

F.M. REMEMBERED

The F.M. Alexander Memorial lecture

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delivered by Erika Whittaker

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FM always said we must welcome the new experiences. For me it is an entirely new experience and an honour to have been asked to speak on an occasion that has become an annual event in the memory of FM and his work.

I have had one or two requests for amusing stories about FM from the early days, even possibly from the time when my aunt, Ethel Webb, first went to him for lessons. As far as I can remember we had no funny stories about FM, but she did tell us often that we were very lucky to have had FM in the 30's, when he was a mature and patient teacher, because in 1911 when my aunt Ethel and Irene Tasker first had lessons with him, the lessons were quite an ordeal. He was very cross, he was very impatient, and on the whole he accused his pupils of being unteachable, wouldn't listen, then finally he would say: "You only see what you want to see". However this was recognised by my aunt as merely being a sign of a rather irascible teacher, and they forgave him, they kept coming back for lessons, they had realised the importance of his work, and therefore he could not get rid of them.

And some of you might wonder where I have suddenly come from, for I have not been seen on the Alexander scene for a number of years. I have been connected with the Alexander work since I was eight. At that time, my parents had been told that I had curvature of the spine, and that I had to have orthopaedic exercises. I went just twice. They were quite painless, they were no trouble at all, and I could forget about them. But then aunt Ethel stepped in, and she decided that was no good for me. The next thing I knew, I was having lying down turns on my Grandmother's drawing room carpet, with a book under my head, and she was pummelling my middle and moving my knees about. A real lying down turn. I was very intrigued with this new kind of exercise. It was good fun. But instead of being like the orthopaedic exercises where you forget about it as soon as you leave the place, aunt Ethel demanded co-operation, and I had to give orders, I had to keep my length, and not only keep my length when I

was having lessons, but also when I was doing other things. She turned it into a game and every once in a while she would say: "Keep your length dear", and this was a chant that I was to hear for many many years. I also discovered that it was a lot more interesting than when my parents said to me: "Do sit up straight".

Now, the "Keep your length, dear" I saw as a kind of package deal. It implied stopping, giving orders, means whereby; in one word, it meant not end-gaining. That was fine but it was often frustrating – you really got carried away doing something and aunt Ethel would come in and say "Keep your length, dear", so I had to stop. But I wasn't the only one in this, because she was giving herself lying down turns too, on the back of an old chest in one of the rooms in my Grandmother's house, and that in those days was in itself very unusual. And she could not have lain down on her mother's drawing room carpet for a lying down turn, it simply would not have done. But we did this together, and it was a good deal of fun. It was quite different teaching, very logical, and I began to enjoy it very much.

The first lesson I had from FM was when I was 17. There was quite a gap in time – I was away going to school. And when I first met FM I had of course heard a lot about him. He was quite a familiar figure – I hadn't met him before, but we had great fun straight away. My lessons were very informal. They seemed to be a meeting ground for other people to come and talk things over with him. He worked on me and things proceeded in that way. This was in 1928. In that time Ashley Place was a very busy place. I do not know if any of you were able ever to see the house. The building has gone. I went to have a look the other day, and it gave me quite a fright, as Ashley Place as I knew it has disappeared.

FM had the ground floor which was slightly raised above street level, and the basement, downstairs. In the upstairs section were the teaching rooms – FM's teaching room, AR's [A.R. Alexander] teaching room, and another big room which Irene Tasker used for her little school. There was a small little back room

which was used later on for students and for teaching, and then of course there was the little office, which was next to FM's teaching room, where my aunt Ethel Webb functioned as secretary, as teacher, and as general cheerer-up of any pupils who had become depressed.

