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Old Dad Chiro Comes to Portland, 1908-10

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Old Dad Chiro Comes to Portland, 1908-10

Roses fragrant, roses rare; roses, roses everywhere. Portland is the "Rose City" (Palmer, 1910b, p. 6).

Introduction

In late October, 1908 D.D. Palmer and his fifth wife, Mary Hudler Palmer, arrived in Portland, Oregon and commenced a most important phase in his chiropractic career. Although it is well known that Old Dad Chiro wrote his classic text, *The Chiropractor's Adjustor: the Science, Art & Philosophy of Chiropractic*, during his several years in the northwest, most accounts of Palmer's life provide only sketchy details of this crucial period in the evolution of chiropractic thought. Indeed, Gielow, Palmer's preeminent biographer, devotes only 2 of 133 pages of his text to DD's Portland years. Moreover, although it has long been recognized that Palmer's 1910 volume was in part a compilation of the various materials published in his Portland journal, little attention has been given to the periodical and the stories it tells.

Anna Powell, D.C., an early Portland chiropractor, suggested that DD's interest in establishing a Portland school was in reaction to a lecture series in the city given by B.J. and Mabel Palmer in July, 1908 at the request of a number of Portland area chiropractors. That BJ would have received such a request seems not at all surprising, since several of the Portland DCs were graduates of the Davenport institution, including Leroy M. Gordon, George S. Breitling and John E. Marsh.

The D.D. Palmer College of Chiropractic

On Monday, 9 November 1908 the D.D. Palmer College of Chiropractic began operations. Palmer was its president, and Leroy M. Gordon, D.C., graduate of the original Palmer School in Iowa, would soon become DD's partner and business manager of the school:

UPON a visit from Dr. D.D. Palmer, who was in Portland investigating what seemed to be a very flattering offer to establish a school, I became very much impressed with him. In conversation I found him to be a deep thinker, and with the ability to reach the depths of his subject which he has carefully weighed and analyzed, therefore, when he decided to open a school, I was more than pleased to become a student. A few days later he suggested that I become a partner. After due consideration I decided to accept his offer...

L.M. GORDON, D.C. (Palmer, 1909a, p. 13)

The nature of the "flattering offer to establish a school" is unclear. In any case, a photo of the first 13 students at the D.D. Palmer College soon appeared in Palmer's new journal, and included Gordon, George S. Breitling, D.C., John E. LaValley, D.C., John E. Marsh, D.C. and several more of the same DCs who had previously sponsored BJ's lectures in Portland. A letter dated 12 December 1908 from

Cleveland, Ohio chiropractor M.J. Mapes to Dr. Breitling reflects the continuing hostility between the senior Palmer and his son, and the apparent competition to start a school in the northwest:

I understand Dr. D.D. Palmer and Dr. Gordon have started a school in Portland; that BJ was looking towards your city to locate his school, but it now looks as if the Old Man got there first and will get the fruits of BJ's labor. (Palmer, 1909a, p. 11)

John E. LaValley, D.C., who's account would not be recorded for another four decades, can be forgiven for crediting himself as Palmer's co-founder. Moreover, it is not impossible that LaValley had been a silent partner in the College. However, the second and third issues (January and March, 1909) of Palmer's journal, *The Chiropractor Adjuster*, clearly list L.M. Gordon, D.C. as manager of the school, then located at 205 Oregonian Building in Portland. By September, 1909 LaValley had replaced Gordon as manager of the College, and the institution had relocated to the fourth floor of the Drexel Building at SW Second Avenue and Yamhill in Portland.

The D.D. Palmer College was rather innovative among chiropractic institutions, at least in intention. Palmer initially proposed an 18 month curriculum extending over two years to include dissection, minor surgery and obstetrics. The tuition was \$250 per year for two years, but DD apparently granted his students their diplomas after one year, and instruction in dissection may never have been provided. In reference to obstetrics, Old Dad Chiro would write:

...A Chiropractor should be able to care for any condition which may arise in the families under his care, the same as a physician; this we intend to make possible in a two year's course (Palmer, 1910b, p. 789).

