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Viewpoints from Involvement -- "Thon"

New Standard Dictionary of the English Language, Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1913 -- Definition Thon

By Fred Barge, DC, PhC

Thon, that one, he, she, or it: a pronoun of the third person, common gender: a contracted and solidified form of that one, proposed in 1858 by Charles Crozat Converse, of Erie, Pennsylvania, as a substitute in cases where the use of a restrictive pronoun involves either inaccuracy or obscurity, or its non-employment necessitates awkward repetition. The following examples, first as ordinarily written and afterward with the substitution of the genderless pronoun, illustrate the grammatical deficiencies of the English language in this particular and the proposed method of removal: "If Harry or his wife comes, I will be on hand to meet him or her (or whichever appears)." "Each pupil must learn his or her own lesson." With the substitution of thon: "If Harry or his wife comes, I will be on hand to meet thon (i.e., that one who comes)," "Each pupil must learn thon's lesson (i.e., his or her own)."

Both B.J. and D.D. Palmer obviously agree with the inadequacies of the English language in this respect and early on used the word "thon," thus putting a good deal of effort into promoting its use.

This author has attempted to look into the word root origin of this word and, at this point, I have not met with great success except for the aforementioned dictionary. I can only assume it is correct and that the word came from the two words -- that one -- "thon." At any rate, as before stated, D.D. and B.J., rather than use person or he/she, his/her, them/their, etc., often used the word "thon." Let me give you just a few quotes from early Palmer writings. First, on page 393 of D.D. Palmer's 1910 tome, he states:

"Thon -- that one; he, she or it. A pronoun of the third person, common gender, a solidified and contracted form of that one. It is proposed as a substitute in any case where the use of a restrictive pronoun involves either inaccuracy or obscurity, or the non-employment necessitates an awkward repetition -- The Standard

Dictionary.

This is a word that deserves universal recognition, for the reason that it obviates the use of the awkward form "he, she or they," "his, her or their," etc. It is said to be in common use in some parts of Great Britain with the meaning given above. Thon is used in the singular or plural, as a nominative or objective, the possessive form being thon's -- Proofreaders' Style Book.

Webster's International Dictionary, 1910, says, "Thon (contraction of that one). A proposed pronoun of the third person."

So, D.D. Palmer explained the word "thon," and throughout the elder Palmer's writings can be found his usage of the word. For instance, on page 873 of the 1910 text is an example. Speaking of how to get a patient to relax while on the adjusting table, he states, "place thon's arms beside and parallel with the body, or the hands on the nates."

B.J. continues to carry on the effort, and in "Up from below the Bottom," speaking of religious beliefs and his particular viewpoints on the matter, he states, "God must be either male or female, or both, or be a law, principle, or rule, he called "thon" as "God" is the creator of all species and families."

From father through son in the writings of the Palmers, the word "thon" appears occasionally, as any astute reader of the Palmers will attest. With today's renewed interest in treating the female gender with equal respect, it is interesting to note that the Palmers, early on, wished to correct the English languages inadequacy in addressing both genders with equanimity.

Not only in language, but in placing women on an equal basis with men in the educational process, the Palmers were way ahead of their times. Notice, for instance, the number of women in D.D. Palmer's early classes. In fact, B.J. Palmer actively solicited women to become chiropractors and had a promotional brochure produced for the recruitment of women as students; it was named, "Women in Chiropractic." At one time, if a husband enrolled at the PSC, his wife could pursue the same course at no charge except for \$3; this fee covered the cost of her diploma. My own family history can be traced back to my two aunts, Emily and Alma. Unusual professional women for their times, they were both RNs, who pursued their DC degrees. They graduated from the Palmer College before my father; he graduated in 1923. I recall them both saying how, at the Palmer College, women were treated as equals with their male counterparts. Yes, the history of chiropractic shows no prejudice toward women, and as a result is replete with examples of great

women in chiropractic. For example, Dr. Mabel Palmer was one of the college's most revered instructors. To my knowledge, the average percent of women in our colleges today is 30 to 35 percent and rising.

As we deal with the continued and increased presence of women in our profession, and as we become increasingly aware of the inequities of the English language in respect to addressing women, let us remember that historically chiropractic has looked with favor on equal rights. Our founders were considered suffragists and referred to themselves as such.

During my time in California as acting president of Life Chiropractic College West in 1991, I was made even more aware of the womens' movement attempts to change our vernacular and verbiage as we speak and write the English language. At first, I thought this issue to be somewhat irrelevant, but as I became more aware of the indignities it implied, I have changed my mind. I have three daughters in the profession; two are DCs and one a CT (all three married chiropractors.) The biblical saying, "blessed are thou amongst women," comes to mind or, as I say, I married one and got four. But I jest, and I am not jesting on this matter. I do believe it is high time we took this matter seriously. But seriously, it is indeed cumbersome to write and speak using the him/her, he/she, them/their, the person, etc., alternative.

Perhaps I will use "thon" in my next book, but then, I certainly would have to have an author's note to explain its use. I'm truly surprised the word didn't take root, possibly the attempt was premature. But what about today? Should we, as chiropractors, give it a try again? I do believe the consciousness of "thon" is ready for it today.

Next month -- Unto the Least of These.

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