in activity. Man has never thought in activity, nor woman either. That is one of the great things that is going to come. The two great things that are going to come to us in the future if civilization is not destroyed first, will be to do these simple acts consciously, and to think in activity.

Let me explain further about thinking in activity. It does not matter what we do with our exercises and so forth. We say rather, "This is what we are going to do during the time the activity is taking place." Generally, in the doing of exercises there is a mental hiatus. There is no direction. But if we are going to do, not a mechanical exercise, but something real that matters, you have to think out beforehand the means whereby you have to do it, and give the directions or orders for these means whereby, in the form of a wish, as it were, and keep that wish going all through the activity.

A word about directions. When you are asked to sit down and you refuse to give consent, the old messages which have always been sent

from the brain are not sent. We do not really know what giving or withholding consent is. We do know that when you have refused to give consent, it simply means that you have refused to indulge in the old habit. Instead, you say, "These are the new messages I have decided to send. I am going to give these new orders and directions, instead of the old ones I have always given," and you must all see that you cannot order your head back while you are sending it messages to go forward.

But immediately the desire to sit down is so great that you say to yourself, as soon as the idea comes to you, "Oh, yes, I am going to sit down," then the old messages are sent from the brain which are in accordance with your habit, and any possibility of a change in use is stopped. Is that clear? In the beginning of any of these things, we have to prevent that "something," whatever it may be, which is putting us wrong. If you see that, we can now go along in a wonderful way. As there are no questions I take it that you all see it.

I am now going closer to our work, yours and mine, because our work is made up of seeing people and trying to help them. What does helping mean? A pupil comes in. We look at that pupil. We say, "Yes, that is wrong," and we consider the conditions that are there are undesirable. It is our business then, to change them to more desirable conditions, is it not? So that really the work we are engaged in is one of making changes.

Immediately we attempt that, we are in a very curious position, and I want you to follow me very closely here, if you will. I am going to assume the position of the teacher for the moment, and imagine that there is the pupil. For the moment we are going to stick to the old plan, and so I say to the pupil, "This is what is wrong with you, and this is what I want you to do in order to help yourself to put it right."

I want to try and make you see what we are assuming when we do that. We are assuming that we know what will actually take place in the changing of the activity of the different reflexes that are at work and are going to be at work in the person who is standing, stooped over, like this, in order for him to be brought up to what you would call "standing straight."

It is bad enough for the teacher to believe that we know this but what about the pupil? The pupil is assuming that he or she knows what will take place. And—follow me closely here—how can any of us make the

extraordinary physical and mental change which this involves, unless we get a new experience? Don't you see that such a change would mean a new experience? An experience we have never had. How could we have had it?

Therefore this is practically what it amounts to. We are saying to ourselves, as it were, "All we have to do is to use words." For the pupil may be able to conceive of what the teacher wants, so far as words are concerned, but how in the world can the pupil conceive of the sensory experiences, which would be necessary to take him from his old point to the new point of change? It means entering a new sphere. It is an experience which we have never had, and yet, here we are, all of us, depending upon our old past experiences, which are associated with our wrongness, to help us, and substituting them for that new experience which must accompany any real change which takes place in us.

I know it is a terrific point for you to take in, and I will go over it once more. I do wish any of you would ask a question on it, because it is so difficult to make a thing of this kind clear. I will take it from another point of view. The very fact that we, as teachers, ask a pupil to do something to put something right, means that we do believe that all of [us] here in the audience, myself included, have that within us which we can use in order to carry out the instructions which are given us for putting us right.

You must admit therefore, and you will admit it at once, I know, that we ourselves are the instrument—each one of us is the instrument—by means of which whatever we are going to do is done.

The next point is this. If there is such a thing as primary control, and if I have the habit of pulling back the head, which is a very common fault today, supposing you ask me to pull that finger up, I shall pull my head back to do it.

I cannot get any direction from my brain through to my arm until it comes through my torso, and the movement of the arm will be affected by whatever sensory and other conditions are present in my torso as [i.e. when] the direction is sent through [to] my hands. So much so, that if we have a person with some trouble with the use of the arms or fingers, we do not need to touch the use of the arms or fingers. This we can demonstrate. All we have to do is to restore the use of the primary control, and the use of the arms or fingers will come right in the process.