FM always taught with his connecting door slightly open, and this was very interesting because if you were in the next room you could hear the lesson. But aunt Ethel, also, would pop her head round the corner and tell him it was time, if he was running over time, but more importantly she would sometimes, if she thought there was anything interesting going on, take pencil and paper and stand behind the door, and write down all kinds of good conversations – things that she thought were worth recording. What I would like to mention at this point is the tremendous importance of Ethel Webb and Irene Tasker at Ashley Place in that time. They acted very much as a sort of bridge between the lessons which the pupils had from FM, where they very often did not quite understand what he meant, but did not like to ask him, and they would sometimes come in great confusion, and they would really not know what it was all about, so Aunt Ethel was able to explain to them a little bit more, how they could apply what they had just learnt, and Irene Tasker of course could do the same thing, with the parents of the children who came to her class. Irene Tasker and Aunt Ethel had no training at all with FM in the same way that we know it now. They went to America with him at the beginning of the first World War, and I think they must have served an apprenticeship. As far as I know they just started teaching, FM just gave them pupils, sometimes children, sometimes adults, and they simply used their own initiative and their own experience, because both of them had a lot of experience, Irene in the ordinary teaching profession, and my aunt was a very fine pianist in her own right, and had had a very classical education in Literature and Painting. And they had met at the Montessori School in Rome. [See "The role of women in the growth of the Alexander Community", the F.M. Alexander Memorial lecture, 2002, delivered by Alexander Murray].

The atmosphere at Ashley Place was very informal as far as we saw it. Younger generations might nowadays perhaps think it was a bit too formal. There were no rules – FM did not believe in regulations. The front door had a little window in it, and everybody just put their hand in and let themselves in, and if they'd been before they just went into the waiting room. That waiting room was a rather dark and dingy place – it never gave us particular joy – but people didn't have to wait very long in it. After a while if people began to feel a bit at home they came right in and stood in front of the gas fire if it was a cold day, where they would get rather in the way, as that was exactly where the telephone was and the appointments book.

When FM took on new pupils for lessons he insisted they must come every day for three weeks, Monday to Friday, on the provision that they read the books. I do not know if anyone ever checked whether they did read the books, or how much they would have got from them, but FM perhaps saved himself the trouble of doing a little explaining. FM would at first work very quietly with a pupil, very often nothing would be said for a while and the pupil would sit down in the chair. And if the pupil was sitting FM would sit on a stool by his side, and sometimes they would talk, either about the person's directions, or about something else. It was really very quiet, and as he worked on them he might just give them a little tap on the neck to remind them to free their neck, or on the knee to remind them not to stiffen. And so the lessons for the newcomer would go on for a while. And then one day there would be a slight stir in this quiet series of lessons, and if you were in the room next door you would suddenly hear FM say "You will do it, you will do it", and this would mean that the pupil had suddenly got himself into a bit of end-gaining trouble. And if the pupil then protested and said they didn't intend to do it they were really in trouble and FM would say "Of course you intended to do it, otherwise you wouldn't have done it". So as I see it now, FM chose the right moment to make a pupil aware of his reactions, probably he had changed the pupil's condition subtly to a point where it was safe to make the pupil aware of his reactions.

FM was very fond of talking about “variations of a teacher’s art” – when to say nothing, and when to, as it were, wake a pupil up, and maybe some pupils were just enjoying the nice feeling of the lessons and he decided they needed stirring up a bit. Which made them unhappy of course, but if he stirred them up and woke them up a bit, he would then put them right again and he would send them quite happy out of the room. Nevertheless, some pupils would arrive in aunt Ethel’s office, they would look very sad and say they had had a bad lesson. But then aunt Ethel would explain that in fact, they had had a very good lesson. The fact was that the pupil decided he knew and anticipated, say, getting up or sitting down; but FM could feel people’s thoughts with his hands, and this was very disconcerting for a pupil. You could not get away with anything with FM. But he showed us all the time thought is action, and inhibition in his sense is action, and this was very hard to understand at first, because pupils would see inhibition as a repression, when in fact it is just stopping. A way of clearing away the clutter of our busyness and of our striving. It clears the way to think, direct, and then to allow for an activity to happen, or not, if we so decide. But habit gets in our way. FM sometimes said “You really would think, that once a person had had it pointed out to them that if they put their heads back, they are doing themselves harm in their use, they would never do it again. But of course, we all know they do, why? Habit”. And so many of our troubles are the result of learning procedures inflicted on us from our earliest days: we have to do right, we have to do it quickly, and above all we have to try. And we have to be seen to be trying.

