

# F MATTHIAS ALEXANDER'S VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

## April to December 1895

by Rodney Mace<sup>1</sup>

This paper reproduces in full an article written by F.M. Alexander while he was living and working in Auckland New Zealand in 1895. Its significance, I believe, lies in the clue it gives us as to Alexander's place among a number of other proponents of the 'vocal arts' who were attracting widespread attention in the English-speaking world of the time. My contention is that the relationship between Alexander and this larger community of people has been seriously



neglected, to the detriment of our present understanding both of his early life and of the development of his technique. From my reading both of this article and of a body of contemporary material I argue for a reassessment of Alexander's subsequent claim to originality for his 'system' to claim underlined by the total omission in his later autobiographical writing of any attribution for his ideas to influences from other practitioners.

I begin by a brief introduction to the article, in which I discuss the late 19th century preoccupations with voice, pronunciation, elocution and breathing, and the influence these exerted on Alexander's own theories. Then follows the original article; after which I provide a historical commentary on the other sources and writings of the time.

It was during his visit to New Zealand in the winter of 1895 as Alexander tells us, that he first began the experiments that were eventually to lead him to his 'discoveries',<sup>2</sup> Based as these were on observations and reports he had made of himself in the mirror, there are questions as to the methodological validity of these "discoveries" which are beyond the scope of the present paper. Here, my focus is on the evidence that his article

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1. Rodney Mace, a historian, has spent some time training as an Alexander Technique teacher at Victoria Training Course for the Alexander Technique in London.
  2. Alexander, F.M.A., *The Use of the Self* (1932), Chapter I "Evolution of a Technique" and Carrington W.H.M., *F. Matthias Alexander 1869-1955: A Biographical Outline* (1979)

(published in the *Auckland Star* in July 1895)<sup>3</sup> and other related sources give us, as to the location of Alexander in a wider body of contemporary thought.

From the *Auckland Star* article itself, it is clear that during this period Alexander's thinking drew heavily on several other prominent people working in the area of the "vocal arts" and related topics. These include four of his well-known (but older) contemporaries. First, is the Melbourne elocutionist Thomas Padmore Hill (who may well have been one of Alexander's teachers). A good part of Alexander's article is directly taken without credit from one of Hill's most popular books.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, there is Charles Hartley, a man who, although working and publishing in London, appears to have been well known in both Australia and New Zealand at the time.<sup>5</sup> The third person named in the piece is the early nineteenth century American elocutionist Andrew Comstock, whose theories by the mid-century had come to influence almost all practising elocutionists and vocal art teachers.<sup>6</sup> Finally the English elocutionist Emil Behnke<sup>7</sup> with whose work Alexander's writing was to have so much in common, but whom he mentions here almost in passing.

In addition to these writers, there is some evidence (as I discuss in more detail in the historical note which follows the article) that Alexander's encounter in Auckland with a certain "Professor" Alphonse Loiset may well have had some influence on his ideas.<sup>8</sup>

The article is entitled 'Speech culture and natural elocution': a choice of theme which may appear surprising for those of us interested in the practice of the Alexander technique today.

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3. *Auckland Star*, Saturday 20 July 1895" 6-7.

4. Hill, T.P., *Oratorical Trainer* (1862). Hill was probably stimulated to write his book by the publication in England of a government report on education which he extensively quotes in his introduction. The report was particularly critical of regional dialects see pages 1861 XXI.1 and following.

5. Hartley, C., *The Speaking Voice* (1873). *The English Elocutionist* (1892). *Hartley's Reciter and Elocutionist* (1898).

6. Comstock, A., *A System of Elocution* (1844).

7. Behnke, E. and Browne, L., *Voice, Song and Speech* (1890). Behnke and Browne say about singers that "in their anxiety to stand quite upright they not only take their shoulders back but they slightly raise them...so far bending the head they are more likely to tilt it slightly backwards, that is also wrong, because it tends to fix the larynx in too high a position" (p 188). Like Alexander, Behnke and Browne approved of and often quote, the writings of the philosopher Herbert Spencer. Emile Behnke was from the 1880s to the 1940s one of Britain's most influential teachers on all matters relating to the voice. Along with his wife and daughter (both Kates), the doctor, Lennox Browne and the musician, Charles Pearce, Behnke published dozens of books, some of which ran into a hundred editions. Behnke was among one of the first voice teachers to use the evidence of X-rays after their discovery in 1896 to study how the lungs and muscles of the throat actually worked when a person was speaking. Kate Behnke, like her father, made extensive use of the laryngoscope made popular by the famous London singing teacher Manuel Garcia in the 1870s.

