

THE HOME EDUCATION  
OF CHILDREN  
IN THE DENKYERA  
TRIBE

By

ALFRED KWAMINA MENSAH  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE  
GOLD COAST INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION

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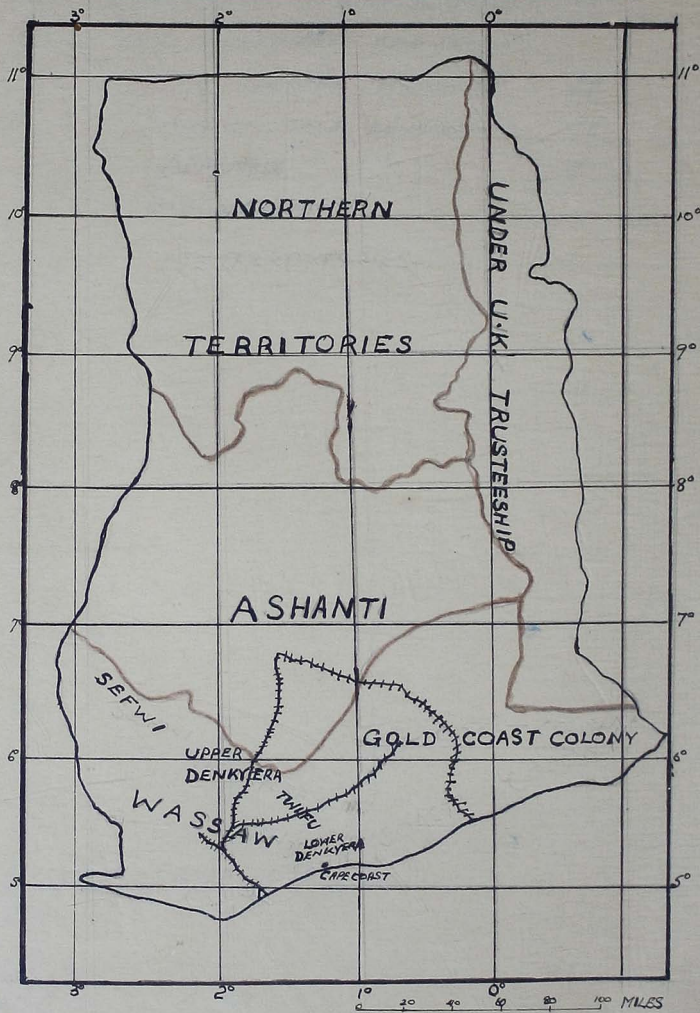
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# THE GOLD COAST

SHOWING THE POSITION OF THE DENKYERA TRIBE



## INTRODUCTION

In order to give a vivid description of the home education of children in the Denkyera tribe, I feel I cannot do better than to begin with a background knowledge of the Denkyera people, with special reference to their economic and social lives.

Denkyera is one of the tribes of historic importance in the Gold Coast. Prior to the reign of King Osei Tutu, the builder of the Ashanti nation towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Denkyeras were recognized as the overlords of the Ashantis, the Sefwis and the Wassaws.

As a result of a total defeat which the Denkyeras suffered in their encounter with the Ashantis, they were obliged to move from their ancient home which was around the place now known as Obuasi to make a new settlement southwards, on the banks of the Ofin river.

Today the Denkyeras are found in the Western Province of the Gold Coast Colony occupying two separate portions of land, politically known as the Upper Denkyera and the Lower Denkyera. The Upper Denkyera which is supposed to be the larger is bordered on the North by Ashanti, on the South by the Twifu and Wassaw Fiasse States, and on the West by the Sefwi and Wassaw Amani States. The Lower Denkyera, on the other hand, has a common frontier on the South with the Fanti tribe, and

is about fourteen miles from Cape Coast, the administrative headquarters of the Colony.

Both areas form one state under the administration of one Paramount Chief who resides at Dunkwa.

According to the census of the Gold Coast taken in 1948, the population of the tribe is about 32,769, made up of 16,696 males and 16,073 females.

The Denkyeras live in the forest area of the Gold Coast, and so they are mostly farmers whose wealth is derived mainly from the cultivation of cocoa and food-crops.

Being a farming community, they are scattered in villages of varying sizes.

A village consists of a number of buildings made of wick and roofed with either thatch or corrugated iron sheets. The buildings are of rectangular shapes with open yards where children usually gather at night to hear stories from their parents and relatives, since a large part of their home training is derived from listening to the "Anansesem" (Spider Stories). A compound house may consist of about six or eight living rooms, a kitchen, and a parlour called "Peto" where the family gathers to rest or dine.

Children in the tribe derive their status and property rites through their mothers, to whose lineage they customarily belong. As a result of this matrilineal system

of succession maternal uncles also hold special positions and wield some influence in the upbringing of children.

The types of children whose home education form the topic of this thesis come under two categories: (a) those children of farmers who are brought up in villages, and (b) those children who are brought up in towns. As the children in the former are more numerous and therefore present a more interesting study, I shall confine myself more to the children in a farming community than to those who receive their home training in towns.

My aim is therefore to point out the educational ideals of the Denkyeras, and to consider how such ideals are achieved by means of an educational system which aims at bringing up a child into complete correspondence with his environment.

## 2

### THE DESIRE FOR CHILDREN

A consideration of the ideals of the tribe with regard to the bringing up of children has its logical commencement in a study of the conditions of childbirth. Therefore I shall attempt to explain in this chapter why there is a strong desire for children among the Denkyera tribe.

Like the Ashantis, early marriages are the general rule, the girls usually

marrying at the age of fifteen or sixteen, and the boys between eighteen and twenty. This has such an influence upon the girls attending school that only very few of them ever complete their elementary education.

The Senkyeras say that a man wants children so that he can pass on the names of his forbears. They deem it a very important filial duty as well as a source of pride.

There is no family limitation in the tribe because food is plentiful, and moreover a large family is considered a great economic asset to parents, so far as farming is concerned.

Women of the tribe have good reasons for desiring to have children, for barren women suffer loss of affection and prestige. A childless wife loses favour with her husband, is ridiculed by other women of the household and regarded as a social nonentity. Consequently, sterile women seek the aid of the local medicine-man who offers a sacrifice and gives potions which are accredited with the power of aiding conception. More often than not, such women think themselves cursed by a witch, and so they spend all they have in the purchase of medicine, for the payment of which the husbands help to the utmost of their power.

Childlessness is reckoned as one of the chief causes of many unhappy marriages, and it has always been a reason for divorce. No marriage is therefore considered really complete unless it produces off-spring. Boys are a social asset, girls have a pronounced domestic and marriageable value, hence the desire of parents to secure issue.

### 3. PRENATAL CARE

The education of children may be said to commence with the treatment of the expectant mother.

In villages, as soon as a woman discovers herself to be pregnant she offers sacrifice to the tutelary deity of the family and a priestess binds charms about her ankles and waist, at the same time invoking the god to avert ill-fortune.

Pregnant women who live in the capital town where there is a residential Medical Officer attend the Government Antenatal Clinic. Besides they also consult the local medicine-men for protective medicines against evil spirits and malevolent persons who are supposed to haunt them.

It is to be remarked that among the Denkyeras pregnant women do a lot of hard work, such as visiting farms, fetching water, cooking meals and pounding fufu. It is believed this helps them to bear very strong and healthy children.

There are restrictions respecting diet, actions and sights, all of which appear to be directed towards securing healthy offspring, free from blemish, and normally presented during delivery. There must be complete avoidance of foods which are believed to have an adverse effect upon the foetus by causing abnormal development.

Pregnant women are not allowed to eat pawpaw, roasted plantains, groundnuts and Okro. The belief is maintained

that groundnuts and Okro can neutralize the effect of poisons taken in by pregnant women.

A good quantity of palm soup mixed with herbs is regularly eaten by pregnant women with the view of helping the foetus to develop.

Apart from food taboos, other taboos are observed by the pregnant woman so that she may secure a safe delivery. For instance, a pregnant woman is not permitted to lend a helping hand to her neighbour to carry a load. It is believed this might cause some delay in delivery. She is also not permitted to watch the labour of her friend or to attend the funeral of a deceased pregnant woman.

The mores also prescribe that intercourse between the parents should stop two or three months before the child is born, in order to safeguard the health of the woman and that of the child.

A pregnant woman is encouraged to be lively and energetic so that the child may acquire qualities which facilitate a rapid delivery.

#### 4 BIRTH OF A CHILD

When the time for delivery is approaching the wife usually quits her husband's house and returns to that of her mother, whose advice and assistance are required at this period.

The service of a midwife is engaged, as soon as the woman begins to show signs of labour. Midwives are to be found

in every village. They are generally old women, themselves grand-mothers, who receive no special training. Instead, they develop the knack for their work by assisting others, and they launch out on their own practice when they have established a reputation for being handy and capable.

Frequently, beside the midwife some relatives are present in the room to watch and encourage the mother. As soon as the child is born and the afterbirth also expelled, the midwife ties the umbilical cord with string and cuts it with an iron blade.