His writings suggest dissatisfaction with his pupils:

...I could count on my two hands all those who are desirous of knowing or capable of learning (either result being the same) all of Chiropractic as presented to the Portland class or to the readers of the Adjuster. If I can leave in this world ten educators who comprehend the principles of Chiropractic mutually associated as a science, those who can make a practical scientific application of the art of adjusting, that will be ten times more than the originator found when he began developing that first adjustment into a science and an art. (Palmer, 1910a, p. 12).

Anna Powell, D.C. later recorded that Palmer's students had "walked out" after DD "openly attacked him (B.J.) in class and made some unfortunate remark about his first wife, B.J.'s mother...". With Palmer's departure from Oregon in 1910, the D.D. Palmer College ceased to operate as such, but its derivative, LaValley's Oregon Peerless College of Chiropractic & Neuropathy, continued to emphasize its connection to the founder. Peerless College merged with the Pacific College of Chiropractic in 1912; the product of this merger, known as the Pacific Chiropractic College, would be purchased by William Alfred Budden, D.C., N.D. in 1929, and eventually became today's Western States Chiropractic College.

The Chiropractor Adjuster

Not to be confused with his 1910 volume of similar title, the *Adjuster* first appeared in October 1908. Intended as a monthly magazine and containing 60⁺ pages per issue, the periodical, as its name implies, would correct the errors DD found in the writings of chiropractors, particularly those of B.J. Palmer. However, Dad Chiro was not able to keep to his planned schedule. Beginning with the January 1909 issue (Volume 1, Number 2) the *Adjuster* appeared about every two months, was printed by A.E. Kern & Co. of Portland, and was published by the D.D. Palmer College. The last issue available to this writer (Volume 1, Number 8) is dated February 1910; whether Palmer fulfilled his contract to subscribers (12 issues per volume; \$1 per volume) is unclear. What is readily apparent is that much that would later appear in the 1910 book was reprinted from this journal. The December 1909 and February 1910 issues of the *Adjuster* mentioned the preparation of the volume.

Although many have reviewed and commented on DD's 1910 volume (e.g., Donahue, 1990; Turner, 1931), perusal of the *Adjuster* magazine is nonetheless refreshing. Palmer wrote for the sheer pleasure of writing. Much of the *Adjuster's* pages are filled with the biology he had studied and the chirobiology he devised, but a good portion is also devoted to descriptions of his social life, travels and local professional events; for example:

THE "PALMER KIDS" TAKE AN OUTING

The rivers of the Northwest have afforded D.D. Palmer and wife much pleasure during their vacation....Mount Hood can be seen at a distance of 25 miles, although it seems but a breakfast walk. It is 11,225 feet high (over two miles); can be reached by stage from Hood River....The "Palmer Kids" spent four days of their vacation at the Seattle Fair. The Japanese exhibition cannot be equaled by Americans. The Canadian display of apples was fine, considering the time of year - the best I ever saw..... (Palmer, 1909c, pp. 5-12).

Palmer repeatedly mentioned an ocean voyage taken during the 1909 Thanksgiving holiday, in part to determine whether adjusting could relieve seasickness (perhaps not):

SEASICKNESS

I said to Dr. Lavalley, my partner, that Chiropractic was good for smallpox, typhoid, corrosive sublimate and ptomaine poison, why not an antidote for seasickness? He said, "Go to sea and see, I will bear half the expense." I made no reply. When I arrived home I found that he had phoned: "Mother, prepare for a trip to sea."

Eight P.M., November 23d, found us on board the Geo. W. Elder. We were assigned stateroom 14, where we slept till morning. Below Astoria we were given numbers 33 and 34 at the breakfast table. It will be observed that the amount of these figures is "13," the unlucky number, at least such it proved to be toward our eating capacity for the next four days. Inside of a half hour we had lost our first meal on board ship (Palmer, 1910a, p. 6).

Old Dad's Iowa-corny humor was also much in evidence:

What is the greatest surgical operation on record? Lansing, Mich....

Why is a blush an exhibition of nerve? Because the woman who blushes is admired for her cheek...

Which travels the faster, heat or cold? Heat, of course, because any one can catch a cold...

When are people like pianos? When they are square, upright and in tune.

Why is a back biter like an adjuster? Because they both give it in the back... (Palmer, 1909a, p. 59).