8. Loiset A., (1896). *Assimilative Memory or How to Attend and Never Forget*.

What did such a theme have to do with the subsequent development of the practice of this technique?

and

Why, as this article of his plainly indicates, would Alexander have been so interested in the 'vocal arts'?

These are complex questions; to answer them we need briefly to recall, first, the role that spoken language and dramatic literature had in unifying nation states and empires, including of course the emerging states of Australia and New Zealand, in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The proper spelling and pronunciation of English lay at the heart of the British Empire's assault on its colonies, where local languages were often brutally suppressed and dialect speech forms heavily discouraged. As sociolinguists have documented, in many colonies whole peoples were forbidden to speak or read their own languages (including the Irish, Scots and Welsh in Great Britain itself). Those who didn't speak English in the authorized pronunciation (itself a dialect) were increasingly dubbed intellectually and morally inferior. At the end of his Auckland Star article, Alexander makes it abundantly clear where he stands on this issue when he uses expressions like "well cultivated and well modulated voice" and "the refining influence of spoken culture."

By the turn of the century, however, the British Empire was beginning to be unstable and 'white' colonies like Australia and New Zealand were pressing hard to make themselves into self-governing and unified nations while still retaining place within the Empire itself. Australia became a Federation in 1901 and New Zealand a Dominion six years later. Central to the nationalist movements and moments of 'independence' was the inevitable argument over what constituted the respective national languages and literatures of these two countries.<sup>9</sup>

In New Zealand (often called 'Britain of the South') the argument over language was very muted: by contrast, in a more strident Australia, a tension between those who spoke an authorized 'English' and those who spoke 'Australian' had been bubbling along since the 1880s. 'Englishness' began to lose out as a culture of distinctly Australian writing began to emerge which even sidelined many well-known English Authors and dramatists of the established canons of literature. At the height of Australian nationalism, in the years around Federation in 1901, performances of Shakespeare (who in England had only recently been elevated to being the national bard) became very infrequent events indeed

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9. Turner G.W., *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand* (1981). White R., *Inventing Australia. Image and Identity 1688-1980* (1972). For an overview of this period see Walker, S., "Perceptions of Australia, 1855-1915" in Bennett B. et al. *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (1988).

in the theatres of Melbourne and Sydney.<sup>10</sup> In their place theatre managers staged an increasingly popular diet of 'bush and mateship' melodramas.

The consequences of this for those who, those who, like Alexander, had tied their cultural aspiration to the language and literature of 'English,' was twofold: on the one hand, a shrinking in popular interest in the vocal arts; and on the other (the route Alexander chose) a migration to the land where the likes of Shakespeare were both appreciated and popular. Several of Alexander's early students in London were part of this emigre community.<sup>11</sup>

The overt nationalism to which these were reactions, however, was by no means uniform throughout Australia. In Alexander's home state, Tasmania, pro-Englishness was particularly marked among the small but powerful settler class who controlled the economy and the culture including much of education.<sup>12</sup> Around this settler class was a much larger group made up of the descendants of Tasmania's convict population who, desperate to distance themselves from their family histories, strove to become more English than the English. Amongst these would be counted the Alexander family (who probably worked for the Van Diemen's Land Company). Significant pockets of a very provincial 'Englishness' existed in Melbourne, too; often made up from emigres fleeing the depression that hit Tasmania in the early 1890s. (Two points should be noted here: first that Tasmania only became so-called in 1853 – having been, for seventy years before, the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land where Alexander's grandparents had both been sent in the early 1830s;<sup>13</sup> and second, that the Aboriginal population had been almost totally wiped out by the 1840s.)

So Alexander's well-documented interest in Shakespeare was in some ways both commonplace and expected – Hobart [Tasmania] had a flourishing Shakespeare society and Melbourne's 'English' folk: boasted having the largest number of Shakespeare societies outside Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> His choice of performing extracts from Richard Brinsley

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10.Love H., *The Australian Stage - A Documentary History* (1984). Irvin E., *Australian Melodrama* (1981).

11.See footnotes in Carrington (1979). Most notable of these was the actor manager Oscar Asche (1871-1936).

12.Robson L., *A History of Tasmania* (1988) Vol 1.

13.For details of the trial of Matthias and his older brother Joseph for their part in the Captain Swing riots in December 1830 see the *Pyte House Papers 413/23* Wiltshire County Record Office. The Archive Office of Tasmanian (AOT) has several details relating to Matthias Alexander including genealogical tables of the Alexander family drawn up by Michael Roe for his article "F.M. Alexander: A Prophet from Australia" in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society Vol 60* pt 2, pp 117-123, June 1974. The AOT also has details of Matthias's wife, Mary Reading (the later spelling Redden as in FM's brother Arthur may be a corruption of her name) who was convicted in London age seventeen for stealing a dress and transported in 1833.

