

# THE UNITY OF MIND AND BODY

A technique for  
EDUCATING THE CHILD  
AS AN  
INDIVISIBLE WHOLE

is discussed in the following letters from

THE EARL OF LYTTON, G.C.S.I.

MISS E. E. LAWRENCE.  
(Principal of the Froebel Institute)

MISS D. L. BECK, M.A.  
(Headmistress of the County School for Girls,  
Ealing)

AND

J. E. R. McDONAGH, F.R.C.S.  
(Author of "The Nature of Disease")

This correspondence is reprinted here by the courtesy  
of the Editor of "The Times Educational Supplement."

"Mr. Alexander's doctrine makes for piecing together bodily and mental powers more perfectly than has yet been done."—THE SCOTSMAN.

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IN the TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT of April 28 there recently appeared a leading article entitled "What Does 'Mental Age' Mean?" which brought forth considerable correspondence on the necessity for regarding the human being as a unit or whole, especially in connection with the education of children. "Our present inability," as one writer puts it, "to realize the unity which underlies mental and physical activities, and our habit of treating them separately is the frequent cause of our educational failures. The majority of teachers realize this, but have not found a simple method of including both in one classification."

The following correspondence is here reprinted for the sake of those parents and teachers who may be interested to know that a technique for dealing with the child as a unit or whole has been developed and employed for many years:—

## THE UNITY OF MIND AND BODY

SIR,—In the *Educational Supplement* of April 28 appeared an extremely interesting article entitled "What Does Mental Age Mean?" This article dealt with certain principles which for many years have been the basis of definite technical instruction by Mr. F. Matthias Alexander, and I think it may be of interest to the readers of it to know of the existence of a master whose pupils have been helped to realize the essential unity of mind and body and to practise this co-ordination in their own lives by the aid of a carefully evolved technique. The writer of the article says of a child: "Our business is not to discover what a child can do or can't do, but what it does do, and how and why it does it. In measuring mind we are concerned not with the result produced but with the manner of its production." That is precisely what Mr. Alexander has been teaching for years, not merely to children but to adults, not merely in the measurement of mind but in the execution of every act, whether physical or mental. The writer concludes his article with these words: "The fact remains that both (mind and body) are but functions of the nervous system, too frequently discordant. It may be that in perfecting a harmony between the two the soul may achieve its own evolution." These words, again, might almost have been a quotation from Mr. Alexander's book, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, it being just the object of his life's work to teach men to acquire this harmony between body and mind whereby the soul may achieve its evolution.

I am often asked, "Who and what is Alexander?", and it is difficult to supply the answer in a few words. He is not a doctor, nor a school teacher, nor a physical culturist, yet his work is of assistance to all these professions. He has helped many who are suffering from functional disorders to regain health; he has shown to school teachers how children, considered mentally backward, may be brought up to the standard of the most efficient; he has rebuilt bodies, even of those of advanced age, and given them new efficiency and youth. He is not a competitor with any

"Alexander's positive principle is, in effect, an education which will integrate the functions now so disastrously divided."—JOHN DEWEY.

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of these professional groups, but his work is a valuable adjunct to theirs. Every wise doctor knows that the success of his work depends largely upon the co-operation and help he receives from his patient. Mr. Alexander gives his pupils a knowledge of the essentials of health which enables them to co-operate intelligently with the doctors whom they consult, and those doctors who seek his help have found the most obstinate or obscure cases become easier of treatment as a result.

Mr. Alexander's work, however, is primarily educational, since he recognizes that it is both easier and better to prevent functional disorders of mind and body by teaching the young the right use of their natural equipment than to cure such disorders after they have arisen as the result of wrong use. His principles, therefore, should be in force in every school in the country. Parents anxious to do the best for their children yet conscious of the limitations imposed by their own ignorance, teachers wishing to get the best results from their pupils but puzzled by their failure to get the desired response from some of them, doctors who want to cure the patients who consult them but who find the results of their treatment slower than they have a right to expect, persons of all ages suffering from defects which medical aid has failed to remedy, athletes in training for competitions and anxious to secure the utmost measure of efficiency of which they are capable, ordinary healthy people who wish to improve their proficiency at their games—all these may derive benefit from the Alexander technique, and none can, in any circumstances, derive any harm from it.

