

**MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE:  
CONSCIOUS GUIDANCE AND  
CONTROL IN RELATION TO  
HUMAN EVOLUTION IN  
CIVILIZATION**

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in Civilization by Frederick Matthias Alexander

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**FREDERICK MATTHIAS ALEXANDER**

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# MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE

Conscious Guidance and Control in  
Relation to Human Evolution  
in Civilization

BY

F. MATTHIAS ALEXANDER

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY WORD BY  
PROFESSOR JOHN DEWEY

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## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

(London, 1910)

Among my intimates I once numbered a boatman known as Old Sol, or to his familiars just Sol, without the courtesy title, for he was not notably old. I could not say whether his name was an abbreviated form of Solomon or not, nor if it were, whether the longer name was baptismal or conferred in later years as a tribute to his undoubted wisdom. I have thought it possible that the name was not an abbreviation at all, but it was certainly descriptive of my friend's habit of optimism in regard to the weather. For the cockney oarsman who doubtfully contemplated the weather conditions on the upper Thames, Sol was unwavering in his encouragement. His certainty that the weather would clear and the sun come out was so inspiring that the pale-faced Londoner cheerfully faced the most unpromising outlook, and started out on his uncertain course upstream, buoyed with a beautiful confidence in Old Sol's infallibility. But for me and for his other intimates, regular clients whose custom was not dependent on the chances of a fine week-end, Sol had another method. In answer to the usual ques-

tion, "Well, Sol, what's it going to do?" he would first look up into the sky, then step to the edge of the landing-stage and study as much of the horizon as was within his limit of vision. After this careful survey he would deliver his opinion judicially, and I rarely found him at fault in his prophecy.

Facing my critics, lay and professional, I wish at the outset to disclaim the methods by which Sol invigorated the casual amateur. I am not prophesying unlimited sunshine for every one, without regard to conditions. In this book no mention will be found of royal roads, panaceas, or grand specifics. I have attempted rather to treat every reader as Sol treated his intimates. I have looked into the sky and made a careful survey of the horizon. It is true that I have seen an ideal and the promise of its fulfilment, but my deductions have been drawn with patient care from signs which I have studied with diligence; if I am an optimist, it is because I see the promise of fair weather, and not because I wish to delude the unwary. And with this I will lay down my metaphor and come to a practical statement.

I know that I shall be regarded in many quarters as a revolutionary and a heretic, for my theory and practice, though founded on a principle as old as the life of man, are not in accord with, nor even a development of, the tradition which still obtains. But in thus rejecting tradition I am, happily, sustained by something more than an unproved theory.

Moreover, on this firm ground I do not stand alone. Though my theory may appear revolutionary and heretical, it is shared by men of attainment in science and medicine. On a small scale I have made many converts, and in now making appeal to a wider circle I am upheld by the knowledge that what I have to say can no longer be classed as an isolated opinion.

Not that I should have hesitated to come forward now, even if I had been without support. During the past thirteen years I have built up a practice in London which has reached the bounds of my capacity. This work has not been done by any advancement of a wavering hypothesis. I have had cases brought to me as the result of the failure of many kinds of treatment, of rest cures, relaxation cures, hypnotism, faith cures, physical culture, and the ordinary medical prescriptions, and in the treatment of these cases, in my own observations, and in the appreciation of the patients themselves, I have had abundant opportunity to prove to my own satisfaction that in its application to present needs my theory has stood the test of practice in every circumstance and condition.

That the limits imposed by the present work render it woefully inadequate I am quite willing to admit, but the necessity for a certain urgency has been forced upon me, and I have deemed it wiser to outline my subject at once rather than wait for the time when I shall be ready to publish my larger work.



Indeed, when I think of the material even now at my command, of the wonderful and ever-increasing list of illustrative cases that have passed and are still passing through my hands, it seems to me that this preliminary treatise might well grow, like Frazer's *Golden Bough*, from one volume to twelve. In the present volume, however, I must confine myself to the primary argument and to indicating the direction in which we may find physical completeness. In the work which will follow I shall deal with the detailed evidence of the application of my theory to life, of cases and cures, and all the substance of experience.

And there are many reasons why I should hesitate no longer in making my preliminary appeal, chief among them being the appalling physical deterioration that can be seen by any intelligent observer who will walk the streets of London or New York, for example, and note the form and aspect of the average individuals who make up the crowd. So much for the surface signs. What inferences can we not draw from the statistics? To take three instances only: What of the disproportionate and apparently undeniable increase in the cases of cancer, appendicitis, and insanity? For that increase goes on despite the fact that we have taken the subject seriously to heart. Now I would not fall into the common fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, and say that because the increase of these evils has gone hand-in-hand with our endeavours to raise

the standard by physical-culture theories, relaxation exercises, rest cures, and *hoc genus omne*, therefore the one is the result of the other; but, lacking more definite proof on the first point, I do maintain that if physical-culture exercises, etc., had done all that was expected of them they must be considered a complete failure in the checking of the three evils I have instanced.

Are these troubles, then, still to increase? Are we to wait while the bacteriologist patiently investigates the nature of these diseases, until he triumphantly isolates some characteristic germ and announces that here, at last, is the dread bacillus of cancer?<sup>1</sup> Should we even then be any nearer a cure? Could we rely on inoculation, and even if we could, what is to be the end? Are we to be inoculated against every known disease till our bodies become depressed and enervated sterilities, incapable of action on their own account? I pray not, for such a physical condition would imply a mental condition even more pitiable. The science of bacteriology has its uses, but they are the uses of research rather than of application. Bacteriology reveals a few of the agents active in disease, but it says nothing about the conditions which permit these agents to become active. Therefore I look to

<sup>1</sup>Modern investigators, however, almost unanimously incline now to the theory that the cause of cancer is a morbid proliferation of the cells not due to the primary influence or isolation of alien bacteria.

that wonderful instrument, the human body, for the true solution of our difficulty, an instrument so inimitably adaptable, so full of marvellous potentialities of resistance and recuperation, that it is able, when properly used, to overcome all the forces of disease which may be arrayed against it.

In this thing I do not address myself to any one class or section of the community. I have tried in what follows to avoid, so far as may be, any terminology, any medical or scientific phrases and technicalities, and to speak to the entire intelligent public. I wish the scheme I have here adumbrated to be taken up universally, and not to be restricted to the advantage of any one body, medical or otherwise. I wish to do away with such teachers as I am myself. My place in the present economy is due to a misunderstanding of the causes of our present physical disability, and when this disability is finally eliminated the specialised practitioner will have no place, no uses. This may be a dream of the future, but in its beginnings it is now capable of realisation. Every man, woman, and child holds the possibility of physical perfection; it rests with each of us to attain it by personal understanding and effort.

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