Sheridan's *School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* while in Auckland was also not unusual; for Sheridan's father, Thomas, besides being an actor was a leading English dictionary compiler and orthoepist, and Sheridan's plays were themselves exemplars of the English language and its proper pronunciation. (Incidentally, Sheridan's son traveled the English-speaking world giving recitals of his father's work and was in Auckland at the same time as Alexander). After all, too, Auckland was a very English city.

Within Britain itself, public interest in elocution and the 'vocal arts' was intense throughout. Every town and every city had its clutch of elocution, singing and breathing teachers. There seemed to be a new book, manual or weekly published on the subject almost every month. It was by no means a narrow pursuit: for its study encompassed issues as diverse as physics, anthropology, anatomy, psychology, medicine, public health and national identity.<sup>15</sup> As Alexander points out in this article, elocution was not an academic discipline although 'proper speaking' had been a preoccupation in the public and private school system since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was the subject of novels and of course the central theme of George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Pygmalion*:

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere — no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespear (sic) and Milton and The Bible...

(Henry Higgins addressing Liza Doolittle in Act I)

Alexander not only shared Shaw's general creative evolutionist ideas but also, one suspects, those which related to the spoken voice.<sup>16</sup>

Along with an interest in the voice came a fascination with breathing and air itself and the role that the will could play in partly controlling the lung and throat functions.<sup>17</sup>

14. See White R. (1981)

15. Lunn C., *Philosophy of Voice* (1874). Charles Lunn attempted to elevate the study of the voice by suggesting that every voice trainer's library should include works by Aristotle, J S Mill, Darwin, Huxley, and Bain. The 1906 edition of *Philosophy of Voice* was subtitled *Showing the Right and Wrong Action of Voice in Speech and Song with Laws of Self Culture*. On page 46 Lunn quotes Dr Harry Campbell and on page 55, William Marcet, who Alexander later mentions in the 1910 edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. Much of Lunn's chapter on Stammering and Stuttering (particularly page 215) bears a distinct resemblance to the one on the same subject in *The Use of the Self*. It is interesting to note that Lunn shared the same publisher, Balliere, Tindal and Cox, that published Alexander's first pamphlet in England, *Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Education* (1906).

16. Shaw G.B., *Pygmalion* (1912). Alexander seems to have been familiar with Shaw's dramatic parable on creative evolution, *Man and Superman* (1901–3), which was partly modeled on Percy Shelley's poem *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) for he quotes lines 700–701 at the beginning of the chapter "Conscious Control" in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. For a full discussion of Shaw's thinking in this area see Turco A. *Shaw's Moral Vision: The Self and Salvation* (1976) and Smith W.S. *Bishop of Everywhere: Bernard Shaw and The Life Force* (1982).

Although the will had been an interest of philosophers and psychologists for a long time, evolutionary thinking, particularly amongst the 'creative evolution' school to which Alexander- certainly belonged, gave it an added and distinct impetus.

The preoccupation with air was not only because it was the means that sustained life, but it also appeared to carry the many miasma (or 'noxious emanations' as the Oxford dictionary has it) that put so many people into an early grave. Most certainly, in unsanitary and heavily polluted cities like Auckland and Melbourne, where the incidence of respiratory disease was high, people's fears about 'bad breathing' and 'bad air' were somewhat justified.<sup>18</sup> So anybody who offered a solution that appeared to give people back some of the control that debilitating diseases like pulmonary tuberculosis and bronchitis took away found a ready audience — and, in Alexander's case, a steady stream of pupils.<sup>19</sup>

Teachers like Alexander depended for their livelihood on these paying pupils, attracted to their 'system' rather than that of their competitors. In many ways these competing practices were similar to, and an extension of, the long-running battle between the patent medicine peddlers, where insignificant product differences were greatly exaggerated for simple commercial reasons. It is in this light, I believe, that Alexander's article in the *Auckland Star* can most usefully be read. Although appearing in the editorial pages of the paper, it is really (to use a modern term) an 'advertorial' in which Alexander is seeking to establish his bona-fides in a new city as a "vocal art teacher," in addition to being known as a stage performer.