The principles of this work have been explained in two books (*Man's Supreme Inheritance* and *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*), but these are designed rather for the student than for the man in the street, and having myself failed to discover from them the full possibilities of the treatment which they describe, I would direct those who may be interested to the man and his methods rather than to his books. Mrs. Diana Watts has written an interesting book on the principles of Greek balance, but readers of her book cannot achieve unaided her wonderful figure poise and grace of movement. The fact is that we are all what Mr. Alexander calls "end-seekers": we are for ever in search of specifics that will give us the desired end, whereas no end can be successfully reached except by a careful study of the means leading thereto. Any one, therefore, reading books which either profess to teach or are expected to teach proficiency in anything is bound to find them disappointing.

Mr. Alexander maintains that in the evolution of the race mankind has lost the central co-ordination of its mechanism which ensures right functioning. Consequently we deteriorate that mechanism by the use of it, and functional disorders follow which temporary specifics may palliate but cannot remove. Instructions, whether by books or speech, are useless to correct misuse, because the true sensory appreciation of right and wrong use has been lost. If an incorrect posture feels right, a correct one must feel wrong. By the use of his hands Mr. Alexander gives his pupils the correct use of their own mechanism, and by a carefully studied technique

*"Alexander's work should be incorporated in the education of our young, if only as a matter of preventive medicine."*—

PETER MACDONALD, M.D., in "The British Medical Journal," Dec. 25, 1926.

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restores to them the sensory appreciation which they require to maintain themselves in perfect well-being, both mental and physical.

The "tuck in the back" instructions to boys and girls of most teachers of physical culture have helped to destroy in their pupils the central control of their whole physical mechanism through the spinal column, and have produced in later life positive malformation which results in both physical and mental disorders. Most of Mr. Alexander's time, which should be occupied in imparting to the young the secret of correct functioning, is spent in repairing the mischief caused by early misuse in the older people who are sent to him by doctors to be cured of physical and mental complaints. It is the educational world which should claim him and employ him for the benefit of the younger generation, which is still healthy and may be taught how to remain so through life.

I have had personal experience of the great benefit which he can render to those who consult him for the relief of definite ailments, but I realize that if I had benefited by his teaching in earlier life the ailments which he has relieved might never have occurred. This is my justification for calling attention to his work in that section of *The Times* which deals with education.

LYTTON.

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### "WHAT DOES 'MENTAL AGE' MEAN?"

SIR,—As the principal of a large training college for teachers, I venture to write to you in regard to the interesting article in *The Times Educational Supplement* of April 28 entitled "What Does 'Mental Age' Mean?"

The article refers to matters of fundamental importance in education, and should be followed up, if it is to be of practical service. As a pupil and disciple of Mr. F. Matthias Alexander I am struck by the similarity between the principles upon which Mr. Alexander bases his work and those referred to by your Correspondent. Mr. Alexander has devoted the greater part of his life to the solution of the problems touched upon in *The Times* article, and has, moreover, developed a wonderful technique which is the practical application of these principles, and with astonishing results. Mr. Alexander and your Correspondent both regard the human being as a unit or whole, and emphasize the impossibility of separating "mind" from "body." Mr. Alexander describes the human organism as "psycho-physical." Your Correspondent speaks of it as a "nervous" organism, body and mind being functions of a common factor. The human organism is, according to your Correspondent, capable of analysis and readjustment. Mr. Alexander, too, lays the greatest emphasis on these processes. "Adjustment" and "co-ordination" are the corner-stones in his scheme of re-education, but in his work "readjustment" and "co-ordination" are brought about by an actual change in the conditions of use and functioning, and his practical technique enables him to realize his aim of helping the

"The book ["Man's Supreme Inheritance"] ought to be widely read by teachers and indeed by all who are practically concerned with problems relating to the progress of the race."—JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

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"psycho-physical" organism to develop the power of controlling and directing itself consciously.