The baby is then washed in cold water, and laid on some ragged cloth beside its mother. Finally the afterbirth is put into a small earthenware pot and buried in a hole made in the floor of the room. This will prevent any enemy from getting hold of it, and mixing it with medicines to bewitch the woman so that she cannot bear again. One strange custom connected with this is that sometimes after the after-birth has been buried a barren woman in the house may be asked to urinate on it in order that she may become productive.

If labour is difficult or protracted, as is apparently often the case, the woman is given drugs to relieve her pains and hasten the birth. Sometimes the village medicine-man gives a medicine

which is gently massaged on the abdomen.

If this does not help, the aid of the Medical Officer is sought, but the majority still prefer the native practitioners.

In very severe cases the female native practitioner puts her hand into the woman's vagina, and keeps feeling for the place where the child is stuck, and if she finds its head or shoulders caught she presses them down and keeps shaking the child until it drops. A similar treatment may be followed if the placenta delays <sup>delayed</sup> ~~is~~ coming.

In the capital town where most of the pregnant women attend the ante-natal clinic the Government midwife assists at child-birth for which the sum of one guinea is charged.

The Tenkeras are generally regarded as being prolific but unfortunately a good number of the children born succumb to the effects of primitive midwifery, although the natives themselves attribute it to witch-craft.

An investigation into the problem of infant mortality in the tribe reveals that in recent years the condition is showing signs of improvement, which is the result of some mothers availing themselves of the opportunity afforded by the ante-natal clinic. Information received from the Clinic shows that in 1951 out of one thousand children born forty-seven

died, and this was mainly by Convulsions and Malaria.

It is hoped that if more women attend the Clinic when they are pregnant, and also if mothers regularly take their babies to the Clinic for weighing, the rate of infant mortality will be reduced.

5

NAMING OF CHILDREN AND CARE OF MOTHERS AFTER DELIVERY

From the moment of its birth, the child takes the name which is derived from the day of the week on which it is born.

The mother is considered unclean for seven days during which she can touch nothing without rendering it unclean.

According to a common belief held by the natives, the child is scarcely considered a human being for the first eight days after birth. It is looked upon as possibly a "ghost" that has come from the spirit world intending immediately to return. If the child survives after eight days certain ceremonies are performed to ensure its well-being and to initiate it into the family. After this ceremony the mother may occupy herself with her ordinary domestic duties.

On the eighth day, the father of the baby proceeds with some friends to the house where the mother is, and they seat themselves in a circle in front of the

entrance. The baby is brought out and handed to the father who gives it a second name. This ceremony of naming is done by applying water and rum alternatively to the tongue of the child to signify that it should be able as it grows up to discriminate between rum and water.

The second name which is always added to the natal name is generally that of the husband's father or a deceased relative.

As an illustration, supposing such a name to be "Oduro", and the child, a male, to have been born on a Friday, its full name would "Kofi Oduro".

After the second name has been given a libation is offered to the spirits of its ancestors, imploring their protection. The father then proceeds to present the child through the mother with customary gifts, consisting of imported toilet articles, clothes, soap and trinkets which may cost about two or three pounds.

It is therefore by means of the naming ceremony that one of the first definite steps in the socialization of the child is accomplished.

The health of the mother after delivery also receives attention. During the seclusion period which lasts for eight days, she is treated daily with hot pepper water and strong pepper. She is also given plenty of food to eat. Her close relatives may send their daughters or come themselves

to help prepare the food, fetch water and firewood and do other routine tasks to which she herself cannot attend.

Friends may visit her after the seclusion to congratulate her and to give her presents.

Three months after child-birth, the mother makes offerings, if she is a pagan, to the tutelary deity of the family, and then, attired in her best cloth and adorned with gold she visits her friends and neighbours and thanks them for their good intentions and gifts.

A Christian mother attends a religious service on a Sunday with her friends and other well-wishers to offer thanks to God for her safe delivery. It sometimes happens that on such <sup>an</sup> occasion the mother arranges with the minister to have her child baptized. By means of baptism, the child is initiated into the church and acquires a Christian name. The new name in such cases is almost invariably European in form, and often enough biblical.

All the names bestowed upon the child are kept unchanged throughout its life-time and it is generally known and addressed by them.

## 6

### THE CARE OF TWINS

Although the birth of twins is welcome in the tribe, certain superstitions determine their treatment. The belief is generally held that infants love sweet

words, kind looks and gentle voices, and if these are not found in the family into which they have been reincarnated, they will close their eyes and forsake the earth until there is a chance to return to more harmonious surroundings.

In view of this belief twins are welcomed by dance and song, and if such signs of appreciation are lacking the twins are said to return whence they came.

Eight days after the birth of twins a special outdoor ceremony is performed. Both parents and twins are dressed in white and their wrists tied with a strip of raffia and beads known locally as "Abam". It is believed that the use of the "Abam" can safeguard the health of the twins, and also bring success and prosperity to the parents, particularly the father.

Like the Ashantis, the twins ~~are~~ if both of the same sex, belong as of right, to the Chief, and become if girls, his potential wives, if boys, elephant-tail switchers at the court. Therefore after the performance of the initial rites at home, the parents, clad in their white clothes, carry the twins in a brass basin to the palace to show them to the chief, who shows his appreciation by giving them some money. Followed by a group of women amidst singing and clapping

of hands, the parents carry the twins to the houses of the prominent people in the village for presents.

After the ceremony the mother has nothing more to do than to give proper attention to them. She has to feed them well and also give them identical treatment in terms of clothing and affection.

Unfortunately it often happens that one of them does not survive, and this is commonly due to malnutrition, as there is no alternative to human milk.

On the other hand, if both of them survive they are given the same home training as other children in the tribe.

Twins are generally well-treated and brought up, since according to local beliefs they are endowed with some supernatural powers, which enable them to do harm to their parents if they are neglected.

7

## THE NURSING PERIOD

### (a) FEEDING: -

The nursing of the baby is one of the earliest duties undertaken by the mother. Her whole attitude towards nursing is one of enjoyment, and rarely does she entertain any fear that it will spoil her beauty.

Breast-feeding is most common in the tribe, and it starts from the day the child is born. It is administered

by the mother at very regular intervals with the baby on her lap.

Occasionally, breast-feeding is supplemented with water contained in a small tin or calabash. During the first week, a Denkyera mother uses the peel of the plantain in giving her child water to drink, because a child is customarily considered to be a human being eight days after its birth. After the first week the mother uses a special kind of spoon made of silver or brass.

Generally crying is regarded as a signal of discomfort, and the convention is that the mother responds to the signal by giving the child the breast to suck.

When the baby stops feeding it is often taken that it has had enough, and no efforts are made to get it to take more.

Since the child is mainly fed on the breast of the mother, it follows that the mother should have sufficient milk in her breasts for the baby to feed on.

If a mother has too little milk both the husband and the relatives of the woman view it with grave concern, because a child's health greatly depends upon good feeding. The usual device adopted is that a sister or a close relative of the woman who has sufficient quantity of milk to spare, feeds the baby

until such time as the mother has enough herself to feed her baby.

To increase the quantity of milk in the breast, the mother is given a specially prepared diet mixed with herbs.

It occurs sometimes that if a mother with such trouble lives in the Capital town she may resort to bottle-feeding on the recommendation of a qualified mid-wife. This is considered by many as a foreign method, and so it is not very popular.

When the child begins to have its first set of teeth breast-feeding is supplemented by a gradual introduction of some starch food. In the village, the child is usually given some cooked plantains to chew. Occasionally the mother boils ripe plantains and prepares them like porridge for the use of the baby.

In a progressive home, such as those in the town such liquid foods as 'Akasa', rice porridge and corn flour are introduced as an initial process towards weaning.

#### (2) WEANING

The time when the well-being of the child is most in danger is the period between twelve months and two years when it ceases to be entirely dependent on its mother and begins to find interest, amusement and excitement in the world around it. This parting from

The maternal protection is a gradual process, and it is guided by the mother, chiefly in the matter of the child's feeding.

In the Denkyera tribe, a child is weaned either at the mother's convenience or in many cases, in relation to the birth of the next child. Since pregnancy often occurs when the first child begins to walk, most children are weaned during their second year. To have another child when the old one has not been weaned is a matter which is looked upon with great disfavour, because the health of the old child often stands in danger. Therefore, although marital intercourse is begun three months after birth, most husbands are (so) careful (as) to prevent early pregnancy.

It appears this social taboo encourages some men who cannot restrict themselves from the point of view of sexual intercourse to take to plural marriages.

The weaning of a Denkyera child ordinarily follows a gradual introduction of other foods, such as fufu, cocoyams, yams and plantains which are commonly eaten by the adults. In other words the child learns to eat any kind of food which the parents eat.

No regular times are arranged for child-feeding, which implies that the child can call for food at anytime it longs for it.

During the process of weaning the mother teaches the child gradually to drink water by itself whenever it feels thirsty. It is observed sometimes that some children are difficult to wean. To wean such unwilling children, mothers blacken the nipples of their breasts with stove soot or rub quinine or a bitter seed, called "ekwamba," locally, on them to arouse distaste. By this process the unwilling child gradually loses appetite for the milk of its mother and eventually begins to eat solid food entirely.

In some cases, the child is handed over to the grandmother who gives it a dry breast. ✓

### (C) SOLID FOOD

After weaning, the mother continues to feed the child on solid food.