Within the culture of elocution at the time, the article is rather narrow and literary in its bent: reflecting, perhaps, his wish to build above all on his reputation as stage performer of the classics. It is also important to note, however, as I have already suggested, that that what he has to say is far from original. Quite a lot of it, as I have indicated, is drawn directly and without credit from Thomas Padmore Hill's *Oratorical Trainer* (1862). For him to do this was not exceptional: many writers of the time borrowed freely from each other's work but in this case it sharply differs from the writing of both Emile

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17. In print for seventy years since its first publication in 1851 James Wilkinson's *The Body and its Connection with Man* gives expression to an oft spoken Victorian view of breathing. "Breathing makes the living body bigger than the corpse...the lungs correspond to both the cerebrum and the cerebellum. For there breathing may be either involuntary or voluntary. In this respect they combine in a single organ the functions of the accidental and permanent life, or of the will and the nature. They therefore cement the bond between the two brains by a marriage of their motions in the body" (pp 117-118).

18. For the most elegant discourse on this subject, particularly on tuberculosis, see Sontag S. (1983) *Illness as Metaphor*.

19. Alexander suggests his "perfect respiratory treatment" could cure tuberculosis; see *Sydney Herald*, December 12, 1903 p 16.

Behnke and Hill himself who were scrupulous in giving credit to others whose ideas they incorporated into their own work. At the same time, the article is careful to not reveal anything of Alexander's own method (although he does quote with approval Hartley's method of 'natural elocution'<sup>20</sup>).

Here then, reproduced for the first time in its entirety since its first appearance almost a hundred years ago, is the article that Alexander wrote.

## **Speech Culture and Natural Elocution** **by F. M. Alexander: 1895**

Unfortunately, these important arts are very sadly neglected in the colonies, especially outside the large Australian cities. This neglect is due in great measure to the fact that an erroneous idea prevails that good delivery and the proper use of the speaking voice is the *common* gift of Nature, and not the product of art. That great authority Dr. Comstock considers cultivation an absolute necessity, and states that "perhaps there is not one individual in every ten thousand whose articulation is perfect."<sup>21</sup> This arises from the neglect of proper gymnastic training of the vocal organs in childhood. The proper production of the voice is the first aim of the singer, and it is of the same importance to the speaker. The former recognizes the fact, as is proved by the number of singing teachers in our midst, the latter fail to do so, and consequently voice users as a rule have not attained to anything like excellence.

Cultivated speaking voices are as rare as the oasis in the desert. The improvement that can be made by proper training is simply wonderful, and the most moderate voices can be extended in range, strengthened in power and rendered flexible to a remarkable degree. To acquire a good delivery should be the ambition of all, because as Lord Brougham observes, "it enables a man to do at all times what nature only teaches on occasion."<sup>22</sup>

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20. Charles S Hartley was a self-styled professor of elocution who practised from an address on the Strand in London's West End. He was a prolific author on the subject of the voice, spelling, improving your memory and in the 1885 published a tract on physiognomy. Alexander takes the Lord Chesterfield quotation from the back of Hartley's *The English Elocutionist* where it appears as a title page advertising his forthcoming book *Natural Elocution*. There is no evidence that *Natural Elocution* was ever published.

21. Hill, p 26. Andrew Comstock was born in New York in 1795 and published several books on phonetics. His best known *A System of Elocution* ran into sixteen editions within ten years of its first publication in 1844.

22. Hill, p 13. Lord Brougham (1778-1868) was a Scottish politician and well known orator who as Lord Chancellor helped get the 1832 Reform bill through parliament.

'True ease in reading and speaking as in writing,  
-----comes from art not chance.  
As those move easiest who have learnt to dance  
Tis not enough no harshness give offence,  
the sound must be the echo of the sense.'

**Nature may endow a person with splendid vocal organs but they cannot possibly be used to anything like proper advantage until thoroughly trained. Some years ago a series of articles on the subject of speech culture appeared in the "Times": the following being an extract:**

'From the time a gentleman's son goes to school, to the happy moment when he sees his name on the list of wranglers on the class English list, he has probably never recited poetry or prose, never even read aloud, much less has he ever made an oral statement of fact to a greater length than a short sentence to short question. Up to the age of three and twenty, it is a matter yet to be ascertained whether the *intended clergyman* can read a verse in the Bible as it *ought to be read*: whether the *intended barrister* can make a legal statement without *giving disgust*, or persuade without making *himself* ridiculous. He may be deep in Greek and Roman antiquities, and able to construe, and even to construe any chorus; he may write Latin and Greek verses in a dozen metres. He may be a good mathematician, and compose a tolerable essay. He may have these and other accomplishments which may never be called into practice in a whole life except in the production of written sermons, or in some correspondence of unusual gravity. *What, however, every man must do, in one way or another, what is the common gift of all classes and all professions, all ages from infancy; what is the first foremost difference between man and brute, between man and another, is left to chance without any assistance whatever from schools or universities.* The first education that the country can give offers no security whatever that a man shall not offend and should please and inform. Enter church metropolis or elsewhere, and you will hear the prayers read by a machine and the the servom preached by a drone. This ought not to be, but it is also, and will remain so long as the art of speaking is neglected in all its stages and applications, and nothing is cared for but head work, and pen work, as applied to ancient languages and pure mathematics.'<sup>23</sup>

