

An Opinion Exchange **1908 Letters to the** ***Pall Mall Gazette* Editor**

F. Matthias Alexander

Arthur Lovell

J.W. Williams

Henry G. Davis

K.

E.R.

Countess Debie

Robert E. Mack

by Jeroen Staring
Nijmegen, The Netherlands

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Introduction

In introductory commentary to Alexander's 14 March 1908 letter to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*¹, Jean M. O. Fischer (1996) reports that "unfortunately the edition preserved by the libraries contains neither the article to which Alexander responds here nor Alexander's letter" (p. 68). Alexander's 1908 letter, Fischer continues, was subsequently "reprinted [by Alexander] as a long flyer" which "includes an advertisement for his 1907 booklet *The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-Education*" (ibid). Fischer's observation that libraries failed preserve the *Pall Mall Gazette* article to which Alexander responded, were it accurate, could preclude addressing the specific context of Alexander's missive. Fischer nevertheless asserts that "Alexander warns of all the harmful effects of 'deep breathing' [then] the most widespread exercise in singing, elocution, Swedish gymnastics and general physical culture" (ibid).

Fischer's endnote 83 states that "Deep breathing: the name given to the exercise of taking and holding the breath for a certain length of time...was the most common and widely recommended health exercise in the period 1880-1920" (p 285) and that "Alexander's 'full-chest breathing'...indicated an original approach" (p 286). The text to which Alexander responded in this 1908 letter, however, did not advocate holding the breath; instead, the author simply defined deep breathing as "the opposite to shallow breathing" and that "the proper method [is] taught by nature" (see below, page 4). Fischer does not specify how this author's advocacy of "full deep breathing" differs from the "full-chest breathing" that Alexander previously promoted in Australia or show how Alexander's approach is "original."

Fischer's report is accurate regarding the British Library failure to preserve the 14 March 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* edition in which Alexander letter to the Editor appeared. In its heyday, the *Pall Mall Gazette*² was known for sensational coverage and frequent contributions by English literary notables such

1. In *F. Matthias Alexander: Articles and Lectures*, edited by J.M.O. Fischer, Mouritz, London 1996, available at <http://www.mouritz.co.uk/>.

as Oscar Wilde and G.B. Shaw. There were several editions per day. Thus far, no copy of the edition in which Alexander's letter to the Editor has been found — although, letters in subsequent issues refer to it. It is understandable that Alexander published a reprint as an advertisement; its publication in the *Gazette* Letters to the Editor pages shows Alexander engaging as a participant in one of the great popular discussion arenas of the period.

Fischer, however, typically failed to dig deep enough in search of text to which Alexander's letter responded. "Quickening the Cure of Consumption: The Value of Deep Breathing," a 23 January 1908 editorial column, was easily found in the British Library archives when I visited there in 2001. Not only is it preserved, so is a considerable part of an exchange of opinions in Letters to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* regarding this article. The exchange began in January 1908 and continued until the end of September of that year; all together, about 50 replies are extant. Alexander's 14 March letter was hardly at the exchange beginning.

Previously, early in 1908, the British medical press began discussing the forthcoming publication of Dr. H. Trimble Bulstrode's *Report to the Local Government Board on Sanatoria for Consumption and Certain other Aspects of the Tuberculosis Question*. Bulstrode questioned the wisdom of building sanatoria (like the King Edward VII Sanatorium at Midhurst) for tuberculosis patients and analysed the relative effectiveness of such therapies as "open air cure." On 23 January 1908, "Quickening the Cure of Consumption: The Value of Deep Breathing" appeared as a *Pall Mall Gazette* editorial column addressing issues raised by the Bulstrode report. The article bears no signature but is in the clear prose style of the *Pall Mall Gazette* Science Editor, Caleb Williams Saleeby.

Trained as a gynaecologist, Saleeby did not practice medicine; instead, he was a prolific writer, lecturer, columnist, friend of G.B. Shaw, and author of several popular books on health. In that capacity, he was an ardent supporter

2. The evening newspaper, first published in 1865, merged with the *London Evening Standard* in 1927.

of numerous causes. He was for clean air (coined "smog" by combining smoke and fog), passionately against mindless physical exercise, just as passionate for progressive education, a staunch supporter of Marie Montessori. He was avidly pro temperance — and pro eugenics, the efforts for which he is most remembered. In 1907, he was a founding father of the Eugenics Education Society (E.E.S.). Exactly one month before Alexander's letter to the editor, on 14 February 1908, for instance, the English Eugenic Society had held its first Annual General Meeting.

Publication of Alexander's letter to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was not the only connection between Alexander and Saleeby. Saleeby's popular science writing in his 1904 book *The Cycle of Life* — applying to the game of cricket the neurology of Charles Sherrington on inhibition and the psychology of William James — precedes Alexander's inclusion of inhibition in his published commentary on his work by four years.³ In 1910, Saleeby was an editor at Methuen's, where *Man's Supreme Inheritance (MSI)*, Alexander's first book, was published. The structure and content of MSI closely follows that of Saleeby's 1909 *Parenthood and Race Culture*. Moreover, Alexander's commentary on physical culture and other issues mirror Saleeby's, although Alexander held a position on inheritance of habits that differs with Saleeby's understanding.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* article on deep breathing and tuberculosis opened a floodgate of responses to the Editor concerning tuberculosis, sanatoria, and deep breathing exercises that continued to swell until 28 September 1908. Then, at last, the Editor ended that discussion with an abrupt commentary.

What follows are the 23 January 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* text to which Alexander responded and selections from more than 50 correspondences that the original text inspired, including Alexander's 14 March 1908 letter to the Editor — and, near the end, a lively exchange between a follower of Arthur Lovell and a follower of Alexander.

3. See ateducationresearch.com/Saleeby_on_Cricket.pdf

The 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* Editorial Column to which Alexander and Others Responded

QUICKENING THE CURE OF CONSUMPTION — THE VALUE OF DEEP BREATHING
23 JANUARY 1908 *PALL MALL GAZETTE*.

The author of the unsigned editorial column is likely Caleb Williams Saleeby, the *Pall Mall Gazette* Science Editor.

Much is being said just now about deep breathing, especially in its relation to the prevention and cure of disease. The public generally is mystified, having been accustomed to breathe without noticing how it is done in the right way. What is deep breathing? It is the opposite to shallow breathing. There are, in fact, three ways of breathing: clavicular, intercostal, and abdominal. The proper method, as taught by nature, embraces these three. The clavicular, or collar bone, breathing consists in the elevation of the ribs, collar bone, and shoulders, and represents the greatest expenditure of energy with the poorest results in oxygenation of the lungs, and does not eliminate as much carbon dioxide as the breathing with the lower part of the lungs. Intercostal breathing consists in outward expansion of the framework of the chest. This and clavicular are the modes used by women generally, especially those who lace tight. Abdominal, or diaphragmatic, is carried on by the action of the diaphragm, the muscle which is the partition between the chest and abdomen. Considered by itself, it has an enormous advantage over the other two for by this means the lungs are inflated, not only where they are largest in size, but where they are most easily moved. Full, deep breathing is the combination and perfect application of the three modes, and is the only true way to breathe properly and sufficiently. Put simply, clavicular may be described as the breathing that inflates the top of the lungs, intercostal the middle part, diaphragmatic the lower part, deep breathing the whole of the lungs from bottom to top. Not one person in 10,000 breathes correctly, and from this cause alone may be traced an infinite amount of human suffering.