If it is the use of the leg that is wrong, flat-foot, for instance, the same thing holds good. We do not need to touch the specific use at all.

Here too, of course, the question of experience comes in. Supposing, for instance, that we are dealing with a person who has some little trouble with the use of his arm or hand, not paralysis agitans, but some simple little difficulty, and supposing I ask that person to do something with the arm itself to help. Don't you see that I am at once asking him to use the experience, the old experience—for I have done nothing to alter it by altering the primary control through the torso, legs and so forth—which he has always had when he used the arm that was wrong. Now, you see, if an arm is wrong and in order to correct it we go on using that arm and doing something with it, we are simply using the same old wrong experience.

I admit, of course, that you can make a change in the use of the arm and hand by various methods, but in order to see what you have really done, you must come back and examine what you have done with the use of the primary control and the torso.

The next point I think I should make here is in regard to position. I do not know whether it is your experience, but it is mine—and it really should not be mine—that at the second lesson pupils are with me, they will say, "Mr Alexander, I know you say I should not try to do anything, but show me what position I should sit in, or tell me what position I should stand in."

I say, "I do not know," and they get very angry with me. I say, "Honestly, I do not know. How should I?" Then, if they still look doubtful, I say, "Very well, I will show you the best standing position you can have today. You may have, for instance, a curved back. You have other little difficulties here: that contracted chest, and so forth. Suppose I say this is the best position you can stand in today. Supposing, then, you visualize that and go away from me and come back tomorrow, and all the time in between you have been visualizing the position which I told you on the day before was the best position possible, what would be the result?"

"Well, I should keep the position," they reply.

"Yes, that is perfectly true," I agree. "But do you want me to change this condition of your back?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you want me to see that this thorax is enlarged?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then," I ask, "if you hold yourself to the position that was right yesterday, where does the possibility of change come in?"

You see that. The point is this: all these things are relative. A position that is right today, cannot possibly be right tomorrow if you have improved. How can it be? It must be wrong tomorrow, and it will be wrong again the next day if you have improved, because it will have changed with the rest of your changing conditions. This is the principle that I am trying to get to you today, the principle that we must get into our technique and into whatever we are doing.

The possibility of growth and development is something which we all admit with our brains. From the theoretical point of view, nobody will deny what I am saying, but immediately we come to practice, we disown it. But we must make our technique true to this principle of growth and development. We have got to tackle that job.

In regard to position, the next point is this. You are all trying, I am sure, to improve your breathing. For instance, if you fix yourself to a certain standard, say, in standing or sitting, and say, "This is where I am going to stay for the rest of my life," you will never succeed in improving your breathing, because all physical tension tends to cause breathlessness and rigidity, and that is the thing which we have to watch.

That is why so many runners and athletes, as you will all know, have something happen to them sooner or later in life. For as time goes on, more particularly in later years, they come to throw their heads back—these poor unfortunate heads going back—in the belief—and this is the sad part of it—that they will run faster if they do it.

When Dorando was running in the marathon race, the runners were all dead beat, as they say, by the time they were about [word missing] or less from the winning post. You may remember the picture of Dorando. I shall never forget it. There he was, a little in front, his head back, his hands up like this, struggling to get to the post. If he had used his brain

all he had to do was to drop his hands, and put his head forward, and trot on. But he did not.

In all these things we do not use our brains. We see people do certain things and without thinking or questioning we copy them. Don't. Don't do it.

Do what I recommended everybody in the world to do in my first book. That is, to sit down and think over all the beliefs and ideas they have got and find out where they came from. You would not have many left. After a week's thought, you would throw them overboard.

The principle of thinking, of reasoning out first and then putting into practice the "means whereby" of doing any particular thing that we want to do, is the background of all our work. This is the point from which we begin.

If you are all satisfied that on this principle our first step must be to prevent our pupils from doing the things which have brought them to the point of having had to come to us for teaching, I will go a little further.

