

The Man, The Book, The Lessons: The Chiropractor's Adjuster, 1910

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Out of print nearly forty years, this important historical text was re-issued in early 1949 by The Chiropractic Research Bureau. It was again reprinted in 1966 by D. D. Palmer's grandson, David Palmer. Yet today it remains underutilized due to poor indexing and lack of organization. This paper gives the reader a better appreciation of the text's contents and provides expanded indexing. *The Adjuster* has much to tell us about chiropractic's roots. Scattered throughout its pages is a wealth of important information about our founder and other important early leaders. Hidden within its pages is the fact Palmer referenced over fifty of the most noted medical anatomists and physiologists of his time. This text contains controversial philosophical and scientific beliefs and ideas held by D. D. Palmer which still have an impact today. It is hoped this paper will stimulate historical and philosophical research into Palmer's ideas.

The Science Art and Philosophy of Chiropractic has been an intriguing text since its publication in 1910. Until its re-issue in early 1949 by The Chiropractic Research Bureau (part of the old National Chiropractic Association), copies of the text had been extremely scarce in the profession (Griffin 1990 a,c; Rogers 1935).

Long-time chiropractor Dr. L. K. Griffin believes there are only seven existing original copies of the text. He recalls the book the N.C.A. copied belonged to Senator Neal Bishop, D.C. (Griffin, 1990). Palmer College librarian Glenda Wiese, M.A. demonstrated to me how to tell originals from reprints (Wiese, 1990). The originals have a distinctive white binding with narrow red strips. The archives copy of the 1949 reprint, for instance, has a blue and white binding. My personal 1980's reprint has an orange and red binding as yet another variation. Another curious fact is the original was published in 1910 but copyrighted in 1911 (Rogers, 1935). The archives original has the copyright written in over the 1910 date.

It is commonly believed today that Dave Palmer's 1966 reprint was the first. Not only did the N.C.A. re-issue it in 1949 but Dr. Griffin obtained a copy for \$8.50 at the Parker Foundation in January of 1961. Although its availability is yet unknown, it must be surmised that the text was available in the 1950's.

There have been charges that most of the original copies were bought up by early leaders of the profession to avoid its distribution among chiropractors (Terrett 1988, 156). Those charges may very well be true considering what the elder Palmer had to say about the ideas of many of these people. Certainly this book represented a personal and professional threat to several of them. Unfortunately for them, the N.C.A. journal regularly quoted and commented upon the text in the 1930's and 40's thus keeping alive knowledge of it (Rogers, L.M. 1935; Schraiber, 1948; Schwartz, 1939).

What value has this text for us today? This book is a unique historical window on the early profession. It is chiropractic's single richest source of history about the central characters and issues of those early years. As several chiropractic historians have shown, understanding and utilizing this text is essential if we chiropractors are to write our own history (Brantingham, 1986; Gromola, 1986; Peslherbe, 1986a,b, 1988; Terrett, 1986). Perhaps surprisingly, it can also demonstrate, if we choose to look, how D.D. Palmer still influences our profession's philosophy and scientific attitudes.

Chiropractors need to take a realistic look at Palmer. We need to know about him as a person to understand his ideas and ultimately how they effect our ideas. Fortunately, the book gives us a glimpse of what kind of person our founder was. To be sure, there is anger and a sense of betrayal towards those who he felt attempted to deprive him of the honor of founding chiropractic. But, that anger is over-weighted by

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the obvious quality of his mind, not to mention his wit and humor. *The Adjuster* also reveals a feisty and interesting little man (he was 5'4") (Palmer, 1910, 387). He was fascinated by unusual stories. His book included newspaper accounts of freak happenings from lightning strikes to snake bites curing mental illness.

D.D.'s test reveals a man of a very pragmatic nature. He gave his readers numerous bits of practical clinical and business advice. These included anything from money savings tips to matters of etiquette. He recommended the use of napkins for face paper on adjusting tables. Napkins were only "85 cents a 1,000, are clean and save laundry bills" (Palmer, 1910, 162). D.D. also advised one chiropractor "it is not in good taste to place both Dr. and D.C. to your name (Palmer, 1910, 579)." A few of us could use that advice today.