**From the forgoing we find one of the foremost journals in the world giving great attention to this matter of speech culture, and doing a truly noble work in endeavoring to arouse interest in this all important art.**

**How is it possible for the uncultivated speaker to take his place on the platform with the cultivated? As well expect a clerk to compete with a thorough axeman at selling trees. Our amateur actors go to great trouble and expense to Stage and produce plays, which cannot possibly be successful, because the performers have studied acting before being**

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23.Hill, pp 11 & 12.

able to speak a line correctly. Under ordinary circumstances they have not proper control over their voice, and the nervousness which possesses them during public appearances, renders them still less capable of controlling the vocal organs. Lines expressing surprise are spoken in tones which would be suitable to declamation, pathetic passages in tones appropriate to a sudden outburst of passion, and passionate lines are invariably shouted, and so on. The tendency with uncultivated public speakers is to use the upper ranges of the voice, labouring under the erroneous idea that they will be better heard. As a matter of fact, if the middle voice is properly under control the Speaker would make himself heard to far greater advantage and with half the strain upon the vocal organs. C. S. Hartley, Professor of Natural Elocution. London, Oxford and Cambridge, writes: "The power of 'level speaking,' that is ever speaking upon the middle pitch, is regarded as one of the most valuable and one of the rarest of histrionic gifts, and accomplishments, and is as important to the speaker. It is only to be gained by proper cultivation." Imperfect production not only prevents the voice being used to proper advantage, but is the cause of many diseases of the throat, such as 'clergyman's sore throat,' a matter that I will again refer to later on. There is another important subject which rarely occupies the attention of voice users, and that is 'the art of breathing.' Of recent years the greatest attention has been given to it in the Old World, and the system of Behnke and Kofler<sup>24</sup> have been widely adopted. As a rule, I find that pupils have a very great difficulty with the breathing, especially when they attempt to recite or read passages which require any special effort or speedy annunciation. They at once begin to gasp in the same way as many singers. Such a habit irritates and disturbs the listeners, and mars the effect of the voice. Under such circumstances the effort to take breath is a great strain upon the speaker, and sooner or later he will lose control of his voice, which will be immediately followed by loss of power over his listeners. All people with defective voices breathe imperfectly, and in every case system of breathing, the cure has been effected with comparative ease. I have never known pupils to breathe properly at the beginning of a course of study. They invariably indulge in clavicular breathing instead of abdominal, and to effect a cure the greatest care and attention is necessary, but when one is effected (sic), the power the voice is increased, and the act of speaking or reciting, which was once a strain, becomes a work of ease and pleasure.

Teachers of elocution as a rule know nothing whatever voice production, the art of breathing or natural elocution and with such masters the system adopted is simply to

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24. Leo Kofler was the organist at St Paul's Chapel in New York and a great supporter of Italian style of singing much vaunted in America at the time.

make the pupil repeat selections of prose or poetry after them, and thus the pupil (unless he happens to be the fortunate one ten thousand referred to by Dr Comstock) continues to speak and recite without anything being done to remedy the imperfect production and wrong breathing. What is the result of the false method? We have only to listen to our amateur speakers and reciters, and the question is answered. Such teachers undertake to cure stammering, etc. but of course they never succeed. I have two pupils at present who have been so afflicted. I have given one of these gentlemen 15 lessons, and his defects have entirely disappeared, and the other, who has only had five lessons has improved beyond my most sanguine expectations. Stuttering and stammering are terms as to which there is much confusion of ideas, and generally considered to be the one and the same thing, which is quite a mistake. To go into details on this matter would take some hours, but, broadly speaking, stammering is 'frequently due to defective physical formation,' and stuttering due to 'spasmodic muscular contractions.' Curran, one of Ireland's finest orators, was at one time called 'little stuttering Jack Curran' but assiduously following a course of training he overcame this great failing.<sup>25</sup> My system of voice culture may be referred to under two headings — voice building (an expression used by my teacher) and voice production, used together when training a weak voice, but with one of full power the voice production is all that is required. A comparatively weak voice can by these systems be built up to ordinary power, and even the weakest can be materially strengthened. It so frequently happens, that the voices lack power on account of imperfect production, and to exercise such a voice without the assistance of an accomplished teacher would be productive of the very worst results.