You may say to me, "With a stance like this [Alexander demonstrates], what would you do?" We will take first the pulling back of the head which tends to shorten the stature. If you take a piece of paper of a certain length and bend it, you will shorten it. It is in this sense that we say a person "shortens." You cannot lengthen a human being really, but you can in the sense of undoing the shortening.

Supposing you have a person with a hollow back and the head pulled back. The first thing you want to do is to get the person to see that the pulling back of the head is wrong and this is causing him to press down on the vertebrae, which you all know is a wrong thing to do. If you could persuade that person, every time the stimulus comes to him to do anything, to say, "Oh, no." For instance, you may say to him, "Give me a book off the chair." That is the stimulus. If the person says, "No, I am not going to pick that book up ..."—and it does not take a second to say "no"—... until I have decided that I am not going to put my head back to do it," he will not pull his head back. But if he thinks it terrifically important that he should pick that book off the chair at once, then back that head will go.

That saying "no" is a difficult thing. You may say it seems very easy. Well, try it in anything you are doing. See what it is you really do, when you decide to do something. Watch carefully in the mirror. When any desire comes to you to do something, stop for a moment and think, and say to yourself, "I am not going to pull my head back," or whatever your particular fault happens to be. Then go quietly on and do what you had decided to do, still watching yourself in the mirror, and you will find that the head will not be pulled back.

But that is the trouble. To be able to stop and wait like that is the great difficulty. When the stimulus comes to us we react too quickly.

For instance, supposing I ask one of you to come here and sit down. If you have some habit, like pulling the head back or whatever it may be, if you will just wait for a second, inhibit the thought of sitting down, and then say, "No, instead of sitting down, I am going to decide not to put my head back but to allow my knees to go forward." By doing this you will get away from the amount of tension which you generally get in sitting down into the chair, and you will find that you are sitting down in the chair in a new way. You do want, of course, to sit down in the chair, but you are going to sit down in a new way.

Would one of you like to come and just work that out in the chair?

[A student volunteers.]

I have to change something here, because if I ask her to sit down with the feet close together we have a difficulty. [Alexander places her feet further apart.] I am not asking her to put the feet apart because I want her to stand like that, but because it is against her habit—to make it easier for her to do what we are going to do.

[The student pulls the head back.]

Did you notice the pull of the head? It is not very marked in her case, but I am going to show you the difference when the pull back of the head is not there, and she will feel the difference. [To the student:] Directly, I am going to ask you to sit down. I want you to say, "No, I am not going to sit down. Instead of sitting down, I am going to let my head go out of my body, so." [Alexander indicates what he means by "so" with his hands.] What really should happen is that this part of your neck should come back this way.

Now, if she will let her knees go, the chair will support her. She will never slump, because I have conditioned the muscles of her back by what I have done with those which affect the pull of her neck and head. You will never see her slump, unless she does something to interfere.

[To the student:] Now, I want you to get up out of that chair. Say, "Now, instead of pulling my head back and throwing myself forward to get out of the chair, which is a waste of time and energy, instead of that, I am going to let my head go forward and up out of my body."

[Alexander guides the student up to standing.]

You would not think that the matter of belief comes into our sphere. You have all got your ideas of what belief is. Do you know what we have found that belief is? A certain standard of muscle tension. That is all. I am going to prove it to you by what has just happened.

This young lady is doing wonderfully for me, but when I had everything ready, as I had just now, and stopped her from making the amount of muscle tension that she has always believed she must employ to enable her to get out of the chair, she could not. She did not believe that she could get up. She had no urge. If I had not given her my hand, she would never have got up out of the chair, until she had registered the amount of muscle tension that is associated with her belief.

You may remember, in my first book I tried to make that clear. I said, supposing we go into a gymnasium and take two boxes, one of papier mâché covered with silver paper, and the other weighing 200 lb. Bring the ordinary weightlifter in, and ask him to lift the papier mâché box. As you know, he gets his muscles all ready, and when he starts to lift the box, he finds he has no weight to lift after all. Don't you see that by employing his customary amount of muscle tension in this way, he never leaves any chance for improvement. This is what he should really have done. He should have come in and got his proper position for lifting, and then taken hold of the box, finding out in process of lifting it, how little tension he needed. But no one sets to work that way. And if you will think right through the whole thing, you will find that relationship between muscle tension and belief of faith.