Your Correspondent realizes that the activities of body and mind are too frequently discordant, and wishes to harmonize the two. Professor John Dewey describes Mr. Alexander's work as being a "fundamental method of education, which, in the course of slow generations, will integrate into harmonious co-ordination our animal intelligence and our distinctively human capacities of intelligence." The importance of the environment in education is emphasized by your Correspondent. This factor is also fully recognized by Mr. Alexander; but he attaches even greater importance to a more direct process of perfecting the organism so that it can itself modify, or adapt itself to, its environment. Your Correspondent says we are apt to "fall into the habit of regarding mental ability as a fixed quantity, or even as one which may sink progressively below the average of advance." Mr. Alexander has proved that many children who have been diagnosed as sub-normal can, through re-education, become perfectly normal, and can rise progressively above the "average of advance"; but it will be found that in such cases an actual change has been made from the unsatisfactory conditions of use and functioning associated with the sub-normal to those satisfactory conditions of use and functioning associated with the normal. As your Correspondent does not refer to Mr. Alexander, I imagine he cannot be acquainted with his work, and yet Mr. Alexander is, I believe, the greatest authority on the science and art of the very type of re-education which your Correspondent has in mind.

Those of us who are concerned with problems of education welcome most heartily any pioneer work, more especially if it has been thoroughly tested and proved to be of real value. Professor John Dewey said, in reference to Mr. Alexander, that he was the only person he had ever heard of "who knows what he is talking about in the sense that a competent engineer knows when he is talking about his speciality." It is for this reason, among others, that I take this opportunity afforded by the special article in your columns of calling the attention of your readers to Mr. Alexander's remarkable work, which should, as one of his critics expresses it, "revolutionize education and put humanity on a new footing."

ESTHER E. LAWRENCE.

Froebel Institute, London, S.W.

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### "WHAT DOES 'MENTAL AGE' MEAN?"

SIR,—I was deeply interested in your Correspondent's article in the *Educational Supplement* of April 28, entitled "What Does 'Mental Age' Mean?"

In my position as headmistress of a secondary school I have each year to hold an examination in order to select the pupils who are best fitted for

"Mr. Alexander has accumulated a large store of experience and.....has made an original contribution of the very greatest value to our knowledge."—PROFESSOR FRANK GRANGER, M.A., D.LITT.

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secondary education, and my experience is probably not different from that of others in similar positions when I confess that in far too many cases errors are made: some girls are admitted who are hardly capable of benefiting from a secondary education, and there are some rejected who would use such opportunities well. This results from the unreliability of the test which we, in common with other schools, employ. It is for this reason that I was particularly interested in your Correspondent's article, and also because his conclusion seemed to bear so strong a resemblance to the deductions made by Mr. Matthias Alexander in his book published as far back as 1923 and entitled *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*. Mr. Alexander is no mere theorist, but in his book he states the results of a long experience in helping both children and older people to co-ordinate themselves. In the course of this experience he has evolved and developed a technique by which he is able to give to his pupils "conscious control" of themselves, and which enables them to function satisfactorily.

I know little of his work first hand, but I do know the case of the boy who, at the age of eight, was puny and under-developed, held himself in a bad position, and seemed incapable of any sustained effort. He was the child of upper middle-class parents whose ability was above the average, and yet the boy seemed incompetent, and was making no progress. Medical advisers seemed unable to deal with his condition, and he was sent to Mr. Alexander for re-education. In a remarkably short time—a few months later—his physical posture improved, and his general mental attitude and aptitude improved along with the physical development. From being a morose and brooding boy he became bright and happy, and at the age of nine could be trusted to travel alone across London, a journey which involved changing omnibuses at Victoria Station. He seemed incapable of the fear which is so often called "nervousness" in a child, and ready to tackle difficult situations with a confidence which came from self-reliance and knowledge of himself. No doubt others have experience as I have of boys and girls who have ability but lack the power of co-ordination. Such children will give a wrong answer though knowing the right one perfectly. It is merely the result of bad co-ordination, but we teachers call it "carelessness" or "lack of concentration." We do not, however, tell him how he is to gain this great boon, the power to "concentrate." And why not? The answer is because we do not know how to give the necessary instruction. Mr. Alexander has developed a technique which will give such children the power of "co-ordination"—not "concentration"—which is what they really need. He is thus able to equip children with the power of producing their best work; he teaches them how to become masters of themselves instead of being at the mercy of their environment.

There is much more that might be said on the same subject, but I have trespassed too long on your time and perhaps space.

DOROTHY L. BECK, Headmistress.

Ealing County Girls' School.

"He [Mr. Alexander] would certainly appear to have something of value to communicate to the medical profession, educationists, and the community as a whole."

—Reviewer of "CONSTRUCTIVE CONSCIOUS CONTROL," in "The British Medical Journal."