Applied to consumption for its prevention and cure, deep breathing is destined in the future to play a conspicuous part. It is, in fact, the greatest preventive agent there is. In the confines of an article it is not possible to go into the physiology of the lungs but one fact stands out clearly, and that is that nature has provided 725,000,000 air cells, every one of which it is necessary to supply with oxygen. How can this possibly be done, except

by full deep breathing? It is not done indeed, probably only about one-third of these air cells get their proper quota of oxygen! What wonder, then, that they flag. Why is this only just now coming to be considered?

Because the training of the medical man has been grievously neglected in regard to some of the simplest of nature's teachings. The importance of deep breathing being recognised on all hands, will it be believed that no classes for teaching this most necessary function, in a practical way, are held in the medical schools, and consequently the doctors who preside over the destinies of the Sanatoria are generally quite ignorant themselves, and so cannot teach the patients the one thing on which depends their very existence. It is, in fact, a fine irony that these splendid buildings are erected in the most healthy positions, yet the patients cannot get half the benefit they should from their surroundings. The Sanatorium treatment wants thoroughly overhauling, as does the system of education, which, also, does not admit hygiene (which includes deep breathing) on its curriculum. The time is fast approaching when this latter will be taught compulsorily. In the Sanatorium the first thing to do is to see that the head is a man of strong will, expert in the art of breathing, a rigid disciplinarian, and thoroughly qualified for his work. Men are often appointed who themselves have been consumptive. This is altogether wrong. A dominating influence must pervade the place, and the patients must be so instructed that they can help themselves to a cure. Breathing exercises, according to the capacity of each, should be given, coupled with light physical exercises, or work, when possible. The mind should not be allowed to dwell on the disease. Amusements should be provided, and much of the unnecessary "taking of temperatures" and "weighings" dispensed with. Hope should pervade the place from stern to stern. The food question should be studied quite as carefully, proper cooking provided, and suitable food of the very best quality. More than that. The mastication of the food by each patient should be carefully watched, and much less food given than generally obtains. Complete mastication of the food would coupled with rest before and after the meal work wonders, provided the thorough oxygenation of the blood were ensured by deep breathing. No one should be allowed to undertake the cure of consumptives who was not a thorough master of the art of breathing, and who could not shed a magnetic influence around by his own healthiness. He should in every way be the embodiment of what he teaches. Were these reforms vigor-

ously carried out there would be a quickening in the cures of the earlier cases of consumption that would astonish the world; but the prejudice of the medical profession must be broken down before they are generally adopted, as assuredly they will be ere long. The public should demand these reforms, then they would come quickly enough.

Unsigned *Pall Mall Gazette* 23 January 1908 editorial.

January 29 1908 Responses

Among the first to respond to the January 23rd 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* column was Arthur Lovell (pen name of David Arthur Lovell-Williams), author of *Ars Vivendi; or, Art of Acquiring Mental and Bodily Vigour*, (1895), *Deep Breathing* (1907), and leader of a school of breathing education.

THE CURE OF CONSUMPTION⁴

Arthur Lovell letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor

K. letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor

E.R. letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor

DEEP BREATHING

Countess Debrie letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor by , 29 January 1908

Robert E. Mack letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor

THE CURE OF CONSUMPTION

Arthur Lovell letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

Sir.

I was extremely pleased to read the instructive article on quickening the cure of consumption which appeared in your issue of the 23rd last. It is a subject which is of infinitely greater importance to the public than the Utopian schemes of social and political reform which excite such interest in the Press and elsewhere at the present moment. To read some of the effusions anent capital, landlordism, etc., one would think that their abolition is the only bar to the realisation of the kingdom of heaven on earth. But what are the actual facts universally acknowledged to-day? What about the misery caused directly and solely by the condition of the individual, such as drunkenness, indulgence in the cocaine and morphia habits, prolonged ill-health, laziness, and vice? To claim that all this is to be swept aside by the advent of Socialism is ridiculous. What is really wanted all along the line of human activity is an attempt at more clear thinking, so as to ensure that one's efforts at the amelioration of the race do not produce a greater chaos than prevails now.

Social reform means nothing without individual reform. If the money that is now thrown away in futile efforts at restoring shattered health could be devoted to teaching

4. *Pall Mall Gazette* sub-headline.

the elementary principles of hygiene to young and old, immense results would accrue within a year or two. Consider the incalculable loss caused by the ravages of consumption between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, a loss which reacts in numerous ways upon the community as a whole, causing widespread poverty and distress. The open-air cure has certainly done much to alleviate the horror of consumption, but nobody in the know would really claim that it has fulfilled the expectations raised a few years ago. The percentages of real and lasting cures are very small. The causes of this lamentable fact may be ranged under two heads:

1. The vitality of the victim has been below par for years before any active signs of lung mischief have shown themselves, and treatment has been commenced too late.

2. The open-air cure at present carried out in all sanatoria is hopelessly inadequate. A few years ago all chances of a cure were nullified by the “stuffing” process which ruined the digestion. Now things are not quite so bad. But the glaring fact remains that the training of the medical man has not fitted him for his post as head of the open-air cure. There is always lurking in the mind the belief that some new serum will shortly be discovered to assist the open-air cure. There being no attempt at teaching development of will-power, and the nature and properties of nerve-force, all of which are part and parcel of the open-air cure, consequently there is no life in the movement, and people begin to shrug their shoulders at the mention of a sanatorium. The open-air cure really means the breathing cure, that is, the theory that the cause of the disease in the human organism is a devitalised state brought about by want of sufficient amount of pure air. Therefore it stands to reason that instruction in the art of full breathing is the *sine quâ non* in carrying out the process of cure. And yet, not a single sanatorium has seriously attempted it, owing to the want of knowledge. No wonder that medical men are still sighing for a new serum.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR LOVELL, 94, Park-street, Mayfair, W., 24 Jan.

K. letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

Lovell was quick to write a letter to the Editor. Responding to issues of importance to his Order of *Ars Vivendi* served as free advertisements. Pupils of Lovell's contributed letters to the Editor as well. Some quoted from Lovell's *Ars Vivendi*, to further establish his name and fame. The following missive by a certain "K," was published on the 29 January 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette*, page 11.

Sir.

The able article on "Quickening the Cure of Consumption," in your issue of January 23, touches upon a subject of universal importance, especially so at the present time, when public attention has frequently been drawn to the melancholy fact that 100,000 persons perish from this disease alone every year in England and Wales, the daily deaths amounting to 288, while in London alone about 80,000 suffer from the disease; statements made by the National Committee for the Establishment of Sanatoria for the working classes in this country.