As before, there is no difference between the food which the child eats and that of the adult. In more advanced homes such as those found in the capital town mothers introduce other varieties of food. Besides fufu, the child is fed also on "Kentci", "rice" and "bread".

It is the duty of the mother to feed the child herself until he is about two years old.

Feeding is usually done by the hand. After the ~~two~~ second year the child

begins to eat his meal alone from a small earthenware pot. Later he learns to dine together from the same dish with his brothers and sisters. In many cases the girls dine together with their mothers while the boys join their fathers.

During meals the parents take the opportunity of teaching their children (some) table manners. For instance, before the child takes his meals, the parents see that the hands are well washed. After meals a second washing is also insisted upon.

As the hand is the only tool used for eating, a wise mother cuts short the finger-nails of her child at regular intervals, until the age of five when the child is trained to do it himself.

At meals the parents observe their children very closely and correct any bad manners that the children may develop. For instance, a child who eats hurriedly is often told by the parents to take his time and chew his food well.

Over-eating does not receive the approval of most parents. To inhibit this practice, mothers often regulate the food of their children.

Another socially approved training which the parents give to their children in connection with the taking of solid food is how to keep the teeth clean for meals. The child is taught

as soon as he starts taking solid food to clean his teeth every morning and evening. Very often, a child's food is withheld by the mother, for failing during the day to clean his teeth with a chewing stick, until the cleaning is done.

The common ailment which mothers deal with when solid food is introduced is constipation, which is mainly due to the food being predominantly carbohydrate.

Children with constipation are usually treated by syringing them with a mixture of some herbs and pepper or by putting pepper only into the anus.

## 8

## (C) TOILET TRAINING

Toilet training is done very gradually. One of the earliest demands made on the child is sphincter control. Sphincter control means merely the identification of certain sensations with the time and place for evacuation. It is the first training in responsibility and social acceptance under specific conditions.

Among the Denkyeras, sphincter control is introduced when the child can walk and is able to understand what is expected of him. The child first signals the parents and then learns to discharge excreta in relative privacy. He is often praised for good performance and censured for delinquency.

Children in villages are not taught

to use pans or chamber pots for the discharge of excreta. It is only in the towns that children below the age of four make good use of them.

Normally a father in a village teaches his infant-son to go behind the wall of the hut to ease himself, and the mother cleans this up each day and takes it to "Samina" (kitchen midden). She also teaches him how to use leaves and other soft material for wiping. For all toilet purposes the child is trained to use the left hand always.

At the age of five the child is able to go to the public latrine to ease himself.

The faeces discharged at home by the child before he is five years old is usually examined and criticized by the mother as regards its quality or quantity. By this means the mother is able to tell whether her child has some parasitic worms in his system or suffers from dysentery or constipation, so that she can apply an early treatment.

Bladder control meets with more difficulties than bowel control. Like the latter it is introduced when the child can understand what is expected of him.

The mother begins the training usually at night by placing the child on a chamber pot when he is awake. This is the method applied by parents who

regularly make use of chamber pots themselves. If the parents have no chamber pot, the mother walks out with the child and induces him to urinate. Gradually as the child grows up he acquires the habit of waking up at night to urinate, instead of wetting his bed.

During the day children between the ages of five and twelve urinate openly and the adults treat it casually. Some parents, on the other hand, insist on strict privacy.

Despite the systematic training given by the parents with regard to bladder control, some children become bed-wetters for a prolonged period until measures of ridicule are resorted to.

Should a child of four or five wet a sleeping mat during the night on more than one occasion, the parents will scold him in the hope that he will make an effort to correct himself. If, on the other hand, he repeats the same offence the father will not flog him, but early in the morning he will call in small boys and girls of the same age as his child to make him dance to the tune of "Dwonso Kroberg" which literally translated means "Bed-wetter". He will be smeared all over the body with wet clay and tied up in his bed-mat. Afterwards he will be taken to the bush and dressed in a kind of nettle locally known as "Nsansono".

Water will be thrown over him and the boys and girls will follow him through the street singing the derisive song "Dwonso kroobso, annyew weē". After this, the child will be taken to an elder of the family and made to swear to him that he will not wet his mat at night again.

Thus we have an example of ridicule being adopted by parents as a corrective measure.

Little effort is made to control flatus. If it becomes persistent, the mother attributes it to either indigestion or constipation, and she gets rid of it either by syringing the child with native herbs or putting pepper into the anus.

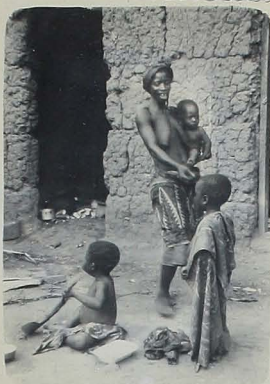
As the child grows up the mother through admonition teaches him as a sign of etiquette never to break wind in public.

In these ways the child learns to adapt himself to the standard behaviour which will enable him to take his place in the society.

## 9

### THE CHILD'S MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

The child's motor development, which is the development of strength, speed and skill in the use of his limbs and other portions of his body is an important feature. It serves as a means for a large proportion of his social contacts and his learning of ways of communicating



A Denkyera mother with her children  
This is how she carries  
her baby at home.



A happy family group with  
the older girl acting as a  
nurse-maid.

with others.

From birth right up to the walking stage, the child is physically handled a great deal by the mother with much emotional and affectionate play in the form of stroking and kissing, mimicry, singing and talking. All these acts of affection are pressing invitations to the child to imitate and to become accustomed to receiving a large variety of affective response.

The child is usually carried on the back by the mother and other friends and relatives in the neighbourhood. If there is an older girl in the family it is her duty to carry the baby in the usual manner, while the mother is engaged in the task of preparing food or performing some other kind of household duty. In this way young girls in the tribe are giving <sup>the</sup> opportunity of learning the method of nursing a baby.

It is also not uncommon to see a father early in the morning and in the calm of the evening carrying his baby on his shoulder, thus giving his wife sufficient time for other home activities.

Although a child needs every possible parental affection at the very early stage, yet parents do not carry him all the time, because they realize that he should also have ample opportunity for the development of

his bodily movement and skill.

The child's bodily development during the first three years is very great. He learns to use his hands, arms and legs, to grasp and handle things, to crawl and to walk. Normally crawling is observed when the child is about eight months old. This is followed by creeping, although some children creep without crawling. Between nine and twelve months the child is able to cover ground rapidly by sitting on one hip and using both hands and opposite foot as propellers.

Although no specific training is given in respect of the child's covering ground, encouragement is often given to the child by (way of) throwing objects at very short distances and giving him a sign to reach.

Later the child is allowed free mobility, but not without protection.

At this stage a wise mother sees that her child does not get near a fire or play with any harmful object.

Some mothers do not take particular care of their children at this stage when protection is of utmost importance. They allow their children to wander about the compound, picking up dirty stuff from the ground to eat.

Some parents attempt to hasten walking when they find their children side-stepping, by providing them with

wooden apparatuses with wheels designed purposely for toddlers. Others induce walking by holding the child under the armpits or by his hands and walking backwards facing him and encouraging him to try using his legs. It is thought that without practice of this kind the child will become lazy and be unable to walk even when fairly big.

There are some parents also, who, ignorant of maturation, actually syringe the child with some herbs in order to strengthen the limbs and accelerate walking.

I consider that the proper thing for parents to do is to leave the child to walk when he is ready for it, without dependence upon artificial aids, for the mastery of the art of balancing, standing and walking is a slow process which requires a great deal of courage and patience.

The usual period at which the child is expected to walk is between twelve and eighteen months. At this stage, mobility increases and a wise mother will restrict the child's spatial limit for motor activity inside the house to the parents' room and the open compound.

Objects that might be easily destroyed are removed and placed out of the child's reach.

Generally, a woman who lives in the town pays much more attention to her child when he begins to walk

than a woman who lives in a village where the movement of lorries presents no difficult problem to her.

As the child is now beginning to test his skills he sometimes likes to play outside. To avoid getting himself run over by a lorry, a mother who lives in the town may either threaten punishment or tell stories of a frightening being, such as a mad man who is supposed to attack the child if he wanders off.

Throughout childhood there is a steady gain in speed, strength and accuracy in movement. But the type of skills learned depends very much on the child's immediate environment.

## 10

### HOW THE CHILD LEARNS TO SPEAK

During the first month of the child's life all his speech consists of undifferentiated cries which may express joy and pain.

After a couple of months the mother can interpret the child's cry and by it she is able to know whether he is hungry or not ill.

All such cries which the child makes from the moment he is born, up to the time he is capable of making verbal utterances, are responded to by the mother.

To stop him from crying, he is given

breast feeding, or carried on the back, or given a toy to play with. Very often mothers who are inexperienced in the art of nursing children ascribe the cry of the baby to hunger, and this is the reason why the first thing they do to silence the baby is to offer the breast.

After the third month, the child begins to babble and reproduce sounds which are pleasurable to his own ear.

Later the child imitates the speech of other people, and it is at this stage that mothers begin to teach their children to speak.

Much encouragement is given by the mother to help the child to imitate more sounds. Whenever she sees the father coming home, she will point to him and say "pa" or "papa", until the child is able to say it alone.

