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J. S. Clark,
Director,
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An Interview with Mrs. G. A. Linscheid,
Canton, Oklahoma.

Family Life Among the Cheyenne Indians.

The family life of a people is influenced by various phases of its existence. Chief among these we might mention the religious views, the social and economic relations and the physical conditions.

The religious traditions and beliefs among the Cheyennes are brought to the on-coming generation by verbal repetition. The grandparents, and especially the grandmothers, are the ones who, as a rule, tell these, as well as other stories, to the younger generation. From their childhood on, they are taught to reverence sacred things, and they surely consider many objects as sacred; objects like the springs, thunder and lightning, certain animals, and all kinds of good and evil spirits. To them, everything seems to be alive with spirits, the trees, the hills, the springs, and innumerable other things. They also fear the spirits of the departed, and therefore dread going past a cemetery, especially by night.

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and will often sing or whistle at such an occasion to keep the evil spirits away. The children are also taught to respect older persons, especially their priests and their wives. They must never walk directly in front of them, but must get by some other way. When at occasions like our sewing meetings the little children would forget this, and try to pass in front of the chief's wife in order to get to their mother, they were invariably sent back and had to get to their mother some other way. The children are also taught to respect the medicine men and women and even to fear them; for these, supposedly, have the power to harm them. When a priest or medicine man has a small fire or heap of ashes before a sick party, no-one must pass directly in front of such a fire or ashes, but must get by on the other side of the room. Especially, no-one must pass between the fire and the sick party. The children are also raised fearing the spirits, for they are taught that these can cause sickness, misfortune, or twisting of their mouths, etc., to befall them. Indeed, sickness in general is looked upon as a visitation of some evil spirit, and

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the medicine man proceeds forthwith to try to drive out these evil spirits with his rattle and incantation. It is not so much the medicine he administers that is to effect the cure, as it is his power over the evil spirits. Often in case of sickness a number of these medicine men are called, so in case the power of one fails, a second or a third one may try his luck. These medicine men are held in great esteem, and when they are called into a home, all the inmates are anxious to serve them in any way they can.

In such a religious atmosphere of fear and dread, the children are raised, and this fear and dread stays with them all their lives. A good many years ago an old man among them had committed some wrong; displeased the thunder god, and lived in such fear of him that every time a storm came up, no matter what time of day or night it was, he forthwith hastened to the mission school for protection. None of the Indians wished to have him in tepees during a storm, for fear lightning would strike where he was. These gods seem very real to them, as the following incident shows:

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Just a few years ago, lightning struck a tree under which one of the Indian men was standing. He was stunned, and as soon as he came to himself, he said he would get his gun and shoot that thunder god that had stunned him.

It is an important event when religious gatherings take place, and the whole tribe is expected to be present. At such times their tents must all be in a certain place, each clan has its own part of the semicircle. This semicircle is open towards the east, and all tents are open towards the center of it where their sacred tent is placed. No-one must pass between the opening of the sacred tent and the buffalo skull which is placed a short distance east of it, or death will follow for the one so-doing.

Cheyennes do not punish their children. They will talk to them and admonish them, but they look upon corporeal punishment as showing an absence of love for the children. In former years when the Indians were still more to themselves, before the coming of the white man, this method worked out better than it does now when their children are subject to many outside influences which were not there

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formerly. The Indian parent is always ready to satisfy every whim and demand of the child if this is at all possible, thus spoiling the child. Therefore, the saying that an Indian is a spoiled, overgrown child is not without foundation. Of course, formerly, their demands were small, and could sooner be satisfied, but with all the towns and stores, with their many toys, etc., nowadays, the demands of the children have increased accordingly, and this custom, therefore, often works a hardship upon the parents. On the other hand, Indian children are strictly taught never to talk or interrupt when others are speaking. They are as a rule quiet and backward, and their training makes them all the more so. Yet they have their games and amusements which they enjoy as thoroughly as white children enjoy theirs. The boys get great fun out of whipping their tops on the ice. The tops are not thrown or whirled with a string, but made to spin by whipping with a whip made of a strip of buckskin or cloth fastened to a stick. The one who can keep his top spinning the longest is the champion in the game.

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They have many other games with hoops, bow and arrows, a netted wheel, etc., but it would take too long to go into detail. When coming into their homes, we often find even the women playing a game with dice and a basket, which is an all-absorbing game with them. As the younger ones have been together with white children more in recent years, they have also learned to play the same games as shinny, hockey, baseball, basketball, and the like.