Mr. Arthur Lovell, commenting on these figures in his fifth edition of *Ars Vivendi*, says, "When one ponders over these figures, and when one thinks of the piteous tales of suffering they indicate, not to mention the premature shrinkage of human life, the loss of earning capacity, money spent in education, etc., one cannot but shudder at the appalling spectacle presented to the gaze of civilisation."

The mournful fact remains, however, that we continue to tolerate this great drain putting aside the suffering involved on the physical treasury of the nation, despite the praiseworthy efforts of an army of doctors, serum inventors, and vivisectionists, who appear the truth forces itself upon us to search and investigate in every direction but one, and that one Nature's own method of cure. Air and water she lavishes on all sides around us, merely asking that their bounties may be intelligently used and directed.

It cannot be too earnestly impressed upon the public mind that tuberculosis, except in very advanced stages, is a curable disease; but while we continue to place blind faith in the theories of the medical profession (who are not instructed, and are therefore for the most part profoundly ignorant of the practice of deep breathing and the important part it plays both in the cure of consumption and the preservation of health) we must not expect any sensible diminution in the ravages of what has been truly called "the great white plague."

A London physician, Dr. Ashurner, who employed natural methods with great success in the cure of disease half a century ago, and who, in common with Dr. Elliotson, met with abusive opposition and obstruction from his medical confrères, thus feelingly writes in a book he published at the time, on the treatment of disease a work destined in all probability to be resuscitated: “Well, I am sure the medical profession will see its truth and importance, and I shall leave it to them! As though any revolution in science or institutions had ever come from those in whose hands the subject was placed, and had not always been forced upon them and forced upon them with toil and anguish and persecution to those who effected it.”

I quote from Dr. Ashurner's work, as it applies with equal force to-day to the subject of your article, to show that it largely rests with the general public now much better educated in the question of individual and national health to demand reforms shockingly needed.

Faithfully yours,

K., Hampstead, 28 Jan.

E.R. letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

The next letter to the editor, by "E.R.," was printed right after K's, also on page 11.

Sir.

The article on deep breathing which recently appeared in your columns must have aroused sympathetic response in all who have witnessed the extraordinary cures effected by this method. It is a wonderful fact that humanity is immersed in an ocean of vitalising life-giving essence, which has the power to transform all who know how to draw in and use it into beings of radiant health and spirit. Surely it should be the business of all to learn how to partake of this gift. It should be the pleasure of all who themselves have benefited by a course of instruction in correct breathing to enlighten others and to spread ideas which would benefit mankind generally. Were schools established for the purpose of teaching all who suffer from delicate constitutions how to use their lungs and their voices in the right way, much illness might be avoided. Able masters who themselves understand the correct methods of breathing and speaking should be appointed to teach others who are ignorant. Consumption would then very quickly die out, and no "cure" would be needed.

Yours faithfully,

E.R. 26 Jan.

DEEP BREATHING

Countess Debrie letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

Even a countess, from Paris, wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor. Her response made same 29 January 1908 issue as K.'s and E.R.'s.

Sir.

I read with great interest the article on “Deep Breathing” which appeared in your columns a few days ago, proving that the public is at last beginning to realise the tremendous importance of lung exercise, in opposition to the violent muscular exercises, which exhaust the vitality needful for the full development of the youthful body.

Deep breathing is the only true method of requiring that mental and bodily vigour which ensures against the attacks of disease, especially that most frequent and dread malady consumption.

It is within the schoolroom that the seeds of consumption, curvature of the spine, impaired eyesight, neurasthenia, etc., are sown, to develop at the prime of manhood and womanhood, when the strength of the growing body has been fully sapped, through the present defective system of education.

Vitiated air, cramped position during study, which rounds the shoulders and spine, narrows the chest, thus limiting the capacity of the lungs, together with ignorance as to the right manner of breathing, are the primary causes of consumption.

Were the natural poise and position of the body, together with proper breathing and singing exercises, taught in every educational institution throughout the civilised world, the terrible problem of the “great white scourge” would find an easy and natural solution. I know, from personal experience, the value of deep breathing in the development of delicate children, having had the good fortune to place my own two delicate little ones under the care of a thorough master of the art of physical culture, whose great success was based upon his knowledge of the true method of breathing and using the voice in speaking and singing. It is devoutly to be hoped that the attention of our directors of public schools will be called to this all-important subject, which means health and vigour for present and future generations.

Yours truly,

COUNTESS DEBRIE, Paris, 27 Jan.

Robert E. Mack letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

The last 29 January 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* letter on this subject was from Rober E. Mack.

Sir.

I was extremely interested to see your article on "Deep Breathing." The fact that you have to breathe incessantly to keep alive proves it to be the most important thing you do. If the change of air commonly advised by doctors were interpreted into a change of breathing the truth would be more nearly reached. The change of air is so far beyond the reach of most, the change of breathing right to hand. But few doctors understand it, and who is to advice? It seems an extraordinary thing that the men entrusted with the care of life should be so busy studying drugs (mostly made in Germany) that they cannot see the obvious fact in front of them of a more certain simple and permanent cure, instantly at hand, lying in the proper practice of breathing. Is it that it is too simple?

To anyone who is aware of the amazing permanent and constitutional changes that can be brought about by proper breathing, and the ease with which small ills can be remedied immediately, the thing seems still more odd. In fact, very short of a scandal. I trust you may follow up the article with others.

Yours hopefully,

ROBERT E. MACK.

Another Lovell Response, 31 January 1908

THE CURE OF CONSUMPTION.

Arthur Lovell Letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

What a large number of responses to the 23 January 1908 column on the value of deep breathing regarding tuberculosis patients in such a short time! What on earth could better invite Arthur Lovell to write another letter to the editor expounding his theories for a second time? Are we too cynical in suggesting that it was free publicity? This second letter appeared in page 3 of the 31 January 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Sir.

Again, what about the foolish suggestion which quite recently emanated from an English doctor, to give tuberculous meat to the victim of consumption? Space would not suffice to enumerate the supremely silly ideas about the cure of consumption that have been given to the world from time to time by the medical profession. I have no wish whatever to attack individuals. What I aim at is the complete revolution of the medical system of looking upon disease. I am acquainted not only with sanatoria, but also with the present method of training the medical man. [...]. I know that more could be accomplished in one month than is now expected in three or four months.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR LOVELL, 94, Park-street, Grosvenor-square, W., Jan. 30.

Deep Breathing Excerpt from Lovell

Other letters to the Editor on this subject were published between February and March 1908. They, however, were unrelated to either Arthur Lovell and his 'deep breathing' school, or F. Matthias Alexander's method of breathing. We have seen that the first to respond was Arthur Lovell, always keen to promote his Order of Ars Vivendi and his breathing method. Below, two passages from Lovell's 1907 *Deep Breathing*, show how he had previously articulated the issues brought out in the 23 January 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* editorial.