I have an interesting story in this respect, to tell of a pupil in Melbourne, who had a deep frown, down the middle of her forehead. She told me that when she was small she lived out in the country where there were no schools, and her mother taught her to write, but she liked drawing, and she was very good at drawing so she neglected her writing a bit. Her mother kept saying to her “You’re not trying”. And the child wondered about this, what trying meant – she hadn’t heard it before. She thought about it because she wanted to please her

mother. She watched her father whenever he was cutting up wood. When he raised the axe he produced a tremendous frown, and she thought to copy this. So she copied the frown, and decided to frown like that when she did her writing. Her mother was satisfied and could see that her daughter was now trying. And this is the origin of her frown.

Now, FM learned to deal with all this as he evolved his technique to share with others what he had discovered in himself all those years ago in Tasmania. It is understandable that he was impatient as a teacher in the early days, because he realised the importance of what he had to teach us and realised the great difficulty people had in taking in what he had to tell them, because of their habits. But by the time the training course had arrived he had become a very much more mature teacher and had learned to appreciate the difficulties his pupils had.

About the time I arrived at Ashley Place the pressures began to be on FM to start a teacher training course because his well-wishers and admirers thought that his work ought to be somehow carried on after him. But he resisted this for quite some time, and partly it would have been the knowledge that end-gaining and enthusiastic young pupils would rush out into the world spreading the message, and goodness knows what they'd get up to in the name of Alexander. But he was persuaded, and finally agreed as you all know, and in 1931 the first course began. Now, FM said he had never run a training course before, therefore he could have no preconceived ideas – it was a new experience. There were no rules beforehand, nothing was arranged beforehand, we simply assembled in what was then known as AR's] [A.R. Alexander] teaching room. FM gave us turns one by one. For some students it was the first time they had in fact ever seen anyone else having a lesson. FM insisted very early on we must observe. We must watch each other, watch other people, watch people in buses, in trains, in theatres. Just watch, don't criticise, necessarily, just watch and see how people use themselves. And, to show how good our observations are, he used to tell us the story of some medical students at a lecture. The lecturer had

arranged for each student to have a little bowl of castor oil in front of him, and he said to the students, "Now I want you to dip your finger into the castor oil and lick it as I am doing," and he dipped his finger into the castor oil and licked it. Then he asked the students to do the same. The students did it and licked their fingers and pulled wry faces. The professor said "Ah, you didn't watch; now watch again." He dipped in his forefinger, but he licked his middle finger. Now, the other thing that FM stressed was the matter of our unreliable feelings. The word 'feelings' was almost taboo; you were never allowed to talk about your feelings, and he stressed this very much and we got into trouble if we felt this or felt that. "Don't go by your feelings". That was quite a strict subject at the time.

In time of course a pattern developed as the course wore on. FM went round as the circle widened and more students joined. FM went from one to the other always in the same classroom. As more students came so the room just filled up. He didn't give us anything specific to do in the afternoons, but we were still thinking about the observation problem, and some of us tried to experiment using our left hand instead of our right hand, and we would practice putting our head forward and up, and having means whereby for using our left hands to write instead of our right hand, if we wrote right handed. Or we tried playing tennis with our left hand. It wasn't very brilliant tennis but it was great fun. We worked very often on our own in the afternoons in each others houses, and I can't remember in detail what we did, but we managed to make the two years go by very well with directing and means whereby and finding interesting ways of watching each other.

We wore normal clothes. Some students I have met since I have been over here, I've shown them some photographs of us and they were very surprised because we seemed to be wearing city clothes and high heeled shoes. We simply wore normal clothes as we would have done in London 50 years ago. The idea of informal or casual wear wasn't known then. FM was always immaculately dressed and I wore high heeled shoes – not really high heels – sometimes girls

wore flatties but I liked nice city shoes, and we worked in these shoes, and in these clothes, and certainly it was never a matter of taking your shoes off; and I never ever saw FM in his stockinged feet. It simply can't be imagined.

When it came to use of hands – putting on hands – the first thing we had to do was to simply observe – put on hands with our use – to observe tension in somebody, to see if when somebody moved there was any tension. But later on when we began to use our hands in the third year we had such great help – FM putting his hands over ours and giving us the directions, and it was something I was very sorry that later generations could not have had, because the sense of your own use going through and giving the direction to the pupil through FM's use at the same time was a very great thing and was an enormous help to us later on.

Sometimes we helped in FM's lessons. Occasionally he had pupils that he would want to have an extra hand with, and he would ask Irene or me or both of us to help him. He would put his hands over ours exactly where he wanted some support for that person, and that was another great experience because you worked with him, and the timing was very important.