True to his repeated exhortations to "give credit where due," DD refuted claims that he had composed "the famous Boston poem, 'The Path the Calf Made.' D.D. Palmer has never claimed to be a poet - he never composed a verse of poetry." However the verse, which would appear in the College's *Announcement* and in the 1910 book, was obviously modified to suit his chiropractic purposes, if not by him, by an admirer perhaps.

Old Dad fumed at his son's expropriation of title and credit for the discovery and development of chiropractic. He explicitly denied BJ's claim that he had studied phrenology, and belittled the correspondence course established at the Davenport institution. At times it seems his anger propelled his writing as he alternately mocked and condemned the man who had taken his Davenport school from him:

I have just finished the reading of 558 pages on the [BJ's] "Philosophy of Chiropractic." My great surprise is, that so much was written without saying something (Palmer, 1909d, p. 17).

and

The word Innate and its use, as one of the principles added to Chiropractic literature, was originated by D.D. Palmer, as was all the principles of Chiropractic. The only principle added by B.J. Palmer was that of greed and graft, aspiring to be the discoverer, developer, founder and the fountain head of a science brought forth by his father while he was a lad in his teens.

"O what a tangled web we weave,

"When first we practice to deceive." - SCOTT (Palmer, 1909c, p. 57).

The diverse range of topics Palmer covered in the *Adjuster* apparently appealed to his audience. The correspondence he reprinted included letters and testimonials from chiropractors and others across the American states, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Old Dad Chiro's Portland school and journal provided a partial reinstatement of his role as preeminent leader of the field he had established.

The Final Theory

The Portland years also witnessed the first published versions of Palmer's final chiropractic theories (see Table 1). In the pages of his Portland journal and book he made clear his revision of the notion (earlier published in *The Chiropractor* while still at Davenport) that foraminal occlusion compresses spinal roots:

...I have learned since that nerves are not 'pinched in foramina,' but, instead, are *impinged* by pressure of displaced bones...

Table 1: D.D. Palmer's concepts during three periods of publications

Concept:	<i>The Chiropractic</i> ^a (1897-1902)	<i>The Chiropractor</i> ^b (1904-06)	<i>The Chiropractor Adjuster;</i> ^c <i>The Chiropractor's Adjuster</i> (1908-10)
circulatory obstruction?	Yes	No	No
nerve pinching?	Yes	Yes	No
foraminal occlusion?	?	Yes	No
nerve vibration?	?	?	Yes
therapeusis?	Yes	No	No
method of intervention?	manipulation	adjustment	adjustment
innate/educated?	absent	nerves; Intelligence	Intelligence
religious plank?	absent	absent	optional?
machine metaphor?	Yes	Yes	Yes & No
tone?	(vital)	absent	Yes

^a*The Chiropractic* was the title of D.D. Palmer's journal during the early years of his practice in Davenport, Iowa

^b*The Chiropractor* was the title of the journal published by he and son B.J. Palmer beginning in December, 1904 from the Palmer School in Davenport.

^c*The Chiropractor Adjuster* was the title of D.D. Palmer's journal published in Portland by the D.D. Palmer College of Chiropractic, while *The Chiropractor's Adjuster* was the title of his book.

Palmer's rejection of nerve pinching is seen in his criticism of rival Portland educator W.O. Powell, D.C.'s supposedly mistaken idea that chiropractic involves removing nerve pressure in order that "full supply of nerve force reaches the starved and so-called diseased part of the body." Palmer rebutted, arguing that "The cause of nearly all diseases is an over-supply of nerve force; therefore, we have fever." Excessive (or reduced) nerve impulses were caused, he believed, by osseous impingements on nerves, which caused a stretching or slackening of the neural tissues, and thereby altered their vibrational frequency. The founder's Portland years saw his apparently earliest mentions of his vibrational theory of nerve conduction. Increased vibration supposedly raised the temperature of the nerves themselves and of the end-organs supplied by the nerve; conversely, increased or decreased bodily temperature could alter neural impulse rates.

