

here,” she thought. There was a nook in one wall where a scroll with a lovely painting and some Japanese writing was hung. A small stand beneath the scroll held a bamboo vase with a flowering branch. That was all that was in the room except the table and the floor cushions on which they sat.

When they rose from the table, Karen said politely, “*Goh-chee-soh sah-mah*” (“Thank you very much for the delicious meal”).

Kiku looked surprised and pleased. “I didn’t know you could speak Japanese.”

“Father and Mother often use Japanese at home, so I have learned to speak some,” Karen replied. “But I can’t read or write any Japanese.”

“I study English in school,” said Kiku, “but since we don’t use

it much otherwise, it is hard for me to speak English very well.”

“You must need to study a lot,” Karen remarked. “I haven’t learned any foreign language in school.”

Karen’s mother smiled. “Maybe Kiku will encourage you to do better with your school work. Students here in Japan need to study hard to keep up with their lessons.”

“I’m sure your visit here will be good for both girls,” said Aunt Haruko. “Kiku can practice speaking English, and Karen can practice speaking Japanese.”

Karen followed Kiku into another room. “You will sleep in here with me,” said Kiku.

Karen noticed that this room also contained very little furniture. “Where are our beds?” she asked.

Tea

Tea has been a favorite drink in Japan for hundreds of years. The Japanese often serve tea to their guests. They enjoy sipping the tea slowly while they visit. Sometimes they have special tea ceremonies.

The tea used in Japan is green tea, not reddish brown like the instant teas served in America. It is raised in the southern part of the Honshu island. Workers pick the leaves of the tea plants by hand. Then the leaves are steamed, rolled, dried, and sent to stores.