*I have been frequently surprised at the general opinion prevalent among doctors that singing and reading aloud, or exercise of the voice in any form, is bad for the consumptive. On the contrary, voice exercises should be regarded as constituting the chief part of the cure, when carried out on the Ars Vivendi principle of freeing the throat from all strain, and singing or speaking from the Solar Plexus. This is by far the safest and most efficacious lung exercise, and invariably produces beneficial results. However, if the singing or reading is performed badly, the throat gets very quickly fatigued, and the nervous tone of the general system is lowered; unless it is performed in the right manner, therefore, neither singing nor reading aloud should be attempted, and the breathing exercise alone must be carried out. (Lovell, *Deep Breathing* 1907, p 130)*

The consumptive could thus proceed with a "home" cure immediately, without waiting to be formally installed in a Sanatorium before attempting seriously to take himself in hand. And when he remembers that a stitch in time saves nine, an additional incentive is given him to start immediately with breathing. (p 131)

Alexander Replies, 14 March 1908

“THE DANGERS OF DEEP BREATHING”

F. Matthias Alexander letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor

Compulsory education, free milk for infants, tuberculosis, physical training of recruits and children were hot button topics for the rather sensational pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The 1908 heated exchange of opinions regarding deep breathing and tuberculosis presented an opportunity for Alexander to join the discussion.

The title of Alexander's reprint of his letter, "The Dangers of Deep Breathing," suggests a shift in his line of thought. Previous to 1904, in Australia, he advertised teaching "full-chest breathing." Up to 1908, he, like Lovell, mainly promoted himself as a teacher of breathing. For instance, his promotional pamphlets included "Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory Vocal Re-Education" (1906), and "The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-Education" (1907).

An article, "Quickening the Cure of Consumption—Value of Deep Breathing," appeared in your columns sometime since, in which the writer pointed out a serious defect in the treatment of consumption in sanatoria. My attention has been drawn to it by a gentleman⁵ who had read a long article on "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption," which was published under my name in 1903. Under that article I wrote: "The open-air treatment is at present only in the very rudimentary stages... Every year hundreds of unfortunates are sent off to selected spots without proper assistance from a respiratory point of view."

I have been actively engaged in the study of the subject ever since, and the added experience only serves to verify the statements then made. For this reason, I deeply regret your advocacy of "deep breathing" exercises as a remedy for the defects in the treatment in sanatoria, seeing that it is well recognized by the few who understand the subject that as much harm has been done by so-called "deep breathing" exercises as by "physical culture" exercises.⁶ It is impossible for me to go into details here because it would occupy more of your valuable space than you could grant me. I will merely point

5. Alexander likely referred to Dr. W. J. Stewart MacKay. MacKay, who had helped Alexander publish that 1903 article, was visiting London and Alexander early in 1908.

6. The *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, Caleb Saleeby, also campaigned against "mindless" physical culture exercises and for regarding "our muscles merely as servants or instruments of the will" (*Parenthood and Race Culture*, 1909, Cassell & Co., Ltd. p 62).

out that in our schools and in the Army human beings are actually being developed into deformities by breathing and physical exercises. I have before me a book on the breathing exercises which are used in the Army, and any person reasonably versed in physiology and psychology, and knowing they are inseparable in practice, will at once understand why so much harm results from them. Take either the officers or the soldiers. In a greater or less degree the unduly protruded upper chests (development of emphysema), unduly hollowed backs (lordosis), stiff necks, rigid thorax, and other physical eccentricities have been cultivated. It is for these reasons that heart troubles, varicose veins, emphysema, and mouth breathing (in exercise) are so much in evidence in the Army. As this is a matter of national importance I am prepared to give the time necessary to prove to the authorities (medical or official) connected with the Army, the schools, or the sanatoria, that the "deep breathing" and physical culture exercises in vogue are doing far more harm than good, and are laying the foundations of much graver trouble in the future. The truth is that all exercises involving "deep breathing" cause an exaggeration of the defective muscular co-ordination already present, so that even if one bad habit is eradicated many others—often more harmful—are cultivated.⁷

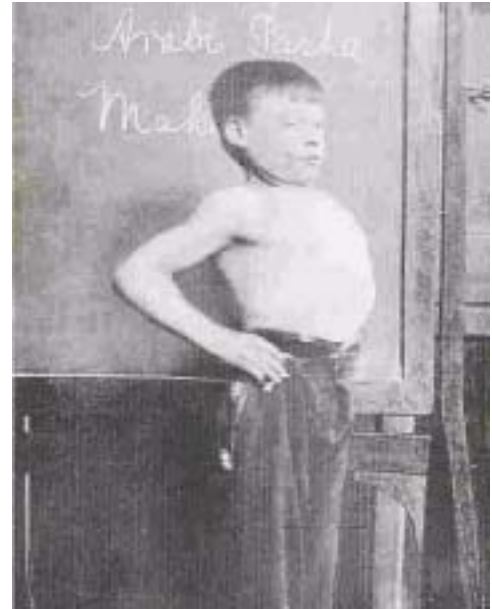


Figure 1. Caption in the Mouritz 1996 MSI.

"This photograph, published a few years ago in a daily paper, represents a member of a class in a London County Council School performing exercises. Below (ill. 5) this lad may be seen at work in the class. These unfortunate boys as here shown are simply being developed into deformities. Luckily of late a change for the better has taken place in school callisthenics. (*FMA*). See p. 91."

Caption in sports medicine physician Ernst Jokl's (1944) critique of Alexander.

"The above photograph was published by Alexander in 1939 (!) to show the deteious effects of current physical education...The truth, of course, is that the boy shown above suffers from the after-effects of rickets, and that at this stage of his illness neither deep breathing nor any form of postural gymnastics can possibly 'cure' him. the appropriate method of preventing rickets is not physical training (including the conscious control cult), if one wishes to honour Mr. Alexander by including his 'technique' in this term but nutritional and environmental measures must be adopted! Ample supply of dairy products and other foodstuffs containing vitamin D, plus sufficient sunshine, will eliminate rickets everywhere..."

"This is a particularly blatant example of the methods adopted by Mr. Alexander in his attempts to discredit physical education, with a view to impressing the public with the quackery advertised by himself. impressing the public with the quackery advertised by himself." (Jokl, E. 1944. *Manpower*, 2 p 34)

In 1948, Alexander successfully sued Jokl for libell for calling him a "quack." Alexander's lawyers, however, did not challenge Jokl's assertion that this boy had rickets.

E.B., ATeducationresearch.com

7. Alexander quoted this passage the 1912 *Conscious Control (Man's Supreme Inheritance) in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (Methuen & Co., LTD, London, 1912, p xi) along with a photograph of a young boy, added to all subsequent editions of *MSI* (also see Fischer, 1996 p 286). Ernst Jokl challenged Alexander's assertion that the photograph indicates deep breathing exercises leads to "deformities," see Figure 1.