[To the student:] I want you, this time, when I ask you to sit down, to say, "No, I am not going to sit down. I am going to let you take my head, and let my knees go forward, and let the chair support me."

[Alexander guides the student into sitting.]

Now that is a very helpless position, you would say, for anybody to sit in and rest. But I am going to show you that she can. [To the student:] Do not stiffen your neck, and you can stay there till doomsday and be perfectly comfortable.

If you come now and examine her back, you will find that in this simple way I have given her the use of the anti-gravity muscles which will support her and, as long as she does not stiffen, she can stay like that—if she wants to—for ever.

Now I want her to come forward. She would have to make an effort to come forward from there, you might think. But she is not going to make any effort. As I take her forward, watch the relativity of this head and neck to her body, and see how I get her up. I am simply going to show her how to use this primary control.

I push her body back and you see the direction of her head does not change relatively with her body, as the right pull is there. Watch carefully. Now I want her to go back, but she says "no." You see how the head is adjusting itself, as I put her body back. That is due to the work of the primary control.

Now I want her to come forward again. She says, "No, I am not going to." [Alexander takes the student forward.] Did you see her going up and lengthening the whole way? You all know what you all do to make a movement like that: you shorten all the time.

[To the student:] I believe that you can do it for yourself. [The student comes forward herself, without shortening.] There you are.

I want to draw your attention to another thing that just happened, and is important. It happened naturally, which shows you how subtle this thing is, and how carefully you have to watch.

Supposing I were to bring you all out one after the other and talk to you for half-an-hour and give you instruction, and not use my hands to give you the experience of what is required, you would all, in trying to put your head up, do this, or this. [Alexander demonstrates.]

The whole difficulty is "thinking in activity." You see, in order to do even a simple thing like coming forward in the chair, your brain must go on giving consent to the original order that the head is to go forward. Immediately you start to go forward, the original order or message from the brain must be given. There may be five of such messages required for the making of the movement, and each one, as it is picked up, must be kept going. By now you will see that to get control of this wonderful thing which enables you to do whatever you like with comparatively little muscle tension, you must replace muscle tension by the way that you use your brain.

I want her now to get up out of the chair. I will not give her any real help this time with my hands, except in direction.

[Alexander guides the student up to standing.]

If that chin had not pulled in the least little bit we should not have lost the direction again. Now watch again. This time, she will refuse when I ask her to get up at first, then she will give consent to her head going forward and up, and then she will get it—the new way of getting up.

I could show you things of that kind going on all the time, things that you know nothing about, but no one takes any notice of them, because we have not been trained to see them.

[A second student volunteers.]

[To the second student:] Put your knees forward.

I want you to watch this carefully. I have asked her to put her knees forward. This is one of the movements that you do a great deal in your work, and here is a way by which it becomes very simple.

[To student:] I want you to put your knees forward. You say, "No, I am going to let you take my head, so that it can go forward and up. Now I am going to let the knees go forward gently and steadily." [The student attempts to sit, but Alexander stops her.]

You will see that there is still this shortening of the back. What is happening is, she is trying to make a hip hinge in the middle of her back.

[To the student:] Now we have got the whole thing clear in our brain. We are simply going to send the message from the brain to let the head go forward and the knees forward and the hips back. Now we are not going to let the head go back and we are going to put the knees forward a little more. We have not to bother about our breathing. Our ribs are moving perfectly.

What this young lady is doing now is a very difficult thing to do. She is directing her head forward from here [Alexander indicates with his hand a part of her back], her knees forward and her hips back, and that is the only way you can get your antagonistic pulls. By physical culture methods you do not get antagonistic pulls, and that is what is the matter.

What interests me is to give her something to do by means of which she will put this head forward, and the knees forward and the hips back, and so to get the antagonistic pulls working.