The child learns to speak by making all sorts of sounds that may occasionally form words like "a" "ba" "ta" "fu". The mother keeps repeating these sounds after him, and then makes a word from them like "fufu" "eno" (mother).

By this time other children in the home, who often play the role of nurses, encourage the child to speak by saying words and making the child repeat after them.

Some of the earliest words which a nurse may teach a baby in a play-way

are words connected with the home, such as the names of children, and food.

Very often through his contact with other children in the house the child unconsciously learns some abusive words, such as "abowa" (beast) "inyan" (witch) "wo ni" (your mother).

Most parents do not make an attempt to stop their children from uttering such words, with the result that most children in the tribe who are grown up use such abusive terms freely when they are provoked.

When the child is about two years old, he is capable of putting a few words together to make sentences.

It must be mentioned here that in the whole process of the child's learning to speak much depends on the child's own intelligence and on the parent's own speech. The more perfect a parent's speech is, the more quickly does the child learn to speak well.

When the child begins to express himself in sentences, he is taught to modulate his voice always and not to shout.

From this time up to the age of ten, training in speech may continue, but it is done mainly in the form of correction.

## THE CHILD'S HEALTH AND EARLY TRAINING FOR HEALTH PRESERVATION

### (a) SLEEP :-

Sleep is considered as one of the most important factors upon which the health of a child depends, and so parents see to it that their children have enough of it.

More often than not, mothers are much worried when their children either through ill-health or some other causes, cry out in the night and so fail to have (a) good sleep.

In order to promote a sound and healthy sleep mothers keep the bowels of their children free by means of a regular syringe with native medicines or providing regular doses of children's laxative obtainable from local stores or pedlars.

When a child does not want to go to sleep the mother offers him some inducement. Normally if he has not been weaned, the mother may put him on her lap and lull him to sleep by singing a popular lullaby which runs as follows: -

Gyae o Gyae,

Gyae a mama wo tso

Tso na wudii

Nkwan na wonom

Kokoo na wudi

Wobnom, wobnom nkwan suodo

Yenni di o, yenni o maama.

The literal translation is as follows:

"Stop, Stop! I'll give you

mashed yam, if you stop. It's mashed yam you eat. It's soup you take and ripe plantain you eat. You will take light soup. We know how to eat. Let's eat."

Sometimes the child may be removed to the mother's bed and given the breast to suck. In the case of children above two years the problem is generally solved by the parents telling them short "Ananse" stories.

An investigation into the family life of the Denkyeras reveals that when a child is born he sleeps beside the mother on a mat spread on the floor. The child is put on a folded cloth without a pillow during the first week. After the first week when the child is now regarded as a human being, he is provided with a pillow.

As the child needs the best of attention and comfort and comfort the mother shares the same bed with him until he is weaned or when she herself becomes pregnant once again. The child is then separated from the mother and made to sleep in the same room with his brothers and sisters on a mat spread on the floor.

According to my observations, children up to the age of five sleep in their parents' bedroom so that they may attend to them in the night in case of ill-health. I think it is

worthwhile mentioning that although the children use the same bed-room as their parents, they do not have the opportunity of observing parental coitus, as all lights are generally put out during sleep.

Separation from the parents takes place about the age of five when normally the child is expected to sleep with his brothers and sisters in another room. Although both sexes share the same room, the girls spread their mats on the floor quite apart from the boys.

In many homes two boys or girls share a mat and a pillow. Some parents do not provide pillows at all, with the result that the children have to substitute the palm of the hand as pillows or use folded rags.

In wealthy homes the girls in the family sleep together in one room while the boys sleep in another. This is considered by many parents in the tribe as an ideal way, since it eliminates overcrowding and, above all, tends to give some degree of privacy to each sex.

That the sleep of young children is a matter of great concern to most parents can be judged also by the fact that most parents encourage their young children to go to bed early.

A child who comes home late

in the night is reprimanded severely by his parents. ✓

One of the most commendable things which parents in the tribe teach their children at a very early age in connection with sleep is the care of the face and mouth. The first thing which the child is trained to do in the morning when he gets up from bed is to wash his face and his mouth with clean water, before he sets about doing his work. Parents insist upon this rule so much so that children who fail to keep it are usually scolded or teased.

Thus it can be said that while parents encourage sleep among little children from the point of view of health, they also train them in certain social standards acceptable to the community.

#### (b) BATHING

As the health of children depends to a great extent on personal cleanliness, parents train their children at a very early age to keep their bodies clean by regular bathing.

Until the age of four one of the important duties of the mother is to keep her child clean and healthy by means of regular washing. In washing the child the mother uses soap which is either imported or made locally out of the dried peel of plantains, together with sponge and towel. The towel



These little girls are learning  
to bath.



This little girl is taking her  
morning bath at the back of  
her parents' house.

is sometimes obtained from the stalk of plantain which is beaten up into a brush.

During the nursing period the child is bathed by the mother in cold water at least three times a day. Some do it only twice a day, that is, <sup>in the</sup> morning and in the evening. The water for bathing the child is poured into a large wooden tray, which is more economical than the enamel basin or bucket which is used by many mothers who live in the town. The mother lays the infant-child on her lap and applies the sponge together with the soap and water in scrubbing his body. After bathing, the mother neatly combs his hair and powders his body with baby powder.

After the weaning period the child is sometimes bathed by a younger sister of the mother or an older sister in the family, thus giving the mother some time for other household duties. Sometimes the father takes up the task of bathing his son in the evening, since at this age a son takes a fancy to his father.

Training in washing the body takes place at the age of four or five. The child begins to bathe by himself in the company of his brother or sister either in the open yard or at the back of the house, while the mother looks on, pointing her finger at certain

parts of the body which need special attention. These parts are generally the genitals and the armpits. The mother may take the sponge from the child and teach her how to clean such parts.

She also insists that the child should use plenty of soap in removing the dirt on the skin.

In the villages children above the age of five take their baths in streams.

The boys and girls like bathing together, but after the age of twelve, the girls tend to separate themselves and bath privately at home. The girls are strictly forbidden by their parents when approaching puberty to expose their bodies publicly.

In the town the children bathe in streams, at the back of their parents' houses and in public bathrooms.

Parents believe that children should have their baths twice daily, but unfortunately this is not rigidly kept by all children. Some children have their bath once daily; others refuse to have it unless they are forced and threatened by their parents.

As a result of irregularity in bathing diseases such as yaws, ulcers and itches are common among children between the ages of four and twelve.

#### (C) COMMON DISEASES AMONG CHILDREN

##### AND HOW THEY ARE TREATED

The most prevalent disease among

the children of the tribe is yaws. It is a disease which is transmitted from one person to another by contact and possibly by small flies. In the early stages a general rash appears all over the body with firm yellow scabs, but later on it affects the bones and the skin, and is responsible for many ulcers. The disease causes painful pitted feet, and aching joints. In really bad cases it attacks the bones of the face, causing the bridge of the nose to collapse.

When a child has yaws his health is generally impaired, and he cannot move freely among his friends.

To cure the disease most parents are now beginning to make use of scientific treatment available in the hospital and dispensaries. The children are taken to such centres where they receive injections of arsenic or bismuth which are amazingly effective.

Although injections have done much to increase the reputation of scientific treatment as compared with native medicine, yet there are still some parents who keep to the old method of treating yaws.

Children with yaws resent washing because of the irritation and bleeding of the ulcers which take place when they are being washed. However the mothers get them to yield by cajoling them and promising them some mashed yams and eggs. After the bath the ulcers are

treated with a native medicine which is a mixture of the bark of a tree, some black pepper and linc.

Children with yaws are given special care at home. They are isolated from other healthy children, and are also given large cloths to cover their bodies so as to prevent flies from alighting on the ulcers.

Besides yaws, the children may suffer from other diseases such as measles, dysentery, and malaria, which receive equal attendance from the parents.

I feel I must mention at this juncture that most parents, except the few literate ones, are quite ignorant of the causes of diseases. A walk to the village reveals the filthy condition and the unhealthy environment in which the children are brought up, yet almost invariably, diseases affecting young children are attributed to witchcraft and malign spirits. Accusations of witchcraft are common occurrences in the tribe, and in most cases, native medicine-men and fetish-priests are consulted.

As a protection against the influence of witchcraft and malign spirits on children, some parents hang a talisman around the neck and waist of their children.

The bodies of the children are also vaccinated by a fetish-priest or a medicine-man as an antidote against a particular disease or the influence of witchcraft.

Vaccination is done by making small markings with a blade on different parts of the body and rubbing in a black stuff.

Sometimes, motivated by fear of evil spirits, a parent may become a votary to the cult of "Tigare" which has been established recently in the tribe. It is believed that the fetish helps in child-bearing, cures diseases, and protects against envy, and evil spirits. Accordingly, people go to it to seek protection from sickness and witchcraft, or for help to bear children.

These are the main techniques which are adopted by parents in the tribe to safeguard the health of their children. The other techniques employed are embodied in a set of simple rules which every child is expected to observe. For instance, the children are required to wash regularly, comb their hair and anoint their skins with oil after a bath. They are also required to wash their cloths, cut their hair and finger-nails short, and clean their teeth with chewing sticks.