In this connection it is only necessary to point to the serious effects of "deep breathing" and physical culture exercises in the causation of throat and ear disorders, following upon the undue and harmful depression of the larynx—the crowding down of the structures of the throat—such depression occurring with every inspiration, and as a rule with every expiration. This disorganization and consequent strain in the region of the throat is always found exaggerated, and tends gradually to increase in people who are subject to asthma, bronchitis, and hay fever, and the removal of the factors causing such strain and disorganization means great relief and gradual progress towards the eradication of these disorders; but, of course, all organic troubles should be removed in such cases.

Personally, I consider [that] the term "deep breathing" is a misnomer. In your article I find: "What is deep breathing? It is the opposite of shallow breathing." Then I answer that both "deep breathing" and "shallow breathing," as expressions of fact and process, are both misunderstood and misleading.

It is a significant fact that the lungs are usually attacked in the upper part, which shows that the lobes in the apex⁸ are the most inadequately and incorrectly used. Perfect body pose, chest poise, and co-ordinated use of the muscular mechanisms means proper mechanical advantage.

Given these factors, the breathing is correct and adequate, and will remain so if these conditions have been brought about by that conscious control which is essential to the re-education—as Huxley expresses it—of the human machine.

In "deep breathing" the "sucking" and "sniffing" of deep breaths into the lungs is contrary to Nature, and a moment's consideration of the laws of atmospheric pressure and the enlargement of the whole thorax as a primary factor in respiration will make this clear. The advocacy of perfect and adequate use of the respiratory processes—that is to say correct breathing—cannot be too highly commended; but it is the duty of those who

8. Fischer's note states that "The 'lobes of the apex' are the top parts of the lungs. The left lung consists of a superior and inferior lobe whereas the right comprises three lobes—a middle lobe as well. the apex indicates the uppermost part situated between the root of the neck and the first rib" (p 287). Fischer does not clarify what relevance this information has to help understand Alexander's claim that "the lungs are usually attacked in the upper part."

advocate it to make sure that a great remedy does not come into disrepute through ignorance in its application.⁹

I may mention that in my connection with this subject I have been associated with many leading medical men, whose names I forward for your perusal, but not for publication.

Yours, etc.,

F. MATTHIAS ALEXANDER, 22, Army and Navy-Mansions, Victoria Street, S.W.,

14 March, 1908

9. While Alexander emphasizes that “deep breathing” and “shallow breathing” are misleading terms, it is significant to note that Alexander does not claim to be opposed to all forms of breathing instruction. Indeed, Alexander’s own method emphasized breathing until 1908. Instead, Alexander apparently felt that he had to safeguard his approach breathing instruction, since the competing school of Arthur Lovell's was so aggressively taking the opportunity to use free promotion by way of writing letters to the Editor. Here, like Lovell, Alexander uses the letter to the editor format to promote his own practice. It, he proposes, is not contrary to nature, but facilitates “perfect and adequate use of the respiratory processes...that is to say, correct breathing.” Here for instance, Alexander expresses no disagreement with the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor’s assertions that “the proper method” of breathing is “taught by nature” and that “not one person in 10,000 breathes correctly” (see page 4 above).

Responses to Alexander's Letter in September

During the months of April, May, June, July and August 1908, several more letters to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* responded to the 23 January article on tuberculosis and deep breathing but none related to Alexander or his method. In September 1908, a renewed flood of letters reached the *Pall Mall Gazette*, this time addressing an open conflict between Arthur Lovell's school of deep breathing and Alexander's approach to breathing. The first of these was published in the 4 September 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* (page 2), sent in by Mr. J. W. Williams, the Honorary Secretary of Arthur Lovell's Order of Ars Vivendi:

THE TEACHING OF DEEP BREATHING

[J.W. Williams letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 4 September 1908](#)

[Henry G. Davies letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 15 September 1908](#)

[J.W. Williams letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 17 September 1908](#)

[Henry G. Davies letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 19 September 1908](#)

[A. Lovell letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 22 September 1908](#)

[J.W. Williams letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 22 September 1908](#)

[Henry G. Davis letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 26 September 1908](#)

[J.W. Williams letter to the Pall Mall Gazette Editor, 28 September 1908](#)

J.W. Williams letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 4 September 1908

Sir.

Now that the teaching of hygiene in the elementary schools is an accomplished fact, it is a matter of the greatest importance that it should be properly taught. In a letter you were good enough to print in your issue of June 11, under the heading of "Hygiene in the Elementary Schools," I drew attention to the difficulty that would be experienced in teaching "deep breathing," on account of the many methods in vogue some of which were positively harmful. I also drew attention to the fact that of all things that were taught in a school, "deep breathing" was the most important. I should like to ask now how the education authorities propose to deal with this great question, as on it largely depends the health and well-being of the thousands of children attending the elementary schools. I have written to the proper authorities on the subject, but, possibly on account of the summer vacation, so far I have had no reply. The importance of having a practical system to be taught by all teachers will perhaps be seen from the following little episodes.

Yesterday I saw a boy who had been given breathing exercises in his school. He was undersized, narrow chested, and was evidently suffering from some congestion in the

nasal passages. I got him to show me how he was taught, and it was no more like the proper and only right method, than the proverbial chalk and cheese. It was more like the panting of a dog than anything else. Then I found that the whole thing was looked upon more as a joke than as a serious thing to be learned, and it was quite evident that the master knew nothing of the practice of deep breathing, and was simply bringing the whole thing into contempt. This is, indeed, deplorable. And more this boy would very easily become consumptive on account of his difficulty in breathing naturally. It was not at an elementary school, I may say though the same thing will doubtless occur there. Now for another case. A boy who was consumptive, and was rapidly going along the road to the grave, was taken in hand by one who understood deep breathing and the importance of proper mastication of food, etc. He was made to understand precisely why deep breathing was of such vital importance, and he took a lively interest in his own cure. He was fourteen years old. In a very few weeks the change was remarkable. He began to get firm flesh on his poor little limbs, his chest developed well, and a healthy colour came into his cheeks. His eyes, which were always covered with sties, became perfectly free from them, and in three months, or less, there was no sign of consumption in him. I may say he was only treated once a week for half an hour. These cases might be multiplied indefinitely, and it is in order to bring back the healthy glow to pinched cheeks, and proper lung capacity to the narrowed chests, that I have so often encroached on your space. A letter I wrote on the subject "Can Consumption be Cured?" in your issue of August 6 brought me a lot of correspondence, and I would commend that letter to the education authorities. The Ars Vivendi system includes this deep breathing, and it is one of the first taught in that system of training for acquiring the "Art of Living." Did I know of a better I would proclaim it gladly, but I do not, but I hope that before deep breathing is taught generally in the elementary schools the authorities will leave no stone unturned to satisfy themselves that they have the one and only method which is taught by nature herself.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

J. W. WILLIAMS, 148, Fenchurch-street, E.C., 3 Sept.

Henry G. Davies letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 15 September 1908

The *Pall Mall Gazette* was happy to publish a response to Williams September 2 1908 letter, 15 September 1908, page 3. No doubt the ditorial policy encouraged controversy to help to sell papers. This respondant, Henry G. Davis, was clearly a follower of Alexander and he refers to Alexander's 14 March 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* letter.