Some of the pupils that we helped like that were pupils who had very severe problems. They simply came as much as anything for relief, they originally came for their three weeks of lessons and then they probably lived somewhere else in England, and they would come back once a year for three weeks' more lessons just to help them. After FM had worked on these people, the relief you could see on their faces was really a tremendous reward and he tried very hard to give them that experience and help them all he could.

In the 1930's of course the American invasion came, as we called it. They were regular pupils who came from the USA in May, June, July, and sometimes whole families came, the children would be in Irene's class and the parents had lessons. It was great fun when they came, we got to know them very well. They

came year after year and FM entertained them, and we entertained them at home. We all enjoyed their company very much indeed. Many of them became lifelong friends of the work, and tried to help FM all they could. But we did have a problem with the course: how to tell people about the work. You start doing a course and your elders and betters or friends will say: "Now dear, what is this course that you are doing?": how to explain this. We asked FM what we should say, and FM just said "Get them to read the books". It was a very embarrassing thing to have to tell somebody because some people that we knew didn't want to read the books. And so sometimes one had a go at trying to explain the work. And at that particular time, half a century ago, there was no interest, as there is now, in alternatives: alternative religions, alternative diets, medicines, lifestyles. None of these things had come into circulation then, and so there was nothing else for us to say that was remotely like an alternative. When one did try and explain one got into dreadful tangles, wished desperately that one could give conventionally a reply or at least call it something. But FM wasn't at all helpful about that.

Some students complained that FM didn't explain enough, or that he kept things back, or worse, that FM seemed sometimes a bit bored with his students. Now when we come to explaining, I remember Eliza Doolittle's plea in *My Fair Lady*: "Don't explain, show me!" Well, FM showed us, day in day out, with his hands, gave us new experiences as we changed. So it seems now that FM would say he was showing us. That he was bored, I can now understand much better! We couldn't see the wood for the trees, because we were end-gaining like all students. Students demand to be taught, to be given indications as to how they are doing. We strive for progress and perfection. Other pupils go to school, learn to type or to be hairdressers. They go through defined stages towards a standard of proficiency. They must pass an exam, after which they obtain a certificate, after which they hope to get a job. It's the same routine for everyone, and it's a standard nobody questions. But how do you measure change as implied in FM's work? The essence of FM's work is change – going from the known to the unknown, being in a state of readiness. And in theory we

accepted this. But there were times when we were a little uneasy at being in this state of not knowing for sure where we had got to in FM's estimation. And for some of us, this began to feel a little like isolation. In my own case I began to feel that there seemed to be a tendency at Ashley Place to have the attitude that we were the clever ones and the people out there don't know anything. And I began to want to be with friends who knew nothing about the Alexander work, who did interesting things and I wanted to find out what else was going on in the world. I began to think I wasn't making any headway towards being a teacher, and I didn't see any point in, as I put it to myself, hauling people in and out of chairs, as an Alexander teacher. But I also realised there was much more to the Alexander work than that, but I wasn't going to find it out until I went out into the world a bit more. I would have made a bad teacher then, if I had been made to teach then I think I would have come to a fixed point, and possibly even have given up teaching altogether. But then later on, since I'd been thinking about this, the idea came to me that the Alexander work is really an art form, containing a craft which FM had devised as a result of his own experiments on his own use. And I began to see more clearly why FM had resisted all attempts to categorise our progress and had such problems answering questions that seemed to him irrelevant and strange, since he put his working principles plainly before us. It was a case of the Chinese saying: "There are answers to questions that are never asked".