The clergy are great sufferers from this cause, and Lennox Browne and Emile Behnke, when referring to the matter of 'clergymen's sore throat,' bear out this statement, and quote numerous cases. Many have frequently to abandon their calling for months together, while others are always suffering with the throat. A course of careful training would remedy this, and their public speaking would become a work of pleasure instead of a painful labour, and what a blessing would be conferred upon their hearers. Dr Johnson gave the following advice to young clergyman: "Delivery is more potential than eloquent matter;" and the Rev Hugh McNeile, D. D., wrote "It would be difficult to estimate the advantage that might, under the Divine blessing, be derived from elocution classes in our universities, and if candidates for holy orders were thereby delayed a year, there would be more than compensation for the delay in the increased competency for the work."<sup>26</sup>

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25. Hill, p 118 and 121. Speeches by the Irish lawyer and orator John Philpot Curran (1750-1817) were much favoured by voice-production text-book writers throughout the nineteenth century. Hill remarks "As a persuasive orator his powers were so great as he was universally known as the 'silver-tongued Murray.'"

We might cite a multitude of similar opinions from reverend gentlemen, but want of space prevents it. The remarks just quoted are as applicable to barristers as to clergymen, and voice training is one of the first studies to which they should turn their attention, a well cultivated voice being an absolute necessity to enable them to thoroughly and effectively carry out their callings. Lord Chesterfield says: "I have frequently known a man's fortune decided for ever by his first address. You will make it your business, your study, and your pleasure to speak well if you THINK right." This is indeed golden advice. How frequently we listen to members of the professions mentioned dealing with good subjects in well chosen words, but as they lack a voice which commands attention, little impression is made, and listeners become so wearied with the delivery that they feel disgusted with both subject and speaker, and his words fall upon the ear "like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." We are told that at this advanced age the professions are over done, still there is a demand for barristers who (to again quote *The Times*) "can make legal statements without giving disgust or persuade without making themselves ridiculous" and clergymen "who can read a verse from the Bible as it ought to be read" (*The Times*). Regarding elocution, I prefer to be recognized as a "natural elocutionist" because I'm afraid the word elocutionist is so much associated with a person possessing an artificial voice, unnatural style, unnatural inflection, and that dreaded and unpardonable fault which is commonly known as staginess. This idea is so firmly rooted amongst theatrical managers that the mere mention - the word elocution by a young person seeking an engagement, is sufficient to cause the application to be promptly declined. As a matter of fact, the class of voice user to which I refer should not be termed "elocutionists." However, the term is so commonly misapplied that I make a distinction by referring to the matter as the art of natural elocution. C.T. Hartley, professor of Natural Elocution, London, Oxford and Cambridge has taken this view, and has published a splendid little work called "Natural Elocution" which all reciters, readers, and speakers should carefully "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest."<sup>27</sup> Few people are born elocutionists, in the proper sense of the word, and thus many fall into grievous errors. I say to all, "Hold the mirror up to Nature," and learn to feel, and in these few words we have one of the great secrets of the speaker's success. The greatest effects are produced by intensity, and not by loudness. This is the great error into which all uncultivated speakers fail. To quote Hartley, "The power of condensed energy in repose, with accompanying clearness of enuncia-

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26. Hill. p 125. Alexander has truncated this quote by McNeile leaving out several lines after "university."  
Hugh McNeile (1795 – 1879), the evangelical Irish Protestant Orator, was often quoted by anyone writing about the problems of clergyman's sore throat.

27. "read, mark, learn" appears on page 9 of Hill.

tion which renders the suppressed whisper as impressive as the loudest explosion of agony, is a mastery of the art which none but the highly-gifted and persevering can attain. The tragic recital "Parhassius" included in my repertoire, calls into play the art to which Hartley refers, and without such treatment all the great effects of the composition could not be produced. That great and highly esteemed authority, the late T. P. Hill (author of the well known *Oratorical Trainer*, now in its 12th edition) says that three of the great reasons that speech culture commends itself to public favour are:

Because a well cultivated and well modulated voice always commands attention and enlists sympathy with the audience

Because it places in the hands of one man the power of spreading the refining influences of literature amongst thousands who might be otherwise unconscious of them.

'Because it begets a love of reading which if formed in early life, will, by mere force of habit, last through life.'

And thus by the present neglect of speech culture we lose the great blessing that it would otherwise confer upon us by refining influences, and the immense good which would result by its power to encouraging the love of reading in a great degree. We can each picture for ourselves the effect of such loss upon the whole community from this joint of view."