Children who fail to keep these simple rules of personal cleanliness are ridiculed by their neighbours.

Judging by the way the parents treat their children in times of illness, and the precautions taken by them to safeguard their health, despite their being unscientific, it can rightly be said that the health

of children is of great concern to most parents in the tribe.

#### (d) CLOTHING

The clothing of children is one of the essential things which parents consider in their educational methods.

Normally infants are dressed in small frocks bought from the local market. As free movements are very important for children when they begin to crawl, it is very common to see children of that age moving about on warm days without clothing.

Children are taught to dress and undress at about three years of age but they do not become fully competent at the task before <sup>until</sup> about the age of five.

Young boys are given little pieces of cloth which they wear loosely over their shoulders. The size of the cloth normally depends upon the height of individual children. As little boys usually find difficulty in the task of wearing their clothes, they are sometimes provided with underpants.

In fact, only a small minority of parents realize the need for providing their children with underpants, because nudity among children of both sexes below the age of five is not treated as a lapse from modesty. It is therefore not uncommon to find many children within the age-group performing their

house-duties or participating in a group game without covering their genitals.

It is only after the age of five that parents really teach their children to feel ashamed to appear naked in public places or before senior members of the community.

Training in modesty is usually done through correction and scolding.

The dress of a girl of five is different from that of a boy. While the latter covers his body with a small piece of cloth, the former is trained to wear a blouse over a piece of cloth covering the lower part of the body.

When approaching the age of puberty, the girls learn to plait their hair and to cover it with a headkerchief. By constantly plaiting the hair of their friends, the girls eventually acquire the knack of doing it in different styles.

A high degree of modesty is expected from the older girls by the community. They are expected to cover their breasts always and to clothe their bodies well.

As the boys grow up they learn to pick up from the community other ways of wearing their cloths in conformity with social etiquette. For instance, they learn to lower (down) their cloths and expose both shoulders when greeting a chief. ☞

The number of cloths which a child must have varies from home to home.

On the average two cloths are provided, one for daily wear and another for special occasions, such as attending services on Sundays or native festivals.

The child uses the daily cloths for household duties, farm-work and sleeping. To prolong the life of the cloths, the mother teaches the child how to mend it when it gets broken.

The appearance of children in public places reflects to a great extent the standard of the parents themselves, therefore efforts are made by individual parents to clothe their children well for Sunday services and on special occasions.

## 12

### THE PLAY ACTIVITIES OF CHILDREN

The level of the child's motor development plays a large part in determining his play activities. During the first three or four years the child's play activities involve practice in running, jumping, hopping, pushing, pulling, handling and throwing.

The child uses his skills in connection with make-believe activities, which are very much encouraged by the parents.

Among some of the things young boys in the Denkyera tribe like to play at are hunting in various forms such as, chasing butterflies, throwing stones, chasing one another, wrestling, playing at soldiers, and making and using toy



These boys are singing and drumming  
in the parlour ("pato")



A group of children enjoying  
a popular game played  
with stones.

weapons. Other favourite games are playing at being a chief, executioners, lorry drivers, shopkeepers and farmers. They also enjoy drumming, using empty tins and small sticks.

The girls prefer to play at things connected with family and home life such as being mothers and looking after babies. The 'baby' who is represented by a piece of stick, is washed, put to the 'mother's' breast and carried on the back. They also practise cooking with empty tins, pebbles and miniature clay pots.

Through such make-believe activities the children learn to pick up at a very early age the social standards of behaviour in the community as well as the activities of the adult.

Physical strength and incessant activity find expression in group games which children above six years enjoy.

The commonest and most interesting game played by children in the Denkyere tribe is the game of marbles. It is a highly competitive game played during the day, which often results in quarrels and fighting. Notwithstanding its unpleasant results, it develops the muscles of the hand and trains the children in accurate observation.

Another game which is very much enjoyed by boys in most of the villages

is the game of "passing round stones."

The children squat on the ground in a circle each with a stone in front of him. The leader gives the command "Go!", and the whole group starts to sing a song entitled "Egyabu kyrkyre-kyr". With the tempo of the music each player places his stone in front of the player on the right of him, and in this way all the stones are moved in a circle. This game gives boys practice in rhythm and in swift movement of the hand.

Most of the games played by children above the age of six are played on moonlight nights. The parents encourage their children on such occasions to go out and participate in the group games which are usually organized in the street.

Some of the games are played together by both sexes before the adolescent period. The commonest game enjoyed by both sexes is "kwakwā" (hide and seek), which trains them in running and in speed.

Girls usually separate themselves from boys during games at the age of puberty.

At night they gather themselves into small groups and play games which involve clapping of hands, dancing and singing.

On many occasions they play for more than three hours before they go to bed.

If some homes, if a girl arrived home late at night after play she would be either warned or scolded by the parents. Other parents would do nothing about it.

Besides the games mentioned above, children play a lot of indoor games.

The most popular indoor game is the game of "Oware" which teaches the children how to count and also trains their sense of perception. The game requires a carved piece of wood with little holes bored in them into which the "oware" seeds which are obtained from the forest, are dropped.

The children are also taught a simpler way of providing material for the game of "Oware". They bore fourteen small holes in the ground and use pebbles or palm kernels as substitutes for the seeds.

It is very interesting to watch a mother playing the "oware" game with her child of five and teaching her how to count consecutively and in groups. This is indeed one of the ways through which the children acquire unconsciously their first skill in counting numbers.

Apart from indoor-games, the children in the tribe learn to dance and sing folk-songs at a very early age by observing and imitating the adults. Both dancing and singing are encouraged by the parents, and children are often praised for good performances.

We may therefore conclude by saying

that parents in the Denkyera tribe recognize the importance of games, dances and songs in the home education of their children.

13

### TRAINING IN HOUSE-HOLD DUTIES AND GOOD CONDUCT

As children grow older they participate more and more in the routine work of the household.

The training of girls is the mother's concern. Girls from the age of about six or seven are made to help in fetching water, firewood, earth and ornamental clay, and in sweeping the kitchen and the compound. They start by imitating these activities in their play, and are generally drawn into actual service under the instruction of their mothers and elder sisters.

Cooking is considered a very important feature in the training of girls in the community. The ability to cook is an essential quality which every girl is expected to possess before she enters into married life. Most parents take it as a serious reflection on or disgrace to the family if it is discovered that their married daughter does not know how to cook.

To avert this unpleasant happening every opportunity is given to a girl above the age of six to practise



A woman preparing fufu with  
her daughter.



A mother pounding fufu  
with her daughter. The grandmothers  
turns the fufu over in the mortar.

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cooking under the direction of her mother.

The girl must know how to bargain as well, therefore her early training in cooking includes visits to the market with the mother at the initial stage. Later she is given the opportunity of making purchases for the family meat. In this way she acquires experience in the use of money, as a preparation for married life.

Besides cooking, the girl has to help the mother in pounding fufu, serving the food and clearing the eating utensils. She also undertakes the task of smearing the soot stoves and the floor of the kitchen with clay.

Of all the duties performed by the girls in the tribe, it seems the most common is that of a nurse, and one frequently sees them at work or at play carrying a baby tied to the back.

In fact, girls are more helpful to mothers than boys, considering the amount of work they do at home, and this is perhaps one of the reasons why married women are very happy when they give birth to a female child.

Like the girls, the earliest work techniques of the boys are taught by the mother. Little boys first learn to do little chores, such as fetching objects and doing errands.

By the age of six or seven the bringing up of a Denkyera boy seems naturally to pass out of the hands of the mother. His task in the home is to remove the eating utensils from the table after the father has eaten, and then scrub the table with water and sponge. As the dining tables which are generally used are about eighteen inches in height, their removal for cleaning does not present any difficulty to the boy.

The boy is also trained to fetch water for his father to use for drinking and bathing, and also to help in pounding fufu. Besides this, he has to sweep the room of the father and to run errands as well. If the father is literate, the boy undertakes the cleaning of the plates as part of the daily routine.

Children are therefore required from early youth to help in maintaining the household, and until they become adults they do most of the work, while the parents mainly supervise.

The conduct demanded from children is impressed upon them in the household of the parents, and in their relations with other people, especially their kinsmen. But their training is primarily the duty of their parents, and parents are often judged

by the conduct of their children.

Just as some parents are well-mannered and others ill-bred, so will the conduct, (so will the conduct) of their children vary.

In the early years children are more directly under the control of their mothers. They are always at home with her and so become more attached to her. It is the mother who gives them their food, helps them in their little troubles and comforts them in their distress, and <sup>in</sup> general, keeps a close watch over them.

On the other hand, most scoldings and whippings inevitably come from her at this stage with the result that she may inspire more fear than love.

The domestic training in conduct is not carried out in any set manner but through exhortation or reprimand, as well as by chastisement. An occasion arises. Mistakes are corrected, ignorance is dispelled, good behaviour is applauded and insolence and disobedience are immediately followed by punishment. Small children are usually slapped with bare hands or lightly beaten on the buttocks with a small stick.

Thus it can be said that the techniques of securing obedience are whipping, spanking, shaming, teasing

scolding, rewards, encouragements and affection. Teasing and shaming, alone or in combination, are among the most effective means of moulding a child to the pattern desired in the community.