Palmer's practical nature seemed to have a "preachy" side as well. He appeared prone to dispense "pearls of wisdom" about the world. He wrote commentary like:

"He that cannot or will not reason is a fool (Palmer, 1910, 816)."

"The bridge of life has many loose planks and others are greased. It does seem at times as though someone had greased the loose planks, thereby insuring our downfall. We are not always to blame for our falling, but there is no benefit in remaining down; get up and go ahead (Palmer, 1910, 876)."

Dr. Palmer was described as "combative" and "aggressive," one who liked a good quarrel (Gielow, 1981, 129-33). It was noted he was the type of person who friends delighted in getting "oiled up to a proper condition (Gielow, 1981, 1310)." These characteristics are evident in his writing. Certainly, he wasn't one to mince words. Neither was he one who "suffered fools well." His manner of "adjusting" other chiropractors' assertions or ideas could range from mild sarcasm to outright ridicule.

Dr. Palmer's attorney, patient and friend, Cornelius H. Murphy reminded us that D.D. had a sense of humor that helped counter-balance his serious side (Gielow, 1981, 132). Fortunately, *The Adjuster* contains a few samples of his humor.

"A D.O. wants to know how we can give corrective treatment for spinal lesions when the patient is flat on his back with typhoid.

Turn him over—to a Chiropractor, of course (Palmer, 1910, 980)."

"Why are cats like skilled surgeons? Because they mew-tilate and annoy our patience (Palmer, 1910, 778)."

If D.D. Palmer had been a quiet introvert, chiropractic would never have survived. But, his autocratic, cocksure attitude surely effected the course of the profession in ways that weren't advantageous. For example, D.D. had shaky relationships with his business and professional partners such as his son B.J. and Alva Gregory. His many stormy chiropractic ventures surely helped create much of the divisiveness that plagues the profession even today. Therefore, knowledge of D.D. as a person can give chiropractic historians and

philosophers insight as to how the profession came to be the way it is. Such knowledge can help us shape chiropractic for the better.

One caveat must be issued to anyone attempting to read this book. Dr. Palmer's text cannot be understood without a firm grasp of chiropractic history. Anyone attempting to interpret this text out of the context of time (early twentieth century), Palmer's life and developments in early chiropractic "politics" will be sorely disappointed. At minimum, the reader must be familiar with D.D. and B.J. Palmer, Willard Carver, A.P. Davis and Oakley Smith (see *Chiropractic History Cumulative Index* 1989). It would also be well to have a basic grasp of osteopathic history.

What emerges, with a little patience, in the over 1000 pages is astonishing. The book contains over 250 articles and commentaries over a variety of philosophical, scientific and clinical concerns. These are freely interspersed with hundreds of short pieces on a variety of subjects.

The Adjuster leaves one convinced that D.D. read nearly everything of any significance to chiropractors. And, from a scientific point of view, the text indicates he was well-read in the medical field. *The Adjuster* contains several hundred references to over fifty of the best medical textbooks of the time. Dr. Palmer also utilized seven dictionaries to document his use of terms and clarify his arguments. His subluxation theory was obviously based upon a great deal of study. If all the reference materials included in the text were assembled, they would fill a small library.

An examination of the text reveals one conspicuous absence. That is the lack of philosophical references. Since Palmer emphasized philosophy so strongly, it might seem curious the text is so lacking in references to either orthodox philosophical works or those of philosophy of science. This shortcoming is because Palmer's philosophical ideas were not as orthodox as his scientific ones. His philosophical beliefs stemmed largely from his involvement with the "metaphysical movement" of his time (Donahue, 1986, 1987). We'll examine some of the implications of this later in this paper.

The Adjuster undoubtedly contains much of Palmer's work of the previous five years. A significant portion of this work seems to be expansions on topics originally introduced in the Palmer School journal, *The Chiropractor*, circa 1905-6. Many of the articles were probably classroom lectures utilized in the several schools D.D. had been involved with. Other articles may have been from private "seminar" lectures delivered to small groups of chiropractors in the Midwest and on the West coast. Still other articles must have been taken from his short-lived Portland, Oregon journal, *The Adjuster*. At this time, it is impossible to tell how much of the work was composed specifically for the book.