## Commentary

The exact duration of Alexander's stay in New Zealand is uncertain. However, judging from press reports he seems to have arrived sometime in the late April or early May of 1895. The *Auckland Star* of the 25th May reports "a clever little combination ... (that) comprises Mr. F. M. Alexander, the well known elocutionist, Miss Rose Blaney, the charming soprano the clever contralto from Wellington...Mr. Alexander first came to prominence in Melbourne by securing first prize, against all comers in Victoria, for his representation of the title role in the murder scenes from Macbeth...The company appeared to packed houses at Wellington on the 6th and 8th inst., and since visited Napier, Hastings and Gisborne, from which later place they leave for Auckland today."

Two weeks later the *Auckland Star* announces "Something New and Novel" for the evening of the 13th June at the City Hall when "The most versatile actor-reciter and entertainer" Mr F M Alexander will be giving "humorous, pathetic and sensational sketches from life." He would also be appearing as Sir Peter Teazle, The Duke of Aranza and Sir Anthony Absolute in scenes from *The School for Scandal*, *The Honeymoon* and *The Rivals*...assisted by Madam Goldenstedt, Mr J F Montegue and Mr A L Edwards."

The notice ends by announcing that Rose Blaney and Ruth Fisher will not be appearing in Auckland “on account of their being forced to return immediately to Melbourne to continue thier Studies.” In fact they gave one further concert together as the “Alexander-Blaney-Fisher Combination” at the Auckland Opera House on June the 21st. A week later Alexander was appearing as Romeo to Jessie Glover's Juliet in the same hall. Audiences had been small as the mid winter weather was atrocious and as usual Auckland's theatres were going black until the spring.

As a result of Alexander's piece on “Speech Culture and Natural Elocution” that appeared in the *Auckland Star* on July 20th “A magnificent eulogy” to Alexander from a Professor Loisetete gets printed in the 8th of August edition. Loisetete claims that Alexander had cured him if his breathlessness (brought on by over weight and getting tired from giving too many lectures) in only three lessons. And he added that “if Mr Alexander were in London or New York he would soon be recognized as a first-rate artist in his profession and would soon command the highest terms paid to voice builders and genuine trainers for public speaking and reading.” Immediately below the eulogy Alphonse Loisetete advertises his own “Memory System.”

Loisetete was in fact no professor, neither was Loisetete his real name. He was born in 1832 in Cohocton, New York State, Marcus Dwight Larrow and in the late 1880s fled to London after a public campaign by his one-time manager exposed him to be a fraud. Despite this he set up another “Loisetete School of Physiological Memory” in a small office at 37 New Oxford Street, London, from where he once again sold his system, “The Loisetete School of Never Forgetting” in weekly installments.

Loisetete's ‘art’ had several interesting features. Firstly, was not as original as he claimed for it was modeled on the popular mnemonic work of Edward Pick's *Memory and the Rational Means of Improving It* (1861) and *Memory and its Doctors* (1888) — in which Pick accuses Loisetete of stealing his ideas. Pick was probably best known for having written the section on “Memory” in the 1874 Encyclopedia: and secondly Loisetete required that each student sign a contract before they began not to divulge the course's contents (should anybody be foolish enough to reveal all, Loisetete would sue them for \$500 damages!) Thirdly and perhaps more important in relation to Alexander's development at this time, is the “Attention” section in Lesson Ten of Loisetete's course.

Alexander was later to say that this period in New Zealand was an important turning point, for it was here (he tells us) that he lost his voice and began his solitary search for a solution which resulted in his ‘discoveries.’ Carrington reports Alexander as having said, “It was in Auckland in those last three months that I got the idea of what it really was — and could be.” Nowhere along the way does Alexander acknowledge any influences by

others. Perhaps Loisetette, however, was one; and we should remember that Loisetette himself took most of ideas from the not insignificant literature on memory that existed at the time.

For those familiar with Alexander's writing, Loisetette's [concept of] "Attention" contains key ideas and phrases that Alexander was to use time and time again over the next fifty or so years. Loisetette describes "mind wandering" as an "infirmity." "Bad mind wanderers are little more than automatons, the victims of every whim and impression. [W]hen the *directing force* of the *attention* is strong, there is always a struggle going on between it and the other powers of the mind.... and unless the INHIBITORY POWER of the *attention* is sufficient to suppress..." By the "Directing function of Attention" Loisetette separately notes he means the "Volitional" the "purposed attention" as distinct from the "automatic as in listening to a thunderclap." The drift of the whole section is in fact very reminiscent of the chapter on 'concentration' and 'projecting orders' in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* Alexander was to publish twenty five years later.