A master of a craft can teach the basics of an art form, involved only up to a point in showing, guiding, in making his pupils see, listen, touch, observe, it depends on the material they are working with – not observe in a critical way, but just to see how something is, the way a small boy will examine a blade of grass, or a child will watch a snail, see what a stone looks like, metal, listen to music, look at a piece of wood, just see what it is. In FM's case, it was a human being in action. Having to put into words the essence of knowledge, FM as the impatient young teacher in 1911 was very understandable. He had seen the magnitude of his vision, but he probably had great trouble in getting it across in words. But by the time we knew him in the training course he had matured as a

master of his craft, as a teacher, and in his knowledge of human nature. He could read his students and he knew who would understand what he was after and who did not. When he came to the training course and teachers, and gave us certificates, he must have been in a fix, because he might have seen some students understand what he was getting at and others who would not, or took longer. To some students he could say "Yes, you can have your certificate", to another, he might have wanted to say "No, you must stay for another three years". But he couldn't do that. How can one measure that which is going to go on changing indefinitely, into the future? This was a situation FM had foreseen, and his well-wishers had not seen. So he would wonder naturally just how much of the true nature of his work they understood. When they decided to help him and wanted to set up schools or institutions, any sort of organization to keep his work going, he was flattered by the periodic attention from these well-wishers and enjoyed it for a while. But then he realised that he was being pushed in the opposite direction to what he believed in, and he refused to be fenced in, and withdrew. Naturally, those many good friends were often puzzled and sometimes offended. But FM would probably say to himself, or to those people, or to his pupils "You only see what you want to see". He told us that very often.

I've been sometimes asked recently if FM ever got tired. Of course he got tired. At the end of a teaching day you could see in his face he got tired. His quick and light walk along the passage and down the stairs might seem slower, but he didn't look as if he wanted to sink into a nice comfortable armchair, the way a lot of his students wanted to when they were tired. He did sit in armchairs and sofas, and he sat very comfortably. Sometimes he crossed his legs, and there seems to be an idea that it is very wicked, as an Alexander pupil, to cross your legs. But FM said "if you want to do that, just keep your length." If you see the picture which is taken by Marjorie Barstow on the cover of the new American edition of *The Use of the Self* there is FM sitting reading his newspaper, with his legs crossed. He doesn't look, as you might say, sitting doing the Alexander work. He's just reading a newspaper.

FM liked company in the evenings sometimes, and he went to the theatre, and in one particular occasion he asked my aunt Ethel and me to go with him to see a production of "Hamlet", a very important actor was playing Hamlet. We went along and very early on in the play FM began to get very restless. He moved about in his seat and as soon as the lights went on for the first interval he leapt out of his seat and said "This is terrible, let's go", and he walked out, and no persuading would bring him back again. That was likely to happen if you went to the theatre with FM.

Sometimes he asked my aunt and myself to supper, probably other people too, but I am talking about my own experience, and someone will have done the shopping unless I had done it first. The supper would invariably be some lobster or dressed crab, wine, cheese, fruit, and we would have it quietly downstairs in his dining room. No gossip, just talking. No shop talk. FM was very fuzzy with food, and the takeaways of the present day would have given him the absolute horrors. When you went shopping for FM you went to the Army & Navy Stores, and you didn't choose anything, you simply went to the top manager of the, say, fish department, and you said you wanted it for Mr Alexander. You said nothing more. You were given what they thought was right. If you went to the cheese department you didn't choose that cheese, you were given what was right for Mr Alexander, and it was never off the counter, it always came from the back somewhere. And the same with the fruit, lovely things quite different from anybody else, but always the best and always from the back somewhere. To some extent he followed the fads of his doctor pupils or friends, but to my youthful outlook at the time they seemed to contradict themselves every two years or so. And I assumed that all the older people had fads about food and that FM was no different in this respect.

But one day FM played us another trick. Irene and I were in Birmingham teaching, and FM came up on a Saturday to teach also. He came up by train, he taught during the day and in the evening he gave Irene and me dinner, and we

needed it badly because we were living in not very nice digs. And then he would go back to London again. One Saturday Irene and I were particularly hungry, we had all ordered Dover Sole. The Dover Sole arrived and Irene and I fell on our Dover Sole. FM poked at his with a fork, called the head waiter over, said "This fish is frozen, take it away", and it disappeared! We did not forgive FM for this for a very long time.

At this particular time, when Irene and I were both working in Birmingham (Irene rang me up the other day and reminded me of this story) , FM said "One of you has got to come back to London, and one stay on in Birmingham, one come back because we need you." So we both went back to London and decided this was the happiest solution.