The unprepared reader can easily be frustrated by the nearly random order of the contents of the book. The text's contents lack organization into chapters or even groups of related topics which would greatly aid the reader. Couple this problem with a freewheeling mix of articles, correspondence, news items and commentaries and the effect is exasperating. Worse, many pieces are untitled, not referenced or have people referred to but not named. Today we can often only guess what significance each of these pieces once had.

A correctable weakness is *The Adjuster's* incomplete index which prevents more systematic study of its contents. This problem will be partially rectified by an index to names and publications accompanying this article. Hopefully, future historians will add to and expand Dr. Palmer's original index.

The reader must understand why indexing and organization weren't major concerns of Dr. Palmer. This book was not primarily intended to serve as a "teaching" text in the usual sense. D.D. referred to it as *The Chiropractor's Adjuster* because his primary purpose was to make corrections in the perceived errors of other chiropractors. Of such "errors," the greatest concern to him was scope-of-practice considerations. As The Founder, he considered himself "the authority" on chiropractic "scope."

Here is how Dr. Palmer explained *The Adjusters* purpose.

"*The Adjuster* will be the mouth-piece of the original adjuster. It will present Chiropractic normally just as it should be; as it was originally intended to be by the discover. It will adjust all abnormalities found in chiropractic literature; that right is inherent. This adjusting will be done on crippled literature, with the same pleasure, satisfaction and good feelings as we would that of an injured person (Palmer, 1910, 16)."

There were undoubtedly several related reasons D.D. published this book. Surely, he wanted to assure his place in history as the founder of chiropractic. Much of the first part of *The Adjuster* deals with establishing that fact. Why did D.D. feel a need to clarify this apparently obvious fact? The emerging leadership such as his son B.J., Willard Carver and Solon Langworthy each worked to solidify his individual position in the profession. This could only be accomplished by diminishing Dr. Palmer's importance. After all, there was that uncomfortable fact that the founder was still alive . . . and working? Certainly, D.D.'s authority had to be circumvented if one was to sell books and attract students from rival institutions.

Langworthy, for example, attempted to obscure chiropractic's origins as but an extension of old world "Bohemian" bonesetting (Zarback, 1986, 77-82). B.J. Palmer, as another example, fashioned himself as the "developer" of chiropractic, implying his father was only the "crude" founder. Other erstwhile leaders developed their own particular strategies to cope with The Founder's presence.

Unquestionably, D.D. Palmer was also trying to reassert his influence on the profession he had founded (Gromola, 1986). By 1910, he had largely been eclipsed by a younger group, many of whom he had taught. What better way to regain control than to dispatch your rivals in one book: What quicker way to accomplish this than to simply compile many of your existing writings? And, why waste precious time laboriously organizing the contents if you have something better in mind? It is quite likely *The Adjuster* was intended to clear the way for Dr. Palmer's second book (Palmer, 1914). This second text, although never completed, did follow a more classical "instructional" format.

While paging through *The Adjuster* one can almost see "Old Dad Chiro" pounding away on his typewriter and setting the world of chiropractic right. Dr. Palmer was relentless in

"adjusting" all manner of error in the profession. No error was too insignificant to draw his attention. Even simple business cards or patient education pamphlets were not safe if he felt they misrepresented chiropractic. Misuse a word and you were liable to be corrected from several of the dictionaries he used. Make factual errors about anatomy or physiology and you would suffer numerous citations from noted medical authorities.

Undoubtedly, the few pioneer chiropractors to get copies were grateful despite any organizational weaknesses. For early chiropractors, *The Adjuster* contained valuable information on pertinent anatomy, physiology and neurology. Also, the text spent considerable time differentiating chiropractic from osteopathy. D.D. often quoted and critiqued osteopathic writings, especially those of founder, A.T. Still. These critiques would have been a valuable aid to early chiropractors. Surely they needed to educate a confused public about the differences between the two professions. Furthermore, the text also made early chiropractors privy to significant correspondence between Dr. Palmer and field practitioners. This correspondence questioned Dr. Palmer about a variety of items, from philosophy to technique, sure to be of professional interest to isolated doctors.