In former times it was the squaw that did practically all the labor, even the getting and cutting of the wood, the carrying of the water, the planting and tending of the corn, etc., while the men went out to hunt and fish in order to get the supply of meat. With the coming of the white man, even these customs have changed to some extent, but even now it is the woman that has to do most of the work, while the young men are often idle. As most of their land is leased out to whites, the men are not as busy as they should be, though efforts are being made by the government to get them to do more farming themselves, and some of them are making good starts. Besides the

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work on the farm, the men get wood and fence-posts out to sell, and at cotton-hoeing and cotton-picking time, oftentimes both men and women are out working in the cotton fields; also at harvest time some of the men work for their white neighbors. They ^{would} rather work for others where they get their pay each day or week, than to do farming themselves.

The girls are taught in the home by the mother. While still quite young, they are taught to do beadwork, as that affords a source of income, and the women, when not otherwise busy with home duties, do a great deal of this work.

Most of our Cheyennes now live in houses of two or three rooms, while the tent or tepee is, as a rule, used only when they gather at a certain camping place for religious or social gatherings. Some of their houses are but meagerly furnished; some are kept quite clean and neat, considering the circumstances under which they must live; others are quite the opposite. The house belongs to the wife, and her seat of honor is on the left side of the door as you enter the house. Their main means of sustenance are meat, bread, and coffee, but they also use corn, beans, tomatoes, squash,

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melons, rice, fresh and canned fruits. Many a time when short on victuals, two meals a day must suffice. However, an Indian can stow away an enormous amount of food at one time, and then go without for quite a while if necessary. The Indian is very liberal. In fact, it is custom among them that as long as they have something, they are obliged to divide with others if they do not wish to be looked down upon as stingy. This custom makes it very hard for ambitious young people who really want to get ahead to do so, and oftentimes they become discouraged and think there is no use trying. Guests are always welcome and treated very hospitably and according to their custom must be fed, no matter what time of day they arrive. So a family that has a little more income usually is the one that has many visitors and the woman of the home has to cook many meals a day as her guests arrive. The girls, as they grow older, are never allowed to go anywhere unless in company with their mother, aunt or some other older woman. When the girl becomes of marriageable age, her suitor will steal her away, usually at night. Then the relatives on both sides decide upon a day which the

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Indian wedding is to take place. The bride's family furnish the victuals for the wedding feast. The bridegroom's relatives bring all kinds of presents such as tents, blankets, shawls, ponies, moccasins, cooking utensils, dishes, etc. and have them in array at the bride's home. Then on the appointed day the bride is brought, in former times riding a decorated horse, to her home by the bridegroom's folks and is received there and given to the bridegroom. Next, the feast is prepared and eaten, and then the bride divides out most of the gifts to her friends and relatives, usually keeping only a tent.

The young married couple usually make their home with the wife's folks. At the time of the allotment only those living at that time received land, and since then piece after piece of dead allotments has been sold by the heirs, so that all the younger ones have no land and that is the main reason for this condition. But it often causes trouble between the young married couple and one side blames the other; therefore it would be far better if young married people would and could establish homes of their own.

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Peculiar customs or theirs make it doubly hard for the son-in-law, as he must never see or speak with his mother-in-law. That of course implies that he must stay in, and eat his meals in, a different room, etc. In former times every brother and sister, after reaching a certain age were not allowed to associate with each other. It is also improper for a woman, being by herself, to converse with a man who is not related to her; if there are two women, or if there is at least a little girl with her, then she may converse with him with propriety.

The Cheyenne is also very superstitious. After death the spirit of the deceased is believed to return to the place where he died for three days and therefore the survivors do not like to stay at the place where the death occurred and so usually go elsewhere for a while after a death has taken place. They are also averse to keeping dead bodies over night, and if at all possible they bury them on the same day that death occurs. Neither do they wish to keep anything that belonged to the deceased. Such articles are either buried with the dead, burned or given

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away. Formerly they were also opposed, and some are even now, to have dead bodies brought into the church; for they fear if they enter the church later their mouths may become twisted as a result. Articles of food are placed upon the grave so, when the spirit of the deceased returns he may find them there. In former times our Cheyennes also objected to having their pictures taken, for they supposed it would take something away from their individuality. Neither do they like to give their own name when asked for it. So if you want to learn an Indian's name, ask the party with him for the desired information. If the Indian is alone he will, after some hesitation, possibly tell you, "They call me so and so". Wearing an amulet of some kind on wrist or neck is supposed to keep evil spirits away. Meeting some one carrying ashes out of the house is a bad omen. In cases of death, grief is shown by cutting the hair and wearing it loose, by mourning and lamenting in a weird manner, by going barefooted and wearing old torn clothing, and in former times even by cutting the legs so that the blood would trickle down.