This has been my contention with the Army people. Two of the leading men at the War Office have been friends of mine, know of this work and have influence, but they could do nothing to alter the conditions of Army training. You will understand from what I am going to tell you what a terrible thing it is to have fixed institutions and constitutions. They cannot take truth. These two friends of mine, I assure you, say that to knock people's backs in when the lungs are here [Alexander indicates the upper part of the student's back] is an infamous thing. You all know that the human lungs are just through here, and here are these army people pushing men's backs in, and they tell you that they are improving the men. I leave it to your own judgement.

[To the student:] Now you are going up on your toes. Let that head just go up and up with my hand, and rise on your toes.

[Alexander guides the student up on her toes.]

Now I will show you something here that is rather interesting. [To the student:] Just go up on your toes by yourself.

Did you see her body come forward? We all do that. Now watch while we do it together again. If this young lady will allow her head to go forward for me, so, and not do anything, but just use her brain to consent to the head going forward, and then come back to my hands

here, these muscles of her back will come into play and lift her up on her toes. She will not need to throw herself forward, which is only a waste of time and energy. And what we are after is to prevent waste of energy through misdirections. Indeed, my whole object today is to try and show you how little needs to be done in all these things, if you know how to use yourself.

This is what I mean: instead of this young lady trying to go up on her toes, when she would pull her head back and put the use of her whole mechanism wrong, she uses her brain instead and says, "I am not going to try and get up on my toes, but I am going to send the message from my brain to let my head go forward," she gets the power which of itself automatically lifts her without any fuss or trouble on her part. Incidentally, in doing it this way, she will be satisfying both the physiologist and the psychologist. [To student:] Now I want you to sit down.

You see how she has fixed her head and neck in preparation. And now, as soon as she starts to put it right, she looks on the floor. In my first book, written in 1910, I said if people are asked to lengthen themselves they will do one of two things in response: they will either look up or down, and that movement of the eye has nothing whatever to do with lengthening the body. And this is true of every one of us. In practically everything people do one would find, if one watched them carefully, that out of every dozen things they would think they were doing, there would not be more than one or two things that they were actually doing.

The other day I went to see the pictures of Cotton playing his famous and wonderful game of golf. I had heard so much about it and wanted to see what he was doing with himself while playing. I saw the end of the match, when he had a short putt to make, but he missed it. This shows you how unreliable all this professional skill is. If Cotton had really known how to use himself, he could never have failed like that.

Four or five years ago I was asked to dine with Bernard Darwin, because Darwin, who, as you know, has been writing on golf for years, had recently asked this question: "When two professional golfers are playing a match and A has to make one shot to win, while B has to make two, why is it that A will go and miss a shot that he will get 999 times out of a 1,000 on any other day?" I went to see him and in an interesting discussion told him what, from my experience, I thought was wrong. You see, when we are learning things in the ordinary way, we

get nineteen wrong experiences out of every twenty and one right one. When we get more wrong experiences than right, our emotional side is disturbed. Therefore whatever it is we are learning comes to be associated with this emotional upset, and there is not the slightest doubt that this is the case with men such as Darwin was writing about. There they are at the crisis of the match, having this deciding stroke to make. They are both excited. One of them comes along; he has to make his shot and immediately the emotional side of him is disturbed; it starts up again the old reflex activity connected with his wrong experience in learning the game, and so he does now what he used to do when he made the bad shots.

I see my time is up. May I show you just once again? This primary control is made up of the processes which control the use of the head and neck in relation to the body, and enables us to use ourselves in the right way. If you will all just look carefully you will see this head [demonstrating with the student] doing exactly what it is doing now as against the body doing what it is doing now. The working is all antagonistic. When the head is put forward, the body is pulled back; when the head is pulled back, the body is put forward. That is the way the primary control usually works.

[Discussion]

Miss Stansfeld: You are really trying to replace one erroneous mental picture by a correct movement. Supposing every movement you do, you know what you are going to do from your brain, and that in nine cases out of ten is erroneous. Then you are trying to replace a wrong mental image by a correct one?