It would be foolhardy to suggest that Loisetette's influence at this time was paramount for it seems clear that others, including Thomas Padmore Hill, were of equal importance.

Printed below Loisetette's eulogy, Alexander, writing from his third floor studio in Queen Street's Victoria Arcade announces that he will soon be leaving Auckland for America and that "intending students should begin immediate lessons in Correct breathing for singers and speakers; Natural elocution; Stuttering (the cure of) a specialty; Weekly classes in Shakespearean Elocution," could be had for a guinea, or a little less if you signed a term.

Loisetette's agent in Auckland was Perch Dib, the Tasmanian and one-time tea merchant who Alexander may have worked with in the late 1880s. In 1892 Dib moved to Auckland and set-up as a theatre proprietor and with his actor brother Leslie was to become well-known for their productions of Gilbert and Sullivan (Leslie appeared on the same bill as Alexander-Blaney-Fisher Combination on the 21<sup>st</sup> June).

On the 21<sup>st</sup> September, another eulogy to Alexander appears in the *Auckland Star*, this time from Frederick Villiers, "the great war correspondent." Villiers was on a world tour giving lantern-slide lectures on the Sino-Japanese war and seemed to be running into problems with his voice during his shows at the City Hall. He thanks Alexander for his "suggestions re Voice Production" for he "can now talk for nearly two hours with much more comfort." He also thanks Alexander for "the charming morning spent with you and your art. I have never met anyone with so versatile a talent as a reciter. I shall follow your career round the world as a public entertainer with the keenest interest."

As with the Loisettes eulogy Alexander uses this piece of publicity as an opportunity to tell the newspaper's readers that they had better hurry to sign up for lessons with him for he is leaving the city in early December to go to America via the 'principal Australian cities'. On another page the news section reports that Villiers had given Alexander a 'splendid letter of introduction to Major Pond, the great American manager James Burton Pond, the New York based lecture tour manager who had organized Villiers' visit to Auckland also managed Mark Twain who was to give lectures and readings in the city later that year. By the time Alexander eventually reached America in 1914 Pond had been dead for ten years.

Villiers, writing twenty-five years later in what reads now as an appallingly self-congratulatory reminiscence, makes no reference either to Alexander or to his visit to New Zealand. What he does recall however, is an earlier visit to Tasmania to see his old friend the island's elderly Governor, the Irish peer Lord Gormanston, Gormanston had been the 'patron' of Alexander's concert on June 29th 1894.

Alexander was not the only person to promote 'the cultivation of the voice' in the pages of the *Auckland Star* on the 29th of September "Professor" Albert Richardson, one-time "principal baritone" in the Carl Rosa and Lyster opera companies and "pupil of Manuel Garcia (the master of Patti) and Signor Nava (the master of Santley)", offers private lessons. No eulogies for him, just the usual "circulars and testimonials from the highest European masters" available on request.

Six weeks later Walter Moore, Hon Sec. of the Pupil's Committee, "an exceptionally strong Committee of Ladies and Gentlemen who have received benefit from Mr Alexander's tuition in elocution," announces "Under the Patronage of His Worship the Mayor," there will be a "Complementary Farewell" to Alexander at the City Hall on Wednesday November 20th. Positively his last appearance in Auckland, Mark Twain was to make his first on the same boards a night later.

Auckland's Mayor, the building contractor. James Job Holland had somewhat of history of supporting events at the City Hall, which, after all, his firm had built. In July, he had been "patron" of one of Loisettes lectures on Assimilative Memory and had lent his name to an advertisement of Loisettes system along with that of the colony's governor.

The "Farewell" was a mixture of popular songs, piano and violin solos by students with Alexander giving a couple of recitations in the first half followed in the second by a performance of "how Bill Adams won the Battle of Waterloo shown in dramatic performance (pictorially illustrated with slides never before shown in Auckland)."

But for Alexander the high point of the evening was receiving from the Mayor not only a eulogy on his ability as an elocutionist a “handsome testimonial” which had been prepared by his pupils.

It is not certain whether Alexander left New Zealand as he had promised in early December 1895 for his name appears in the 1896 edition of *The Auckland Directory* as continuing to practise from the studio in the Victoria Arcade. In 1897 another elocutionist, Lucas Albert, is advertising for pupils from the same address.

Alexander next appears as a "Vocal Art Teacher" in Melbourne in 1896 where he has a room on the 7th floor of Australia Buildings, a new block of offices which stood on the west side of Elizabeth Street just up from Flinders Street Station. On the same floor were the small offices of an architect, a jeweler, a costumier and a concentrated food manufacturer. He appears to stay at this address until 1899 the year when he probably moved to Sydney.