The common privations for disobedience are keeping children indoors from play or from some desirable food such as eggs or mashed yams.

The majority of mothers do their own punishing and the father his own.

A father generally gets a quicker obedience from a child than a mother does, because he actually has much less to do than the mother in rearing and disciplining the child, therefore a punishment from him often tends to be more sudden, sure and severe. ✓

The children are trained to conform to the many rules of etiquette and social behaviour of the tribe.

For instance, they are taught never to break wind in public, they have to use the right hand for receiving gifts, to say "thank you" for a gift received, and to say "Azoo" on entering any one's house, and not to enter until the reply "Amee" has been given.

They also learn to pick up the various forms of greeting and the

common social taboos. For instance, it is forbidden that a person who is attending nature's call should greet on the way. If he wishes to greet, he has to do so on his return from the public place of convenience.

Girls are particularly warned never to call a man "Kwasea", meaning in English 'a fool', because it is considered to be a very great insult.

Children are trained to respect and submit to the authority of all their elders and tribal superiors, and to greet them with the conventional terms of politeness.

Children have to obey and honour their parents. This is a duty on which the Denkyeras lay very great stress.

It is inculcated in the children by the mother in her role as an obedient and dutiful wife, that disobedience and disrespect towards a father have invariably an unpleasant effect on the future lives of the children. This belief is strengthened by the Akan conception of the nature of man which states that blood is transmitted to the child by the mother, while the father gives out his 'Sunsum' (Spirits)

It may therefore be said in conclusion that in inculcating the ideals of obedience and good conduct in children

the parents have shown that education is not complete without moral training.

14

### THE MORAL TRAINING OF CHILDREN BY INDIRECT METHODS

Besides direct and forceful inculcation of precepts by parents, there are some equally valuable formative influences at work in an unobtrusive way. These indirect ethical factors are folklore, proverbs, songs and habits of elders.

Folklore plays no small part in the moral training of children. The natural imitative tendencies of childhood assist the children in the tribe to conform to the standards of conduct prevalent in his social group.

It is generally known by many parents, subconsciously perhaps, that actions result from ideas, and so a great variety of stories and legends are used to elevate the moral tone of children.

On the whole, the indigenous stories appraise virtues and condemn faults in a manner closely resembling those of European narratives.

Perhaps an examination of some of these didactic legends or stories will give an idea of the way in which parents censor conduct.

and strive to present to children a pleasant means of apprehending ethical standards.

A story which is often told to children to impress upon them the dangers of truancy runs as follows:

Once there lived a boy who used to play truant every day. Despite the repeated warnings of his parents, the boy did not put a stop to it.

One day as the boy was roaming in the forest in quest of fruit he came across a huge rock and he sat upon it to rest. Soon, to his amazement, he found that he could not move again. After a thorough search through the forest, his parents found him sitting alone on the rock. Seeing that they could not bring him home, the parents built a small hut on the rock to give him shelter. Whenever the mother visited him to give him food she used to sing a curious song and the door opened by itself. It happened one day that a monstrous beast hidden in the forest approached the hut and as he sang the same tune the door opened. Presently he jumped upon him and ate him up.

Another story which ~~is~~ is told to children to illustrate the results of covetousness and ingratitude runs as follows: One day, it happened that four young girls were going to the

forest to collect snails when they came across a river. Wishing to get to the other bank, they promised the river that if it dried up to allow them to get into the forest they would each give it a snail on their return journey. Fortunately as they entered the forest they made a good collection of snails. As they were returning home the first girl threw a snail into the river and a passage was made for her to get to the bank. The second and third girls also did the same and got to the bank safely. But the fourth girl complained that she did not collect enough snails, and so she refused to drop one of her snails into the river. As a result of her ingratitude and greed, she was left on the bank of the river and never returned home again.

These two stories selected from an enormous repertoire evidently have a stimulating and admonishing effect on children. There are other narratives which refer to rudeness, disobedience, jealousy, cowardice, selfishness and perseverance. Such instructive stories attempt to teach children that the good is praised and rewarded, while the bad is promptly and severely punished. The adults tell the tales time after

time so that children have an excellent opportunity of imbibing the moral.

The Twi language as spoken by the tribe is full of proverbs, and these are used indirectly in the moral training of children.

Although some parents attempt to teach their children some of these proverbs, a lot of them are unconsciously acquired by the children themselves through listening to the conversation of their parents and elders. In this way the children in their youth imbibe some of the tribal ethics.

The following proverbs about children which are often used by the elders in their speech reflect more or less on the standard of conduct which is expected from children:

(1) "Abofra ye nea wonye a, oho nea wonku"  
(When a child does what is not usually done, he perceives what is not usually perceived).

(2) "Abofra bo nyaw na somo akyekyere."  
(A child should break a softer thing like the snail and not a harder thing like the tortoise). This proverb implies that a child should not meddle himself with the affairs of elders.

(3) "Woye abofra a, nserew akwatie"  
(When you are a child, do not laugh at a short man.)

(4) "Abofra ani anso spanyig a efre mpopa se haha"  
(A child who does not respect his elders

pronounces "mpopa" (palm branches) "haha")

(5) Abofra hū ne nsa ho hohoro a,  
na one mpanyimfo didi" (When a  
child knows how to wash his hands  
thoroughly, he and his elders can partake  
of food together).

These few examples of proverbs selected  
from a long list tend to illustrate the  
formative influence which the use of proverbs  
may have on children in their home  
education. Apart from their ethical  
values, their frequent use by the children  
as they grow up tends to improve  
their linguistic ability.

Some of the prevalent standards of  
conduct are also acquired by unconscious  
imitation of elders. For instance,  
hospitality is imparted by imitation long  
before it becomes a point of instruction,  
because children in the tribe often see how  
a fellow tribesman or even a stranger  
is well fed and accommodated.

The conduct of children is also influenced  
to a great extent by the war songs which are  
sung at "Asato" dances. They may inspire  
brave deeds, brand and shame cowards.  
The most popular among such songs  
is, "Ikyara, Ikyara e, yesim kō,  
yesim dwane o", which in English  
means, "We know how to fight, we  
do not know what is retreat".

Thus we can say that folklore and  
war songs play a great part in the

moral training of children.

15.

THE PART PLAYED BY OTHER PEOPLE  
IN THE HOME TRAINING OF CHILDREN

Besides the parents, other people within the broad family circle of the child take a share in the home training.

The first person who plays an important role during the initial stages of the child's development is the maternal grand-mother. She holds a special position, as she is often the family head of the domestic group, and this gives her great influence in the upbringing of children. Indeed she can sometimes be very autocratic in this respect, arguing that a grandchild belongs more to her lineage, which the natives call "ebusua", than to his parents, and therefore comes more appropriately under his grandmother's care.

The grandmother is the guardian of morals and of harmony in the household.

The young children are her special care. She bestows affection on them for minor acts of disobedience or impropriety. In cases of serious misbehaviour she calls on the parents to take disciplinary action.

It is from the grandparents of both sexes generally that children learn family history, folklore, proverbs and other traditional lore.

An orphan left motherless in early childhood is also brought up by his mother's sister, and in such case, the child treats her as if she were his own mother.

A maternal uncle also plays an important role in respect of the child's training. More often than not, he takes up the responsibility of training the child when the father dies or when the child is neglected by the father as an immediate consequence of divorce.

It is also a common occurrence in the tribe that if a maternal uncle is wealthy he may with permission from the father undertake the training of some of his sister's children, with a view to reducing the financial burden of the parents. In doing so, he realizes that it is his genuine responsibility, because according to native customary law the children of one's sister constitute one's family, therefore the well-being of the children is also the uncle's concern.

In view of the matrilineal system of inheritance, the uncle has the right to query a father if he is not satisfied with the training given to his nephews and nieces.

Apart from the uncle, all members of the family of both husband and wife

cooperate in training the child at home.

They watch his conduct in (the) public and give advice where necessary.

In cases of serious misdemeanour they are entitled to make a request to the parents for disciplinary measures.

An especially naughty or unruly child may be handed over to the care of a kinsman or someone who is well known to be good at managing young children.

Next to the bond between mother and child none is so strong as that between siblings by the same mother.

The most important difference socially recognized between siblings is that of age. An older sibling is entitled to punish and reprimand a younger brother or sister and he is treated with deference. He is conversely obliged to help his juniors in trouble.

This applies especially to the mother's first born called "piewic" in the Vernacular who is regarded as the head of the sibling group, and also receives special treatment from his or her parents.

THE BELIEFS OF THE TRIBE AND HOW THEY  
AFFECT THE CHILD'S TRAINING

With most tribes which are relatively low in the scale of civilization it is found that religion, that is their ideas and beliefs upon what is generally known as the supernatural, is frequently the main spring of their actions.

Broadly speaking, as far as the Denkyera tribe is concerned, the belief of the people in the supernatural affects and influences in some degree almost every action of their daily life and what is closely interwoven with all the habits, customs and modes of thought.

An examination of their beliefs will illustrate the manner in which religious beliefs ideate influence conduct in such a way that children are subject to a formative influence.

The Denkyeras, like any other Tiv-speaking tribe, believe in the existence of beings ordinarily invisible, upon whose favour or indifference man and his fate depend.