Palmer also elaborated upon his ideas concerning Innate Intelligence. Although the former "innate" and "educated nerves" had already evolved into Innate and Educated Intelligences before his 1906 departure from Davenport, while in Portland DD's former neurological concepts took on elaborate theosophical significance:

That which I named innate (born with) is a segment of that Intelligence which fills the universe, this universe, all wise, is metamerized, divided into metameres as needed by each individualized being. This somatome of the whole, never sleeps nor tires, recognizes neither darkness nor distance, and is not subject to material laws or conditions. It continues to care for and direct the functions of the body as long as the soul [life] holds body and spirit together.... (Palmer, 1910b, pp. 491-2)

Innate is a part of the Creator....Innate (Spirit) is a part of Universal Intelligence, individualized and personified. Innate desires to assist the Chiropractor in making a correct diagnosis. The Universal Intelligence, collectively or individualized, desires to express itself in the best manner possible. It has been struggling for countless ages to improve upon itself- to express itself intellectually and physically higher in the scale of evolution (Palmer, 1910b, p. 691).

By 1910 Old Dad Chiro's efforts to unite the physical and the spiritual now also took on potential legal significance. Palmer's religious plank and his notion of a "moral and religious duty of the chiropractor," perhaps best elucidated in his posthumously published volume, *The Chiropractor*, were probably intended as a means of legitimizing the practice of chiropractic under the religious exemptions of various states' medical practice acts. However, despite a parallel adoption of a unique chiropractic jargon to "protect the child" (Howard, quoted in Beideman, 1983), Palmer's theology probably should not be dismissed as mere legal maneuvering. The theoretical motivation for his spiritualization of chirobiology is no less prominent in his Portland writings, and Donahue (1987) also credits the founder with "a theosophically inspired respect for science." Where Palmer in his 1902 writings had likened the human body to a machine, by 1910 he clearly saw things differently:

A machine is an inanimate mechanical contrivance operated by and designed to produce some mechanical effect; whereas, metabolism consists of a group of phenomena, which convert foodstuffs into tissue-elements (assimilation), and complex substances into simple end-products (dissimilation).

A human body is not a mill or machine. Health or disease are not manufactured products, they are conditions (Palmer, 1910a, p. 28).

As DD abandoned his earlier perceptions of man as machine, he seemingly re-discovered the vitalism in which his earliest practice methods had been based. "Vital tone," first mentioned in connection with his magnetic healing practice, reappears in the Portland years as a cornerstone of his final chiropractic theories:

Life is the expression of tone. In that sentence is the basic principle of Chiropractic. Tone is the normal degree of nerve tension. Tone is expressed in functions by normal elasticity, activity, strength and excitability of the various organs, as observed in a state of health. Consequently, the cause of disease is any variation of tone - nerves too tense or too slack (Palmer, 1910b, p. 7)

The *tone* of Palmer's 1910 theory may be understood as roughly synonymous with *health*, more specifically, the *neurally mediated health* of any cell or tissue in the body, including the nerves themselves and the end-organs they serve. Palmer had arrived at a theory of neurophysiology in which deviation from an undefined state of tissue normality (tone) was mediated by neural vibrations (impulses) which could: 1) be excessive due to stretching of the nerve (in which case local inflammation

or systemic fever was the result), or 2) be deficient secondary to slackening (in which case cold hard tumors would be produced), or 3) exhibit tone, that is, a "normal degree of nerve tension." In reading Palmer some confusion results from the application of this term (tone) to both the behavior of end-organs and the presumed neural influence on end-organ activity. Relatedly, Palmer's jargon confuses by applying the term interchangeably to describe "normal degree of nerve tension" and as a dimension along which neural activity may vary, as in "any variation of tone." This multiple usage parallels the interchangeability in meaning of the term health (as in health vs. more or less healthy), but in Old Dad Chiro's final theory, health is always a function of the nerves.

Conclusion

Perhaps the Rose City provided the mental space the founder needed for the concentrated writing which has become his enduring legacy. Yet, while he smelled the proverbial flowers, his pen often also seemed propelled by his ire at the many attempts to displace him from his role as the "Fountain Head" of chiropractic. His role as head of his final school, the D.D. Palmer College, although initially satisfying, apparently turned sour sometime in 1910. The exact reason for and date of his departure from Portland is not known to this writer, but it must have been a blow. His employer during 1911-12, T.F. Ratledge, D.C. of Los Angeles, would note of Old Dad Chiro that he "grieved over the termination with the PSC, at Davenport, and I believed that he was planning (or perhaps dreaming would better express it) to open another school of his own." D.D. Palmer would not live to realize the durability of his contribution to chiropractic education in the northwest.

Old Dad Chiro's Portland era merits further study.