Sir,

The latest from the pen of Mr. J. W. Williams appears in your columns under the above heading. As he is continually advocating "Deep Breathing," perhaps he will be good enough to explain what he means. It is very curious that he did not defend his principles when a distinct attack was made upon "Deep Breathing" by Mr. F. Matthias Alexander in an article, "The Dangers of Deep Breathing," which appeared in these columns in your issue of March 14. He finds fault with the eminent medical men for not recognising "Deep Breathing."

If they do not recognise "Deep Breathing" he will find upon inquiry that they send patients to Mr. Alexander, who, by the way, has had almost all the teachers of the dramatic profession through his hands. Mr. Williams recommends the Ars Vivendi system because it includes "Deep Breathing." It is for this reason that he should condemn it. I have the book before me, and the instructions there given in connection with *Deep Breathing* are merely those to be found in other books published on the subject during the past twenty years, and do far more harm than good, and I intend to deal with this subject in a public lecture at no distant date.

Yours truly,

HENRY G. DAVIS, Alexandra-road, South Hampstead, N. W., Sept. 15.

J.W. Williams letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 17 September 1908

Soon after, Williams replied, in the 17 September 1908 issue, page 10.

Sir,

I am glad of the opportunity of answering Mr. H. G. Davis's question as to what I mean by "Deep Breathing," although I confess I cannot see any difficulty in understanding so simple a definition of a most important function. There are three directions in which the cavity of the chest can be enlarged:

1. Downwards, outwards, and sideways, by expansion of the diaphragm;
2. Outwards and sideways, by expansion of the intercostal muscles;
3. Upwards, by elevation of the ribs and sternum.

The imperfect breathing of ordinary life is frequently confined to a feeble play of one of the above modes. Perfect, or deep breathing embraces the three. By shallow breathing, the percentage of carbon di-oxide expelled from the system is far less than by deep breathing, as is also the amount of oxygen inhaled. The great majority of people do not inhale sufficient oxygen to burn up the carbonaceous waste of the system, and in that fact alone may be said to lie the beginning of our graver diseases. Mr. Davis says it is curious I did not defend the principle of deep breathing when an attack was made on it by Mr. Alexander, on March 14, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Unfortunately I did not see this letter, so I do not know in what it was attacked. But I have consistently warned people of the danger of many of the methods of deep breathing, and have always urged the necessity for personal teaching by a competent master. I certainly do find fault with the medical profession for not recognising deep breathing. When the greatest function in life is ignored in the medical schools, it is about time that others should step in and urge the necessity for the proper teaching of this most vital thing. As Mr. Davis condemns the Ars Vivendi system because it includes deep breathing, it is perfectly clear that he can have very little knowledge of the subject, or have read the letters of those who have been trained under it. I said in my letter of September 4, from which Mr. Davis quotes, that I would gladly proclaim a better system did I know of one. As a fact, it is by this system that deep breathing can be taught without the slightest strain to any of the other organs of the body, which at once disposes of the objections of medical men. In a very short time one begins to breathe deeply, automatically, and then it is that splendid results follow. Per-

haps I might mention, at this point, that I am not a professional teacher of deep breathing. I am one of the thousands who have regained their health by studying and carrying out Nature's laws, and as long as I can wield a pen and use my voice, I intend to do all I can to get people away from drugs, and to a better understanding of the healing power of Nature. There is being shown just now a great interest in this question, and I hope, also, ere long, to speak publicly upon it. Meantime, those of your readers who would like to know more of the science and art of breathing, in all its aspects, cannot do better than get Mr. Arthur Lovell's latest book, *Deep Breathing*. They will never regret the expenditure of the one shilling that it costs.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. W. WILLIAMS. 148, Fenchurch-street, E.C., 16 Sept.

Henry G. Davies letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 19 September 1908

Davis' response to Williams appeared soon after. Australian AT and piano teacher Rosslyn McLeod first discovered this letter while researching the Dr. Leeper Archives at the Melbourne University.

Sir,

Mr. J. W. Williams, in answering my question as to what he means by “deep breathing,” writes: “There are three directions in which the cavity of the chest can be enlarged:

1. “Downwards, outwards, and sideways, by expansion of the diaphragm;
2. “Outwards and sideways, by expansion of the intercostal muscles;
3. “Upwards, by elevation of the ribs and sternum.”

Now, in the first place, every one can get the simple facts of the recognised physiology of breathing in rudimentary books on the subject, and therefore Mr. Williams might have known I would not ask for them. What I want to know is, why should the above be called “deep breathing,” when Mr. Williams tells us that the movement (1) includes “downwards and sideways;” (2) “outwards and sideways;” and (3) “upwards”? Why not call it “wide breathing” as readily as “deep breathing”? Mr. Williams should certainly read Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's letter of March 14, in the *Pall mall Gazette*, and reply to it, as that gentleman and the medical men who support him in his respiratory re-education, will, I feel sure, at once come into the discussion. I would also advise Mr. Williams to write for Mr. Alexander's latest publication, *Why Deep Breathing and Physical Culture Exercises do far more Harm than Good*, and also his book on *The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-education*. There the evils of “deep breathing” are fully dealt with, and, as Mr. Williams says he is anxious to know of a better method, I can assure him that he will quickly discover one, and it is one that has been fully recognised by eminent members of the medical profession for some years. In the *Pall Mall* letter Mr. Alexander mentioned that he had forwarded their names for his (the Editor's) perusal, but, of course, not for publication.

I defy any one who attempts to carry out the exercises given in the *Ars Vivendi* to prevent the cultivation of far more defects than they eradicate.

Yours truly,

HENRY G. DAVIS. Alexandra-road, South Hampstead, N. W., Sept. 18.

A. Lovell letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 22 September 1908

The 19 September letter by Henry G. Davis inspired both Arthur Lovell and J. W. Williams to send lengthily and flaming replies. Both letters were published on the 22 September 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette*, page 3. Here is Lovell's reply.

Sir,

Mr. H. G. Davis takes exception to the term "deep breathing," and says that the evils of the practice have been mercilessly exposed by Mr. Alexander in a former issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and elsewhere. It is to be hoped that Mr. Alexander has devoted more attention to the subject than Mr. Davis has evidently done; otherwise, little good would accrue to anybody from a further discussion of the question. However, as Mr. Davis has made, seemingly in good faith, the grotesque statement that "deep breathing," both as a term and a practice, is vicious, it is as well to lay the facts before your readers.

1. The term "deep breathing" has been extensively used of late years, both in this country and America, to express thorough expansion of the lungs. It has been adopted by some of the elementary school authorities in this country, and praiseworthy attempts have been made to teach the children deep breathing. The term itself always implies the combination and perfect application of the three modes of breathing mentioned in the letter of Mr. J. W. Williams.
2. The practice of deep breathing is the royal road to health and vigour of mind and body. The breath of life is an actual fact, not a mere poetic fancy, for without breathing the whole mechanism of mind and body stops working. When Mr. Davis talks of the "evils" of deep breathing he displays complete ignorance of the elementary principles of physiology, as will be seen from the following extracts from one of the ordinary text-books, *Human Physiology*, by A. D. Waller, M.D., F.R.S.