Mr Alexander: That is a very valuable point. When I ask the pupil to do something, the pupil must get a mental conception of what is wanted. If the pupil goes on then to get a sensory conception of how to do it, it will be wrong. Therefore he has to trust you as a teacher, giving to him the orders or directions while you with your hands supply the right sensory experiences corresponding to those directions.

Miss Stansfeld: It really means that your work must be individual. You could not possibly take a whole class.

Mr Alexander: Oh, yes. You go round them all. It is only a question of time. All these young people who are with me today and are now trained teachers, have been taken together in a class.

If you look at a person, you know the wrong direction that is being given; you ask him to give the right direction and you, with your hands, give the correct associated activity, and repeat that until it is.

Miss Stansfeld: I think that we aim at the same thing, but we have not the power or the personality to get it carried out. We do not know that a person has an erroneous position, and we try to get that position right, but we do not get it over. The people who come to us with a bad posture go out from us with a bad posture.

Mr Alexander: That is because you are not using this primary control. I know it is difficult, but it must be given to the pupils.

I have been asked two questions that are important. One is, "Why do we go wrong?" and the other, "At what age do we go wrong?" I will answer the second in the words of Sir Charles Sherrington, when he said to me, "Mr Alexander, when we realize that children of three today have perverted respiratory processes, it is about time that we began to have our way."

The answer to the other question is this. Do you know that the postural mechanisms of the human creature are the most uncertain and untrustworthy of all the mechanisms? You have that on the authority of Sherrington, and it must be so. If it were not so, then where would we get improvement? It is because the postural mechanisms are the most uncertain and therefore capable of change and improvement. If it is true that mankind has gradually come to the upright position, you can imagine what a difficult problem of adjustment it has meant.

Another question of great importance is this. When we have been helping people to learn, we have all been in the habit of saying to them, "Do you feel that?" and asking them to try to know the particular thing you have given them and remember it. Now, I particularly want you to see this. If I take this young lady up, so [Alexander guides the student up to standing and back into sitting] and put her back into the chair and tell her what direction she needs to give as I put her there, don't you see that I have given her the experience? You cannot do more.

I can give you a good example of what I mean from my experience when I go shooting. If you look down the line, you will see people going along the line like this, all tense, looking to see birds. They never see any birds. The eye will see for you if you leave it alone, and do not try to make it see.

So with the sensory mechanisms. If you as a teacher give to your pupils the right sensory experience with the mental counterpart (and I use the word "mental" advisedly here to describe whatever it is that enables us to decide upon a certain procedure or way of doing things), if then the pupil will say, "Now my neck is to relax, my head is to go forward and up," the thing is finished. That is a complete experience.

Do not say to yourself, "I am going to try and remember that experience." When my pupils say this I ask them, "What do you do when you try to remember it? Will you explain what it is you do?" Of course, they cannot tell me.

We talk about "getting the conception" of what people mean. We talk about the "decision" and so on. And if I ask this young lady to get up out of this chair and she gives "consent," she will get out of the chair. But what is giving or withholding consent? Who knows what it is? We pass it by as if it does not matter. It matters a great deal. What is a decision to do something? Or not to do it? That is where the trouble comes in. If I ask her to get up out of the chair, she will do something to get up, for at school and all through life she has been taught—like her parents and grandparents before her—that when learning something we have to superimpose a doing. When we wake up in bed in the morning and say we are going to get up, we do not have to try to do anything, we just get up. Pupils who come to me—and I have some of the best brains in the world—simply will not believe that when they come to learn something they have nothing to do to learn. But, believe me, that is what is the matter. We are trying to superimpose a "doing," when all we need is to give consent.

So if she will not try to do something, but instead leave herself in my hands and simply remember she has not to pull her head back, you will see that back widening and lengthening in the next four or six hours.

A question: With what aged child do you start?

Mr Alexander: The youngest that we have ever taken is about two-and-a-half They should be taken earlier, if you could get them, but we have never had the chance. We have only quite recently started a little school in Kent, where we can take children from four to five years up.

[Miss Stansfeld proposed a very hearty vote of thanks to Mr Alexander for his intensely interesting lecture, the audience showed their appreciation by loud and prolonged applause.]

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