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## "WHAT DOES 'MENTAL AGE' MEAN?"

SIR,—Having read with interest the article and correspondence dealing with the subject bearing the above-mentioned title, and being familiar with Mr. F. M. Alexander's work, I would deem it a privilege if you will permit me to view the subject from a medical standpoint.

The answer to the question "What does 'Mental Age' mean?" in a child can only be answered satisfactorily by reference to the standard of functioning present in that child. This answer leads to the further question, "Why does wrong functioning so often become evident as mental activity becomes predominant?" The answer is, Because with the increase of intelligence, the term applied to the activity of the nerve cells in the cerebral cortex, which has reached such a high development in man, there has been over-excitation and insufficient inhibition. In other words, the development of the cerebral cortex in man has resulted in action as opposed to how the action is to be performed, and the way in which this has been brought about is described in Alexander's *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*. Over-excitation of the cerebral activity has led to over-excitation of the activity of the brain-stem from which the cerebral cortex has evolved. The brain-stem contains the centres of two nerve systems, one dealing with voluntary muscle (the pyramidal nervous system) and the other with involuntary muscle (the vegetative nervous system). The activity of these two nervous systems differs from intelligence in being reflex arcs where there is a well-defined active and passive (inhibitory) segment. Over-excitation of the cerebral cortex leads to a wrong balance and over-activity of the brain-stem, with undue muscle tension in the case of the pyramidal nervous system and vagotonia in the case of the vegetative nervous system. Undue muscle tension causes bodily deformity, and vagotonia results in the production of such conditions as chilblains, asthma, intestinal trouble, etc. Of these the intestinal trouble is the most important, because it is accentuated by faulty feeding and insufficient elimination. Both result in changing the intestinal flora, and the pathogenic micro-organisms formed manufacture poisonous chemical products from the wrong food, which, reaching the blood-stream, subject the protein particles in the plasma (the body's main protective substance) to abnormal chemico-physical changes. This damage to the body's main pillar of resistance renders man particularly vulnerable to microbial invasions, and the damaged protein particles injure the cells of the organs which they bathe, and to which they should carry the nourishment they require, in a way to cause disease. This explains why there is only one disease, a view which will have to be accepted before medicine can advance much farther, and one which is fully dealt with in the author's *Nature of Disease*.

Differentiation instead of correlation has been the curse, not only of medicine but of all sciences, and a second curse has been the coinage of words

"Those engaged in the work of education will find this book ["Constructive Conscious Control"] a mine of suggestion."—EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS.

which have no meaning, such as consciousness, conscience, mind, soul, etc. Though there are many results produced by over-excitation, there is only one activity, and this is common to both nerve and muscular tissue, which are fundamentally inseparable. Therefore the issue only becomes blurred by referring to "the nervous system as the factor common to both mind and body." Once disease is produced inheritance comes into play, and the vicious circle just portrayed comes into force before the child is born. There being a vicious circle explains why damage to the pyramidal nervous system, the vegetative nervous system, and a chronic intestinal intoxication can cause wrong functioning of the cerebral cortex and disease. Breaking the vicious circle anywhere results in checking the wrong functioning and in stopping the progress of disease. But it must ever be remembered that should the vicious circle have been present for any length of time irreparable damage has been sustained. Therefore, to prevent further wrong functioning attention must be directed to the children, and in addition to the adoption of the technique advised by Alexander it is necessary to see that the children are rightly fed and housed, that they get enough sunlight, and that due care is paid to the bowels being open two or three times a day.

To sum up, the body is one indivisible mechanism, and wrong functioning of the whole can result from damage to any one part. It is only by a fortuitous concurrence that the activity of the cerebral cortex looms so large in the wrong functioning of man, and the reasons are because the development of the cortical cells has outrun the development or evolution of the other cells of the body, and because their activity has not been able to keep pace with the ever-changing environment occasioned by civilization. Particular attention needs to be paid to the education of children, aimed at preventing wrong functioning, because there is a reasonable likelihood of the continued development of intelligence running *pari passu* with over-activity, or insufficient inhibition, resulting in the destruction of civilization as understood to-day.

J. E. R. McDONAGH, F.R.C.S.

4 Wimpole Street, W.1.

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A statement of technique for the practical employment of mind and body as a unity  
in human activity will be found in

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