The majority of these spirits are malignant; and misfortune is ascribed almost invariably to their actions.

All deaths are attributed directly to the actions of man or to the invisible powers. Should a man be drowned or crushed by a falling tree in the forest, such an occurrence would not be considered an accident; rather it would be attributed to the deliberate act of a malignant being.

The same belief is held with regard to deaths which are really due to disease or old age. They are attributed either to the action of the invisible powers directly or to witchcraft, that is to say, to the indirect action of the same powers, for it is from them that wizards and witches obtain assistance and mysterious knowledge.

Thus sickness is never regarded as the effect of natural causes, the result of malnutrition, or of neglected sanitation.

It is a general belief that sickness is brought about by malignant spirits either acting directly or through their agents.

Such is the environment in which the child is brought up. As may be expected, the child grows up in superstition, and in constant dread of malignant spirits and witchcraft.

In the early training of children some parents make use of the names of some of the ~~names~~ deities to instil fear into them. At a very early age the children become acquainted with such names as "Saman" (a ghost) and "Samantas" through their contact with friends of the same age.

They learn that the "Samantas" is a female deity of monstrous size and human shape, with long pendent breasts and long hair who lives among cotton trees. She waylays and seizes solitary wayfarers, but she does not devour them. Instead she keeps them for four and a half months

and then returns them to their respective villages, after which they become fetish priests and priestesses of "Samantan"

No doubt, no child wants to be in the grip of the "Samantan" therefore parents often make reference to her if they want to stop their children from wandering about.

A child of three or four who cries very loudly and incessantly at home, thus disturbing the peace of the house, may be threatened with the name of Saman (ghost) to stop.

By the time the child becomes an adolescent he has acquired a great deal of knowledge about the beliefs of the tribe.

His chief means of knowing them is by observing the performance of customary rites with reference to child-birth, funerals and entombment and deatombment of chiefs, which are partly or wholly influenced by the religious conception of the supernatural. Apart from these, he may also acquire some knowledge of the beliefs of the tribe through the celebration of native festivals such as the "Adae", and the performances of fetish priests and priestesses.

Side by side with the pagan religion is the christian religion which is seeking to destroy the indigenous belief of the tribe by a different interpretation of the supernatural world. As a result of the spread of this new religion some parents

have attempted to bring up their children entirely in the fear of God instead of adhering to the old system.

It is believed that with the spread of the Christian religion among the tribe superstition will be eliminated, a new outlook of life will be created, and children will grow up with a better idea of nature and of the supernatural world.

## CHAPTER 17

### PREPARATION OF CHILDREN FOR WORK

**TRAINING OF BOYS :** Being a farming community, the boys are given a special training from their tenderest years in farming methods and in the use of tools.

Farming is hereditary and a knowledge of the art is usually passed from father to son. The training of a boy in farming methods actually begins at the age of six when the father provides him with a cutlass for practice in the field. In fact, much of the training given to him is acquired by observation and imitation. He follows his father or uncle to the farm on all farming days, and one of his early duties includes the making of a fire, out of a brand which he brings from home, for the purpose of cooking during the mid-day break.

While the father clears a new patch of forest for a new farm, the son watches him carefully. The father first shows him the proper way of holding the cutlass

for clearing and then puts him on a small area to get some practice. Gradually the son learns from the father how to collect weeds and uproot stumps. During the planting season he is taught how to sow seeds and plant cassava, maize, plantains and bananas.

As he visits the farms regularly he picks up from the father the names of various trees and plants he comes across.

He may study the nature of soils, planting seasons and the types of vegetation.

A father who has a cocoa farm will teach his son how cocoa is cultivated and prepared for the market. During the harvesting season the boy accompanies his father to his farm and assists him in harvesting and fermenting the cocoa.

After the boy has reached the age of 10-12 years, the father allows him to start a little farm of his own next to his, and helps him to take the first step towards economic independence.

All profits derived from the work go to the father who puts some aside to help his son to pay his marriage expenses or any taxes or claims made against him.

Other economic activities are taught in connection with farming. For instance, if there are palm trees standing in the farm a boy gets the opportunity of learning how palm wine is extracted, so that he

can earn extra money besides his actual farm work.

Some boys also follow their fathers or uncles to the forest at night to hunt game, The training which is given to such boys involves the method of shooting, and studying the footsteps and cries of wild animals.

Apart from hunting with guns, most of the children are taught how to make different kinds of traps to provide meat for their diet. Among the common traps which they learn to make are:

"Apaduni", "Amfuo" and "Wire" (pronounced "wae" by the natives), and the animals which usually fall victims to them are the grass-cutter, the antelope and the giant rat.

The "wires" for preparing the "wae" trap are purchased from local stores, while the "Apaduni" and the "Amfuo" traps are made of logs, banana stumps and small sticks.

Knowledge of handicrafts is carefully transmitted from father to son or uncle to nephews in order to preserve social status. Thus among the natives it can be seen that certain houses are specialized in particular crafts. A father who has specialized in wood-carving for instance will try to train his son in the making of stools, wooden trays, pestles and mortars. Such training which the son acquires will enable him when he gets

married to earn extra money and so increase his income.

Boys in villages learn to make fish traps which they use for catching fish from streams and rivers. Fishing in streams and rivers appears to be a popular hobby of boys in the tribe, and is carried on even when they become adults. The boys use line and hooks, besides fish traps, in catching fish, and they are often praised by their parents if they bring home a good catch.

Sometimes a group of boys may dam a pool and succeed in catching a lot of fish.

Although hunting, fishing and handicrafts form part of the home training of the boys, they are considered subsidiary to agriculture which nourishes every household and is the foundation of all life.

## 2. TRAINING OF GIRLS:

Special home

education for girls with a view to preparing them for married life is undertaken by parents of the Denkyera tribe.

Girls are given a training in an occupation in order that they may be able, when they get married, to earn money independently of their husbands. A thorough knowledge of farming is also required in order that they may be able to give adequate assistance to their future husbands.

Early training in terms of occupation

falls mainly on the shoulders of the mothers.

At the age of six a girl accompanies her mother to her farm where she is given a graded training in the methods of clearing weeds and preparing the ground for the sowing of such crops as pepper and tomatoes. Gradually the girl increases her skill by observation and imitation.

At the age of ten a girl is made to manage a small farm quite apart from that of her mother. This gives her further practical training in her future occupation. When she sells in the market the products from her small farm she gives the money to her mother who in turn hands it over to the father.

From this time up to the time she gets married, a girl is a great economic asset to her parents.

Accompanied by her mother, she visits her father's farm everyday day of the week, except on Fridays and Sundays which are recognized as sacred days, and carries a load of foodstuffs to the market to sell. In this way the girl is trained to be industrious and capable of <sup>keeping</sup> making accounts of what she sells.

Apart from giving the girls a sound training in the indigenous farming methods, some parents send their daughters away to live with some respected friends or kinsfolk so that

they may have some training in different occupations. This is the housemaid system which is recognized as one of the ways of conditioning girls for adult life in the community.

Such girls learn new methods of cooking, and bread-making, sewing and other kinds of economic activity which will be of great value to them in their married lives.

#### CHAPTER 18

#### INITIATION OF GIRLS AT PUBERTY

Ritual observances play an extremely important part in the initiation of girls at puberty into full membership of the tribe, capable of entering into married life.

When a girl approaches her puberty which takes place normally between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, the mother or the elder sister tells <sup>her</sup> ~~us~~ about the change that will come over her so that she may govern herself morally before marriage.

A girl who becomes pregnant <sup>before</sup> ~~before~~ the ritual observances have ~~not~~ been performed suffers a great penalty from the hands of the chief or elders of the village. Usually a sheep is slaughtered to purify the land and both parties are driven away from the village.

To avoid such public disgrace,

most parents are very particular about the time when their daughters have their first menstruation, so that they can proceed with the initiation ceremony without delay.

Notwithstanding the vigilance of the mothers to avoid trouble and public shame, some girls, out of shyness, do not disclose at once this physiological change that comes upon them, until after some months.

The ritual observances begin with a complete isolation of the girl for six days. She is never allowed to come back to the house until after six days, because the natives view menstruation as something impure. It is believed it has the power of desecrating family stools or neutralizing the efficacy of the medicines used in the house of a chief, an elder, a medicine-man and a fetish priest. Consequently during her period of isolation, the girl is carefully guided by the mother so that she may not break the existing taboos of the tribe in respect of menstruation. The girl is not even allowed to respond to the greetings of a chief or a medicine-man.

Throughout the isolation period, the girl does her cooking on a new stove prepared at the outskirts of the village or behind her house. At night she may sleep in a special hut at the outskirts of the village or in a separate room on the compound.

During the period of isolation she is provided with mashed yams to eat with her friends. The rites also involve the shaving of the head, the armpit and the sexual organ. The old beads used by the girl are removed and replaced with new ones. If there is a stream or a river available the girl bathes in it throughout the period. After that she anoints her body from head to foot with shea-oil and puts on a nice cloth.

After the sixth day the girl returns to her home, and on a special day appointed by her parents, she puts on her best cloth and ornaments and goes out to greet people.

The significance of the whole ceremony is to purify the girls when they enter into the stage of puberty, and to declare them capable of entering into married life.