The percentage of CO₂ is less in the expired air of shallow than in that of deep respiration; it is less in the air expelled at the beginning than in that of the end. It is of importance to distinguish the separate effect of increased frequency and of increased depth upon the total discharge of CO₂. We should have the same amount of air expired per minute (8 litres) in these two cases: depth = 500 c.c. x frequency = 16, or depth = 400 c.c. x frequency = 20, but in the first case the CO₂ exhaled would be greater

than in the second. From which we may realise that to carry off the product of a more active internal respiration, deeper breathing is more effectual than more frequent breathing; and, as a matter of fact, variations of activity affect the depth more than they do the frequency. Muscular exertion may increase the frequency, but it more prominently increases the depth of respiration.

The above extract is merely a calm statement of what can be easily verified in everyday experience. Deep breathing as a practice must be thoroughly mastered, for it is very easy to do it wrongly, and the majority of people cannot thoroughly inflate the lungs in the proper manner owing to nasal congestion. I have repeatedly warned that breathing must be done without strain of any kind, and I have taken great care to point out that there is "no necessity to sniff, snort, or suck the air in." This is where the danger will come in. Hundreds in the near future will teach breathing without having mastered the art. Then will arise the question, Which of these various methods is correct? "By their fruits ye shall know them" is the only true test. In view of the enormous importance of the subject to the nation as a whole, it is absolutely scandalous that no attempt whatever has been made to teach deep breathing in the medical schools. It is, therefore, gratifying to find that at least a beginning is being made in elementary schools.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ARTHUR LOVELL, 94, Park-street, Grosvenor-square, Sept. 19.

J.W. Williams letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 22 September 1908

Here is J.W. Williams's reply to the 19 September Henry G. Davis letter.

Sir,

I have refrained from replying to Mr. H. G. Davis's last letter in order to get a copy of the paper containing the letter on the "Dangers of Deep Breathing" to which he made so pointed a reference. That letter is now before me, and after reading it carefully I find no occasion to withdraw one jot or one tittle of anything I have written in these columns on the value of deep breathing during the last twelve months; for in that letter the writer evidently does not understand "deep breathing" in the way I do. Mr. H. G. Davis cavils at the word "deep." I did not coin it, but it is a well-known expression that is used to denote a complete, gentle filling of the lungs with air from the diaphragm to the collar bone. In a most excellent little book by J. Mortimer Granville, M.D., in a chapter on "Breathing," occurs the following: "The young should be encouraged to breathe deeply and fully," and from the other remarks made it is clear that the writer understands "deep breathing" in the right sense. It is pleasant to record this fact. All I have been urging is that breathing "deeply" and "fully" should be taught in every school; and this correspondence was started by asking what the education authorities intended to do in this matter, "breathing" being included in the teaching of hygiene. I knew, quite as well as Mr. Davis, the danger of wrong methods being taught; that is why I wrote on the subject; but to condemn full, deep breathing because some ignorant voice-producers teach wrong methods, is absolutely puerile. I have utterly condemned the "sucking" and "sniffing" the writer of the letter on the "Dangers of Deep Breathing" mentions; that is not proper breathing at all; and I have also been equally severe on the idiotic way soldiers are generally taught. Were they and sailors taught the correct method as shown by nature to be so necessary, consumption would soon disappear from the Army and Navy. I am not influenced at all by the mention of the "eminent members of the medical profession" who so strongly back up the author to whom Mr. Davis refers. When I see the names of eminent medical men used in connection with all kinds of patent medicines, often accompanied by photographs, and know also that these same medical men were never taught how to breathe properly in their medical schools, their support does not amount to much. In the last paragraph of Mr. H. G. Davis's letter, "I defy any one who attempts to carry out the exer-

cises given in the *Ars Vivendi* to prevent the cultivation of far more defects than they eradicate," he is playing a very dangerous game, and hitting below the belt is not to the liking of Englishmen, especially as he is attacking a system he clearly does not understand. I ask him to prove what he says, and if he can, I will give £ 50 to any charity he names on the other hand, if I prove what I am prepared to, viz., that the training of the *Ars Vivendi* system does not only does no harm, but has been the means of giving health to very many who had taken it up in despair as a "dernier resort," then Mr. H. G. Davis must pay me £ 50, which will go towards erecting a sanatorium where will be demonstrated the gross injustice of his charge. Indeed, I am prepared to bring myself forward as a living example of the falseness of his statement, for I have been through the system, which not only includes breathing, physical exercises, etc., but also mental training. It is clearly Mr. Davis's duty to prove the truth of his statement, or make an ample apology in the columns of the *Pall Mall Gazette* rather than elsewhere.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. W. WILLIAMS, 148, Fenchurch-street, E.C., 21 Sept.

Henry G. Davis letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 26 September 1908

How typically British this is! A challenge and a bet in one. Could Davis refuse such a British invitation? Davis' accepting reply appeared in the September 26th *Pall Mall Gazette* issue, page 4:

Sir,

I have read the letters of Mr. Arthur Lovell and Mr. J. W. Williams in your issue of to-day. As the latter admits he is a pupil of the former I do not think it is necessary to forward you separate replies. It is useless to deal further with their absurd reasons given in support of the term "Deep Breathing," but I will quote from the recent letter of an eminent specialist which I enclose for your perusal: "In my view the grave failure of respiratory methods taught at the various physical culture systems to deal adequately with the problems at issue. Here 'deepness' of breathing is quite wide of the mark."

I gladly accept Mr. J. W. Williams's offer as set forth to-day, and prove my statement that the *Ars Vivendi* method cultivates more defects than it eradicates in those who need respiratory re-education, but stipulate that he shall be one of those examined. The conditions I set down are: (1) I will name three medical men who occupy foremost positions on the staff of leading London hospitals, and Mr. Williams can name three occupying similar positions, to act as examiners, provided these gentlemen can be induced to do so. The tests to be:

- a. Freedom of neck, arms, and larynx during nasal breathing in respiratory movements, in speaking, in singing, and in active exercise.
- b. Non-depression of the upper part of the chest, and non-protrusion of the abdominal wall, in exhalation, during respiratory exercises, singing, and speaking.
- c. Position of the abdominal wall when considered from the point of view of displacement of the abdominal viscera, tending to hernia, varicose veins, etc.
- d. Undue lowering of the air pressure in the nasal passages, to be tested by means of the manometer.
- e. Position assumed in standing, walking, and sitting.
- f. Throat strain as revealed during vocalisation.