More important to his reader, however, must have been D.D.'s "adjusting" the works and teachings of many of the early chiropractic leaders. The most commonly criticized teachers were his son B.J., A.P. Davis and Willard Carver. Collectively, criticisms of these three men's work consume many pages of the text. Read through D.D.'s critiques of these chiropractic rivals and it is quite plausible that one or more of them might have attempted to suppress his book. They must have shuddered under D.D.'s repeated and pointed attacks on their ideas and concepts.

He summed up several early chiropractic texts this way.

"Neuropathy, by Davis—'Chiropractic, really what we call neurology,' and Chiropractic Analysis, by Carver, have nothing in them that is really Chiropractic. Spinal Adjustment, by Gregory, contains much that is Chiropractic and some that is not (Palmer, 1910, 981)."

Surprisingly, he did not read Langworthy's *Modernized Chiropractic* (Palmer, 1910, 981). Whether this reflects an inability to obtain a copy or Langworthy's insignificance by 1910 is hard to say.

Not surprisingly, D.D. had the harshest and most words for his son, B.J. He flatly stated B.J.'s books were "not worth the paper they have worse than wasted, because of their erroneous teaching (Palmer, 1910, 981)." Time and again, Dr. D.D. attacked B.J.'s ridiculous teachings such as "direct mental impulses" and the related contention that the sympathetic nervous system didn't exist (Palmer, 1910, 426, 507-8).

While B.J. boldly fashioned himself as the "developer" of chiropractic, D.D. sarcastically referred to him as the "enveloper" (Palmer, 1910, 700). The elder Palmer was furious that the younger Palmer often plagiarized his and other's works (Palmer, 1910, 639-42, 744). Historical insight into the professional side of the Palmer father/son relationships alone would make a serious study of *The Adjuster* worthwhile. This

relationship's impact on B.J.'s personality and thereby the emerging profession has great relevance to the profession today (Quigley, 1989). Consider for instance, B.J.'s attitudes and beliefs, borrowed from his father, that shaped the "mixer/straight" division still with us today.

As noted at the outset, Daniel David Palmer is still with us today in the form of philosophical and scientific beliefs he left us. Historical analysis will reveal many lessons we need to learn about these beliefs. While many of these are useful others need to be re-examined. For instance, Palmer initiated the unorthodox notion, still shared by many chiropractors, that chiropractic is a science with its own separate nonscientific (i.e. mystical) philosophy. Clearly, that view of philosophy is controversial and not shared by any other scientific discipline. Since D.D.'s views about philosophy extend into every aspect of the profession, they are historically very important.

D.D. Palmer had some rather curious notions about "chiropractic philosophy." For instance, he saw his philosophy as the "explainer" of chiropractic science (Palmer, 1910, 879). This claim seems strange given that scientific tradition largely sees philosophy's role as analytic and useful for minimizing scientific error. In a later writing, he claimed his Innate Philosophy to be the "science of sciences" (Palmer, 1914, 3). This seems a rather pretentious philosophical claim for a small member of the health sciences which in its turn was a small part of the whole field of science.

Certainly, *The Adjuster* indicates Dr. Palmer initiated the unorthodox views of philosophy chiropractors hold to this day. Innate philosophy, when examined, is but another version of the many "mesmeristic" healing and religious philosophies that sprang up in 19th century America. As Fuller has noted,

"this monistic or emanationist cosmology was not unique to Palmer or to chiropractic; it also appeared in much of the mermerist, spiritualist, and Theosophical literature with which Palmer was familiar and from which he so self-consciously borrowed (Fuller, 1989, 72)."

What is historically important is D.D., and son B.J., convinced nearly the whole profession of the notion that "chiropractic philosophy" was equivalent to Innate philosophy. The profession's "straight/mixer" division resulted from acceptance of this one unexamined assumption. The only quarrel seems to be whether one accepts or rejects Innate philosophy. The "straight" side has strongly argued that "Palmer philosophy" was necessary and "right." They reasoned with the Palmers that chiropractic was a "philosophical science." On the other hand, "mixers" seeing the incongruities between orthodox science and the Palmer Innate philosophy, have therefore charged that philosophy has no place in our science. Their aversion to the Palmer philosophy's theistic approach was understandable. Unfortunately, their assumption, that all philosophy is dogma, led them to reject chiropractic philosophy *per se* (Dallas, 1988; Giller, 1971; Savage, 1983). Obviously, chiropractic insularity from the scientific community left it unaware of the role philosophy of science plays in every science.