CHAPTER 19

HOW ADOLESCENTS ARE TRAINED IN SEXUAL MORALITY

When the boys in the tribe attain their puberty they do not undergo any system of initiation as in the case of the girls, but rather they receive instruction from the father as to their moral behaviour.

Young boys are taught at this stage the tribal marriage laws, with special emphasis on the "Ntoro" exogamy.

Between the children of a man and those of his brother an exogamous relationship called "Ntoro" in the Twi

language exists. This kind of relation is said to have emanated from the spiritual relation which exists between the paternal ancestor and his descendants.

For this reason every male or female child worships the god or gods of his or her father, and marriage is strictly forbidden between every member of the paternal group.

In fact, sex knowledge is a very delicate question which most parents, out of shyness, do not discuss with their sons. We shall therefore try to find out the boys' chief sources of sex knowledge.

To my knowledge, the boys learn a good deal about sex long before they reach the age of puberty. This is due to the obscene words which the children pick up unconsciously from the speech of the adults. Words for the genital are common epithets of derogation used by the children in anger, and since there are no euphemistic expressions for them the parents do not forbid their use. As a result of this, the children discuss among themselves the uses of the sex organs as they grow up.

Another common source by which boys in the tribe gather information about sex is by observing the services of such domestic animals as dogs and goats. Very often one comes across a group of young boys in the street watching with deep

interest the services of dogs and using obscene words freely. In such cases one might expect a rebuke from the parents, but on the contrary nothing is done about it.

Masturbation is also practised by some boys, but this is often checked by the parents before <sup>the boys reach</sup> they emerge into the adolescent age.

Another source whereby boys obtain their sex knowledge is by contact with friends. Most boys through friendship with older boys learn a great deal about sex.

It can therefore be deduced from the facts stated here that environment plays a tremendous part in influencing the child's early sexual life.

Like the boys, the girls are influenced also by their environments in acquiring sex knowledge.

By listening to the immoral conversation of some elderly women and by means of their personal contact with older girls, young girls acquire a great deal of sex knowledge. When the girls reach the age of puberty they learn from their friends how to satisfy their future husbands, as far as sexual intercourse is concerned, so that they can fulfil their destinies of becoming mothers.

To inhibit boys and girls from indulging freely in sexual intercourse before marriage, the local custom advocates early marriages.

Another reason why the natives attach importance to early marriages is the somewhat erroneous idea that the earlier a girl gets married the more prolific she becomes.

A father, acting customarily, may find a wife for his son, and pay head-money for him. In some cases a father may allow his son to make his own choice subject to his approval.

In the choice of a wife, sexual purity is a very important factor, and this is the reason why girls who lead promiscuous sexual lives after their puberty initiation find it difficult to get partners from the village, and often move to another village.

The acceptance of the head-money by the family of a girl gives a boy a sexual prerogative coupled with the service of the girl.

A father may give his son a sleeping room in his house and a place where the wife will cook. After the death of the father the son removes to his uncle's house with the wife.

As soon as a boy and a girl get married the responsibility of the parents ceases and both partners become economically independent.

Beyond doubt, there is a regard for sexual purity among the tribe, and although there are some instances of lechery before marriage, the evidence

adduced shows a general regard for chastity either for its inherent moral value, or because of the enhanced value which it gives to girls in the nuptial market.

#### CHAPTER 20

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A study of the home education of children in the Denkyera tribe must place an emphasis on marriage. Marriage is considered an essential step for every adult person to take. He who deliberately chooses to remain single is regarded as failing in his duty of providing for the increase of the tribe.

We see very clearly that the purpose of marriage is not only to provide a man with a helpmate whose labour at home and in the fields is economically advantageous but also to procreate.

To have children and many of them is therefore one of the great ambitions of every man and woman in the tribe.

Children are therefore prized, and they raise the mother in the estimation of the community. She is felt to have done her duty.

The education of children is begun with the treatment of the expectant mother and the application of reasonable

humane methods of assisting delivery and securing the best protection for mother and infant.

The problem of infant welfare among the tribe is a major one, and is being solved by the Clinics of which help some expectant mothers await themselves..

The need for helping children to grow well and inculcating in them an understanding of the social heritage is felt by parents.

Children are nursed by their mothers. It is from them also that they unconsciously learn most of their speech.

An investigation into the methods of nursing reveals some weaknesses which can only be eradicated by Mass Education and Community development projects.

For instance, little attempt is made to regulate the feeding of the child. A child is put to the breast whenever he cries, or whenever he wakes up after sleeping.

Solid food is introduced earlier, and this gives rise to occasional stomach troubles among young children. When the child is able to walk steadily the parents teach him to discharge his faeces at the back of the house, without realizing that this might lead to the spread of Dysentery and Round Worms.

Sleep is considered most important for the physical development of children

and this is clearly illustrated by how mothers caress their children and stimulate sleeping by singing to them.

But unfortunately, this ideal breaks down abruptly, because children above the age of five are sometimes allowed to stay up late.

Again in the matter of clothing, we see that clothing is introduced very early, yet most parents neglect their duty as the children grow up, by failing to enforce its constant use to cover up their nudity.

As a result of this weakness in the educational methods, we find in most villages children under the age of ten carrying out their normal domestic and play activities without covering their bodies. Of course, in the town we see a different situation, and this is partly due to the influence of other tribes and educated families.

During the early years of childhood, the children devote their whole time to play, which is largely imitative of the actions of adults. In allowing this freedom of action resulting in an all-round physical development, accompanied by the acquisition of useful sense impressions and quick reactions to new situations, the parents in this tribe have adopted a plan advocated by great educationists

such as Froebel who advocated the realm of nature as the young child's best tutor.

The natural interests of the child, which are acquisitive, appetitive and curious, cannot necessarily comprehend the more abstract and evolved aspects of culture, such as the body of religious beliefs, folklore, language and tradition. Therefore some method of training, other than imitation, has to be instituted gradually to bring the child into line.

An investigation reveals that a common method of transmitting the culture-traits, with a view also to developing the appropriate emotional attitudes and sentiments, is through folklore. Through legends and tales which are constantly recited under the pleasing guise of fable, instructive lessons are conveyed and ideas stimulated in the child's mind — ideas that will later affect him in the actual conduct of life.

The tribal wisdom is also stored up in this manner and through oral repetition communicated to the child.

The general education of boys has aspects which go to make them useful and obedient members of their groups.

They are trained to be hardy,

enduring, and capable of supporting themselves and their dependants, through a carefully graded education in the art of soil cultivation according to the traditional standard.

In matters of sex-relation, little seems to matter until puberty when the youth are taught to observe societal rules and safeguards as to their conduct.

The necessity for a certain standard of preparation which will equip young girls for adult life is also recognized by the parents in their methods of home education. This is clearly illustrated by the readiness with which mothers undertake the responsibility of training their daughters at an early age in agricultural and domestic duties.

A study of the home education of children in the Denkyera tribe reveals also that the African educates his child for life in the community. The individual has to conform to the type recognized as normal, and deviations from it are looked at askance, for they threaten to break through the framework of tradition and so become a danger to the community. This means that attention is focussed on the group and is apt to neglect

the individual.

Such an attitude has held up the progress of many tribes for several years.

However, with the growth of the population and the recent changes which are taking place in the Denkyera State, it is very likely that the framework of tradition will gradually break down.

One of these social changes is the spread of christianity which is directly opposed to the pagan religion with which the educational system is interwoven.

The Mission Churches, in pursuing their general policy of christianization, are doing all they can to discourage and even abolish various practices connected with family life which conflict with christianity. A striking example is in regard to polygamy and heathen practices from which converts have to refrain.

Perhaps the greatest social force has been the spread of schools in recent years. In the past parents in strict adherence to tradition, resented school-education, because they thought that home education was sufficient for their children. To-day many parents realize that to prepare the

children for a full life in the community according to modern standards, home education alone is not sufficient, therefore they send their children to school.

Similarly, farming has been the main occupation which parents have transmitted to their children, but in recent years, owing to increase in cost of living, some parents have started to give their children a training in different occupations, and so to-day we find children apprenticed to carpenters, masons, lorry drivers and fitters.

A father who wants his son to become an artisan pays an apprenticeship fee which is usually represented by an offer of drinks. During the period of his apprenticeship, the boy is fed by his new "master", and any amount of money which he earns in the form of wages is handed over to him.

When he qualifies after a period ranging from three to four years, the father has to pay the tuition fees which varies according to the type of trade undertaken. In the case of carpentry the sum of £7 4/- is charged, and the boy gets in return a few tools to work with.

It is quite evident that the changes which are coming about will eventually break through the framework

of tradition in the tribe.

However, it is worth remarking that although ~~that~~ the ideals and methods of this undeveloped tribe in terms of rearing of children are open to objections, they tend beyond doubt to qualify the individual for his place in the environment.

In the foregoing chapters, in which I have dealt with the various aspects which constitute the educational methods adopted by parents in the Denkyera tribe in bringing up their children, I have no doubt, that the educationist of to-day will profit by the mistakes of the tribe, while at the same time he may find ideals worthy of emulation.

24/5/52

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APPENDIX A  
PLAN OF A FAMILY HOUSE