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So one could go on enumerating many more of their customs and beliefs, but it would take entirely too long to do so. Yet it might be interesting to note that their way of speaking of relatives is very much different from ours. Girls call all the sisters of their mother, mothers, and boys call all the brothers of their father, fathers and these in turn hold them respectively as daughters and sons. However, the brothers of the mother are uncles and the sisters of the father are aunts to the children.

Having paused to consider the religious views, also the social and economic conditions, as they influence the family life, let us now stop briefly to consider also the influence on the family life of the physical conditions among the Cheyennes. Health conditions among the Cheyennes are far from satisfactory. Tuberculosis is quite prevalent, often taking the most promising of the young men and women. Ever since they have come in contact with whites, or rather have been forced into schools when they were used to a free life in the open, tuberculosis has spread among them. Then the unsanitary conditions among them allow it to spread

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rapidly. At the present time, however, it is not nearly so common any more, due, I think, largely to the fact that they have by this time become used to the newer mode of living. Besides this, trachoma and various skin diseases are also very prevalent among them. Infant mortality, too, is or was formerly very great, due to the fact that many young mothers, or the womanhood in general, is ignorant of how to care for babies. Improper food and undue exposure to the cold or heat, as the case may be, at times of their large camps for religious or social purposes, are among the principal reasons for the great infant mortality. I am glad to say that these conditions have also improved materially in later years. Then the practices of their medicine men with their rattles and weird songs are not conducive to rest and recovery in cases of sickness. Often a sick one is taken into the sweatlodge, too, and is very apt to take cold and a backset and often death will result from the exposure. The Government sends physicians out among them, but many, especially the older Indians, have no confidence in them. They think the doctor should be there all the time to watch the sick (like their medicine

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men) also that an administered medicine should bring immediate relief. Some of the younger ones are taking more kindly to these Government physicians and after another generation or two their attitude towards white doctors will be entirely different, in fact, is already so to a great extent. The Government also sends out specialists from time to time to combat trachoma, to look after their eyes and teeth, etc., and it certainly brings some results, though the Indians do not respond as readily as one should like. In some localities fieldmatrons also are busy. These are sent out by the Government to teach sanitation, care of children and canning of fruits and meats, etc. In some places the Government also maintains hospitals, solely for the Indians, where all service is free to them. Those living farther away from such hospitals, are averse to making use of them on account of the distance, not wishing to take the sick so far away from home. Yet sometimes, especially in cases of tuberculosis, they will finally, when it is too late, decide to take them to a hospital and of course invariably death results, so that among

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the Cheyennes, at least, going to a Government hospital is almost synonymous with death. Their medicine men discourage their people from calling white doctors and going to hospitals, yet when they see there is no more hope for the sick party, they will sometimes even urge calling a white doctor or going to a hospital, because they can then, when death results, use it as an argument against white physicians and hospitals. As time goes on these conditions are bound to change, however, as even now many of the younger ones take more kindly to white doctors and hospitals.

Now for the close, just a few words about family life in the Christian homes. In these a different atmosphere prevails. Where it is possible on account of their peculiar customs and usages, they have family worship, prayer before meals, and love to sing Christian hymns, the older ones preferring our Cheyenne songs, the younger ones the English. Sometimes we are asked whether we have any extra copies of song books we could let them have. Also, more reading is done in the homes than was formerly the case. After a period of nearly fifty years of schools among the Southern

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Cheyennes, nearly all middle aged and practically all the younger ones read English and so naturally requests for reading material are more numerous. The distribution of Christian literature offers many an opportunity to sow the good seed of the Gospel, therefore we always use a part of our allowance of Christmas money for that purpose. We also distribute Christian literature among the young folks attending our Sunday schools and also get copies of others suitable for distribution among the Christian families. Besides this we are often asked for papers and magazines by some of the younger folks.

So gradually the family life of these people is transformed. May we as laborers in His vineyard be faithful also in this phase of the work, to use every opportunity to spread the news of the glad tidings of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.