Some people have asked about FM's racing, and betting. Well, of course he and AR betted all the time, as true Aussies. It was his one relaxation, and I suspect sometimes, a financial necessity, to have a few wins. There was never the slightest indication of how much he would win or lose in an afternoon's betting, sometimes at tea time in the afternoon if the atmosphere was a bit quiet, maybe he hadn't had a good day, but he wouldn't talk about it. But I thought of an incident recently in Australia, outside my flat, one Saturday – an old lady sitting down with a shopping jeep, rather exhausted, as I was just going out. I asked her if she was alright. And she said she had done her weekend's shopping which consisted of a bottle of beer and a tin of pears, she said she and her husband had blown their pension on the horses that week, and that was the only thing they could buy for the weekend. I thought at the time that FM would have sympathised, and he would have entirely understood.

Since living in Australia I have come to see FM more in the likeness of an Australian. And I often wondered if he had ever thought of returning to Australia, even only for a visit. But in his young days it was the same position as for all young people, especially students of the Arts. They all have in Australia good teaching, they can make a start, but after a while there are not enough

contacts, or not enough experience locally. They must go overseas to develop and keep in touch with what is going on. And for FM this was theatre people in London combined with his new urgent desire to teach his discovery. Australia loses many of its artists in that way, through a kind of geographical bad luck. And then if it should happen that an Australian comes home for a visit sometime, he must be sure to have a return ticket, because once he had stayed here after a certain time he begins to put down roots, and I have seen several tragedies when Australians, who have been in London for many years, followed careers here, than become sick, and somebody says "you had better go home." So they go back, and they find that Australia has changed, their relationships change, and they are simply not at home anymore. If they are old and sick they find themselves trapped over there and it is a very sad situation.

As for the point of view of whether or not a country has changed, I remember FM once complaining bitterly that he had gone down by train to Sidcup station, and when the train stopped and everybody got out, the man who was looking after the gate kept the gate locked until he had seen the train off. And there they all stood. FM was absolutely furious, he said "There we all stood like sheep, having to wait until the man came and unlocked the gate. In Australia it would be impossible, we'd knock the gates down." But unfortunately, Australia has changed, and they are waiting patiently by the locked gate until the man comes. So he would have seen that change too. However, FM could feel in touch with the Australians when the great Don Bradman was playing cricket matches. We heard a great deal about Don Bradman. We saw pictures of him, we had to admire his use, and we had lots and lots of cricket in those days. His other hero was Walter Lindrum, the Australian snooker player, of whom I recently saw a film on TV in Melbourne. The ease of masterly shots with the appearance of one who doesn't care whether he wins or loses, chatting and smiling to people around him and walking about. He would simply walk about the billiards table as if he had all day to do it in: in modern parlance, no worries. In FM's terms he made it look "as easy as falling off a log." And I could see why FM admired those sort of people so much, because they seemed to

have that carefree but very masterly way of moving, with surety. A person's use was to FM a guide to his efficiency. And if anybody came in any capacity to him who was said to be very important, FM would observe his use and then might say afterwards "I wouldn't have his opinion on a hen coop". Of course there were always his recitations of the Australian poets, Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson, which we did not always appreciate, but which to him were home. And actually these poets are very popular to this day in Australia, and if FM were to go over there now, and recite them, they would be a great success.

And now to the future. Fifty years it is since our training course began, and in the meantime the Alexander work has spread worldwide. There are several teacher training schools, whose pupils teach in many countries. Most of them never knew FM, and these pupils are in danger therefore, of being caught up in a situation such as one which is visualised in a 17th Century German poem which I came across one day – which I can tell you rather loosely translated. It is called 'The Hat'. There was once a great master who invented the hat. It had a crown on it and a brim which was turned down all the way round. And everybody admired this wonderful invention and said this man is a true master. And when the man died he bequeathed the hat to his heirs. His heirs looked at the hat and said "Mmm, there's something not quite right about this. Turn the brim up on one side." And everyone said, "Ah, now it's right. That's the way it should be. This is very great. This is right." And this particular owner, he bequeathed the hat again to his heirs. And the next generation took up the hat and said "Mmm, there's something not quite right about this. I think we'll turn it up on the other side". And everyone said "Ah, now it's really good." And so on through each generation. And each generation that owns the hat does something to change it a little bit. In one case the hat was so shabby that the next heir turned it inside out. Now, this is a warning to what can happen to any great ideas.

