

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AFTERTHOUGHTS
ON THE ALEXANDRIAN MOVEMENT

Doris W. Davis

Alexander's work is very much alive in this country today. I can think of at least three good reasons why this should be true.

The first is the basic soundness of Alexander's observations on the nature of habituated response patterns--both conditioned and unconditioned reflex behaviors. His method actually offers a way out of the labyrinth of stereotyped responses into the domain of ever-increasing freedom of choice in all activity. His work has been highly regarded as scientifically and educationally sound by such eminent men as George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, John Dewey, G.E. Coghill, and Sir Charles Sherrington.

The second is the fact that Alexander devised a technique which could be successfully transmitted by teachers other than himself. This in itself is no mean accomplishment when one considers the clarification and refinement which must necessarily take place in the thinking of the innovator or any pedagogical technique before it can stand on its own merits. While the Alexander Technique is profound in its implications and far-reaching in its effects upon the student's total physical response to his environment, it is surprisingly simple in concept and in execution. It is not easy, however. Anyone who had experienced the technique directly would be likely to consider this simplicity a mark of elegance, even subtlety.

The third reason for the vitality of the work today is sociological: the body is "in". A plethora of psycho-physical techniques--ancient and modern--are gaining acceptance and currency. Edward Maisel, Director of the American Physical Fitness Research Institute, has noted no less than "sixty diverse and distinguishable forms of such performance ... visible on the landscape." We are living in the time of the "new body enlightenment," to use Maisel's phrase. The existence of this very journal is a witness to that fact.

Maisel has edited a very important new book which includes selections from the writings of Alexander, aptly titled The Resurrec-

tion of the Body. The introduction to the book is an admirable essay on the nature of Alexander's pioneering work. Despite the fact that the basic theory and technique was elaborated in a straight-laced Victorian atmosphere, the basic discovery which Alexander made is timeless: "Each act ... involves the whole integrated individual ... The total neuromuscular activity of the moment--not least of the head and neck." (The phrases are those used by Sir Charles Sherrington, Nobel-Prize physiologist in evaluating Alexander's work.) Alexander is a most important figure in the field of "sensory awareness" so much in vogue today, for to be increasingly aware of one's whole self participating in life is certainly one of the aims, and results of Alexander's work.

The concept of inhibition as Alexander understood it is the key to the work, for when one truly begins to understand what is involved in thinking, he will soon realize one's ability to experience conscious thought is directly related to one's ability to inhibit motor responses. "To inhibit implies an awareness of the bodily 'sets' to be inhibited. Awareness and the power to inhibit increase side by side," as Maisel has it. With a well-developed power to inhibit and to select appropriate behaviors for each momentary situation, the individual is not a victim of a noisy, chaotic and conflicting array of sensations and response patterns. Stilling the "noise" in the body and its mind is a willed activity. It leads to a neuromuscular state of affairs which is an optimum environment for clear thinking. The stillness Alexander was re-educating into the body was not the stillness of sleep or unconsciousness; nor is it--simply because he chose the ambiguous term "inhibition"--to be confused with repression of subconscious material by the superego.

The stillness that Alexander was interested in was equipoise, stillness in the midst of activity, most akin to the experience of a young child in absorbing play, or an animal surviving in its natural habitat. But, with a difference, as the stillness then enables one to focus on those aspects of reality that are not available to the child or the animal, namely the contents of mature adult experience, which are the peculiar causes and/or effects of man's magnificently-structured brain and nervous system.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AVAILABLE BOOKS
ON THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

- *Alexander, F. Matthias
The Use of the Self
Man's Supreme Inheritance
Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual
- *Bowden, G.C.
F. Matthias Alexander and the Creative Advance of the Individual (Emphasis upon the mystical and philosophical aspects of Alexander's work.)
- Maisel, Edward
The Resurrection of the Body--Selected Writings of F.M. Alexander. New York, University Books, 1969. (Good introduction by Maisel, intelligent selection from Alexander's copious works.)
- Westfeldt, Lulie
F. Matthias Alexander: The Man and His Work. Westport, Conn., Associated Booksellers. (Concise and clear description of the work, with illuminating insights into Alexander's character, by a teacher who studied with him.)

*Available in England from: Re-Educational Publications, Ltd. 70 Derby Road, Fallowfield, Manchester 14-6u, England.