And now I will deal with Mr. Lovell's own words, as published in *Ars Vivendi*. He writes in his instructions on breathing: "(2) Begin by simply taking longer breaths than

you have been accustomed to take. (3) This advice would be quite enough were it not for the inherent conservation of the system itself, which resists any change in its habits. (5) Begin with 'abdominal breathing' then expand upwards and outwards till you feel the whole lungs, from top to bottom, full of air." Here we have some extraordinary instructions, for instance, in (2) the pupil is instructed to take longer breaths, but the author does not give one word of advice regarding "how" to take it, until the pupil is told (5) "Begin with abdominal breathing." Surely any one who advocates "abdominal breathing" at the beginning or end of such exercises proves conclusively that he is ignorant of his subject. In nineteen out of twenty people to-day the conditions present are:

1. Undue and harmful hollowing of the spine in the lumbar region.
2. Undue stiffening of the neck and arms.
3. Undue and harmful protrusion of the abdominal wall, and displacement of the viscera.

The harmful results of this condition are well known, and in the face of this fact Mr. Lovell actually tells his pupils to begin with abdominal breathing. This monstrous practice is fortunately recognised as harmful and antiquated by all up-to-date experts on the subject, and is only entertained by those who follow the crude idea known as "Yogi" breathing. It is only necessary to give Dr. Harry Campbell's table showing the quantity of air which can be expired (vital capacity) by means of the different methods of breathing. I quote from his book on the subject, page 61: C

"Pancostal C 400 cub. inches. . . . Lower costal C 210 cub. inches, abdominal in its mean position 110 cub. inches."

Comment is unnecessary. Lastly, let me draw attention to Mr. Lovell's instruction to "expand upwards, and outwards till you feel the whole lungs full of air." By what power can the unfortunate pupil accurately "feel the whole lungs full of air?" In this connection Dr. McGrath, of New York, has written a fine paper on vocal and breathing delusions.

I recommend Mr. Lovell and Mr. Williams to read it at once, as evidently their experience in connection with the practice of breathing has not led them to suspect that delusion is possible.

Yours truly,

HENRY G. DAVIS. Alexandra-road, South Hampstead, N.W., 24 Sept. 24.

J.W. Williams letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, 28 September 1908

J. W. Williams had the last word. His final letter was published in the 28 September 1908 issue, page 3.

Sir,

In defence to your intimation that the correspondence on the above subject must now be brought to a close, I must refrain from dealing with the very extraordinary letter of Mr. H. G. Davis in your issue of Saturday last. I shall be perfectly satisfied to leave the readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to form their own conclusions on that correspondence. But there is one duty I feel I must perform, and that is to thank you, Sir, for allowing this most important subject to be so thoroughly ventilated in your columns, and for the absolute impartiality you have shown in this matter. Judging from the letters I have received from all over the United Kingdom, it is evident, as Mr. Eastwood, in his admirable letter, says, that the spirit of inquiry is abroad. That, at least, is comforting, and is an earnest of good things to come. Meantime, I hope shortly to be giving a lecture on the “Art of Living,” which is really what the *Ars Vivendi* system teaches, and in it will deal not only with deep breathing, but with other subjects, physical, mental, and spiritual, which, when understood, help to make life really worth living. This lecture will be duly notified to your readers through the advertisement columns of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. W. WILLIAMS, 148, Fenchurch-street, E.C., 26 Sept.

Postscript

From these 1908 letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor, we learn that Arthur Lovell's breathing method, brazenly promoted Lovell and his followers in their letters, was attacked by Henry G. Davis, an ardent pupil of Alexander's. Another letter immediately followed Williams's 28 September 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* letter (by Lawrence B. Eastwood, preserved in the Melbourne University Dr. Leeper Archives where Rosslyn McLeod discovered it in the early 1990's). Since Eastwood did not address Alexander's method, it will not be reproduced here. Below Eastwood's letter, the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor stated: "This correspondence must now come to a close." It was signed C.S.

Davis challenged supporters of Lovell to meet with "medical men who support [Alexander's] in his respiratory re-education" — emphasizing that "Mr. Alexander...had forwarded their names for his (the Editor's) perusal, but, of course, not for publication" — to discuss the "evils of 'deep breathing'" and to determine the "better" breathing method (page 25 above, also see page 19). Williams's 28 September letter suggests the Lovell side withdrew their challenge. If a discussion was held, the results were not published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* or any where else. A statement made by Lulie Westfeldt (1964) suggests that Alexander too may have balked when his offer was accepted "to give the time necessary to prove to the authorities" (see page 17) the dangers of deep breathing or to have his methods examined.¹⁰ Westfeldt reports:

One of Alexander's favourite stories was of a group of anatomists who came to see him in his early days in London with a proposal that they study together. "They were walking deformities," Alexander said, imitating how each one looked as he came into the room. "There is something terribly wrong here," he added. It was inexplicable to him that their knowledge of anatomy did not enable them to prevent their own bodies from becoming deformed. (*F. Matthias Alexander: The Man and his Work*, p. 154)

10. Alexander also expressed willingness to prove his statements to the "authorities of our Schools and Colleges, or to a representative body of Gentlemen connected with the Press and Medical Profession" in his July 1908 pamphlet *Why "Deep Breathing" And Physical Culture Exercises Do More Harm Than Good* (page 2).

Although Alexander published his 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* letter as an advertising flyer and quoted passages in the 1912 booklet *Conscious Control (Man's Supreme Inheritance) in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* and in all subsequent editions of *MSI*, other than, perhaps, in Lulie Westfeldt's anecdote quoted here, he never again hinted that his letter was part of heated exchange of opinions of 1908 letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* Editor. Ardent, uncritical followers of Alexander like Jean M.O. Fischer haven't either. Fischer's failure to find the 23 January 1908 article on breathing exercises and tuberculosis to which Alexander's letter responded is not so much a result of shoddy research as it is a too typical example of reluctance among certain leading Alexander Technique to consider Alexander's writings in context. These teachers, as Fischer has done with Alexander's 14 March 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette* letter, fetishize Alexander's words, treating him as a religious leader with special insight and capacities rather than as a scientist who is part of a community of scientists making observations that can be tested — so much can at least be concluded from the above facts.

Did Arthur Lovell ever address the exchange of opinions in the 1908 *Pall Mall Gazette*? Lovell urged his followers to engage in promotional campaigns by writing letters to journals and newspapers. In 1912, his book *New Light on Consumption* summarizes these efforts to promote his position on tuberculosis, sanatoria, open air cure, and deep breathing but does not explicitly mention the *Pall Mall Gazette* discussion. He does refer to a 1908 *Lancet* and a 1909 *British Medical Journal* discussion though.

Lovell's advocacy of an open air cure, breathing performed "without strain," and "no necessity to sniff, snort, or suck the air in" (see page 27) resemble statements made by Alexander in 1903. Alexander's *Pall Mall Gazette* letter can profitably be studied in the context of competition with Arthur Lovell's method as well as in light of the methods Alexander advanced before 1908. Closed mindedness should not block our insights forever. Historical research can open up our minds, and it clearly exposes the narrow-mindedness of uncritical Alexander followers.