What appears to be little appreciated is that *The Adjuster* contains a great deal about D.D.'s "other philosophy." This "other philosophy" as the late Joseph Janse said, "was essentially a holistic concept, and therefore a Coan approach to the healing arts (Janse, 1975, 26)." *The Adjuster* is full of references and articles that demonstrate Palmer considered each patient unique. He wanted his students to understand that neither overly rigid nor sloppy clinical procedures were acceptable. Time and again D. D. Palmer talked in terms of disease as a functional disturbance and not a thing or entity that attacked the body from outside in. Indeed, his principle of tone was an affirmation of basic beliefs about health dating back to at least the original Coan, Hippocrates of Cos (c460-c377 B.C.). It seems imperative that modern chiropractors study D.D.'s *Adjuster* to help stimulate a philosophical synthesis between "mixer" and "straight" and our philosophy and philosophy of science.

This text has other lessons for us. It reveals that D.D. Palmer assumed an "authoritarian" stance over the profession. We noted earlier, D.D. felt it was his "right" to control the profession's development in terms of scope-of-practice and philosophy. Chiropractic historians and philosophers need to examine what, if any, "right" D.D. Palmer had to control the emerging profession. The profession needs to consider Palmer's descendants (i.e., "straights") contention that chiropractic should be limited to a "one theory" science (i.e., subluxation). Does this contention make logical, philosophical or scientific sense? What other science maintains such a "one theory" notion? What if physics had limited itself to Newton's theories?

Our profession also needs to find limits to "mixer" practices. Perhaps studying D.D.'s "other philosophy" can help us find sensible limits to chiropractic scope. Surely, a chiropractic "Coan" philosophy can meet challenges such as the inclusion of pharmaceuticals into the profession. Hopefully, an integration of philosophy of science with Palmer's Coan philosophy can help us create a unified philosophy of chiropractic.

This text also leaves us with other troublesome philosophic problems to ponder and hopefully resolve. One example is the Palmer insistence that chiropractors don't treat disease. Yet at the end of *The Adjuster* D.D. left chiropractors a whole list of diseases with the proper adjustment to make for each one. Hasn't he contradicted himself? How we resolve this apparent contradiction about disease is not idle thinking. Our view of disease is critical to how we approach chiropractic research and ultimately how we practice in our offices.

On the scientific side, Dr. Palmer left us with distinctively "chiropractic" procedures such as the high velocity, low amplitude adjustive thrust (Palmer, 1910, 982). But, behind such procedures, there are often attitudes, ideas and assumptions many of us never think to question. For instance, the idea that the subluxation is a "fact" and not a theory (Palmer, 1910, 226). And, the accompanying attitude that to question the clinical reality of the subluxation is professional heresy rather than good science. Certainly, there are many more ideas, concepts and assumptions first espoused by Dr. Palmer

in *The Adjuster* that chiropractors need to become aware of and come to grips with.

The Chiropractor's Adjuster is indeed a unique and historically important document. Hopefully, the updated indexing will not only allow us to utilize the richness of this text but also to better appreciate our great founder. Consider, for a moment, that in the last years of his life, while traveling frequently, he was an administrator, author, clinician,

teacher, and researcher. That no man could wear all these hats equally is understandable. But, at a minimum, as Terrett has said, "he should be recognized as a pioneer and major contributor in the field of manipulative medicine (Terrett, 1986, 150)."

That D.D. Palmer would be wrong about some things was inevitable. That he was right about so much is incredible.

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Supplemental indexes to The Chiropractor's Adjuster
(compiled for the AHC in 1989 by Joseph Donahue, D.C.)

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D.D. Palmer's maximum opus, *The Chiropractor's Adjuster*, was completed by "Old Dad Chiro" in Portland in 1909-10. The author of this study contends that much of the original work was kept alive through the publications and journals of the "mixers" prior to their 1949 reprint. Palmer's grandson, David Daniel Palmer, republished the book in 1966. Above left: With early grads, D.D. at left and B.J. at right.