Recently in Melbourne I was with a collection of young people who were all interested in Yoga and meditation and so on. A young man was talking to me

about what he was doing and out of the blue he said to me “Of course the Alexander work is not good at all for healing.” He did not know anything about the Alexander work, I don’t know why he suddenly produced it. And I said “What do you mean?” and he said “Oh, all that pulling about of the head doesn’t do a thing for anybody”, and I asked him where he had seen something like that, and he said “Oh, I saw it demonstrated at a party the other day”. Fortunately, I could enlighten him on the spot, but this is the kind of thing we will come across. People are impressed by the apparent improvement in posture, and one hears repeatedly of the joy expressed and the feeling of lightness that comes with it. What a rocket that person would get from FM! “Your feelings are unreliable, or you would not do to yourself the things that you are doing”. FM would not want to know how they feel, but he would want to know how they think.

FM must have foreseen the problems ahead for his work, and he must have had misgivings about our ability to resist end-gaining in the technique, and wanting to change for the sake of change. Our problem is still how to explain the work. You can try to explain it in a thousand ways, but in the end it has to be traced back to FM’s one principle, or the source, which I see as the corner stone of his discovery: the inhibition, the stopping, whichever term you like to use. If FM had been satisfied with putting his head forward and up, and maintaining this for his recitation, he would have been simply doing a trick, for the sake of his voice. A specific cure, even if his posture improved. But the far more vital observation was that the very thought of speaking produced his head pulling back, be it ever so slight. So he reasoned that he must refuse to speak, stop the idea of speaking, until he had given thought, which he called orders or directions, to the better use of his head and neck IN ORDER to speak. And then he realised when he began to teach, the dreadful difficulty we all have in stopping. That is the vital spark of the Alexander work, and if the Alexander work is to survive in the form FM showed us, it is absolutely essential, that we guard this primary principle of his, not only in giving and receiving lessons but

use it in our daily lives, as it is meant to be lived. I would say now to younger teachers: go out into the world. There are teachers now in so many countries. Get to know one another, work with one another, experiment in means whereby to do things which are a part of your lives, and see what new experiences come your way. But be sure to check up on that fundamental primary principle, which begins with stopping and observing. I am stressing this idea of means whereby, as it was my earliest experience as a child under the tuition of my aunt Ethel, which I so fully understood later, with the invaluable help so many of us had from Irene Tasker, who was a brilliant teacher in the conventional sense. She devised countless ways of not only doing the same dull thing like peeling potatoes or going shopping with better use, but also how to tackle a new maths problem, or a worrying personal situation. And later still, after I had gone to live in Australia, Irene corresponded with me and sent me every possible encouragement, not only to keep on teaching the Alexander work, but also to read, to travel, look what is going on around me. I was at the time doing a university course, and I wrote to her half apologizing at end-gaining because I was working towards exams and that is one of the biggest kinds of end-gaining you can go in for. Her answer was that there was a certain craftiness also in exams passing. In other words, stand back, stop, whatever you like to call it, look at the situation, work out your means whereby, and get on with it. From her we learned new experience and change in terms of movement, awareness and readiness, and Margorie Barstow wrote to me recently saying how what Irene did with us in the 30's is still very much alive with her now, and goes on maturing all the time.* Of course if we understand Irene's teaching, and see the Alexander work more clearly, we might have said to FM "Alright, we now understand it, but why didn't you tell us before?" And FM would reply sadly, "What else have I been telling you all these years?" The greater the master the fewer the words, which to us on the outside appears like a sort of detachment. But FM has shown us the way to each of our own individual progression in our lives, and this apparent detachment will reveal itself as a living activity.

In remembering FM we must not forget his love of Shakespeare, or as he sometimes called him: Spokeshay. We realised, when he put on "Hamlet" and "The merchant of Venice" with us students, how much the theatre meant to him, and one wondered if he sometimes yearned for more life as an actor on the stage. And I would like to end with a favourite quotation of his which combines his love of Shakespeare with the very essence of his lifelong work: "The readiness is all". Thank you.

*Verbatim quote from Marjorie's letter: "I think Irene Tasker was of more value than we could realise at the time we were in training. Now I appreciate what she did for me more and more."

For further information about the people mentioned in the talk, see *The Companion to the Alexander Technique*, mouritz.org