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JAPANESE FAIRY TALE SERIES No. 25

CHIN CHIN KOBÁKAMA

Rendered into English by

LAFCADIO HEARN
The floor of a Japanese room is covered with beautiful thick soft mats of woven reeds. They fit very closely together, so that you can just slip a knife-blade between them. They are changed once every year, and are kept very clean. The Japanese never wear shoes in the house, and do not use chairs or furniture such as English people use. They sit, sleep, eat, and sometimes even write upon the floor. So the mats must be kept very clean indeed, and Japanese children are taught just as soon as they can speak, never to spoil or dirty the mats.

Now Japanese children are really very good. All travelers, who have written pleasant books about Japan, declare that Japanese children are much more obedient than English
children and much less mischievous. They do not spoil and
dirty things, and they do not even break their own toys.
A little Japanese girl does not break her doll. No, she
takes great care of it, and keeps it even after she becomes
a woman and is married. When she becomes a mother, and
has a daughter, she gives the doll to that little daughter. And
the child takes the same care of the doll that her mother
did, and preserves it until she grows up; and gives it at
last to her own children, who play with it just as nicely as
their grandmother did. So I—who am writing this little story
for you,—have seen in Japan, dolls more than a hundred years
old, looking just as pretty as when they were new. This will
show you how very good Japanese children are; and you
will be able to understand why the floor of a Japanese room
is nearly always kept clean,—not scratched and spoiled by
mischievous play.

You ask me whether all, all Japanese children are as good

as that? Well—no, there are a few, a very few naughty ones.
And what happens to the mats in the houses of these naughty
children? Nothing very bad—because there are fairies who
take care of the mats. These fairies tease and frighten children
who dirty or spoil the mats. At least—they used to tease and
frighten such mischievous children. I am not quite sure whether
those little fairies still live in Japan,—because the new railways
and the telegraph-poles have frightened a great many fairies
away. But here is a little story about them:—
ONCE there was a little girl who was very pretty, but also very lazy. Her parents were rich, and had a great many servants; and these servants were very fond of the little girl, and did everything for her which she ought to have been able to do for herself. Perhaps this was what made her so lazy. When she grew up into a beautiful woman, she still remained lazy; but as the servants always dressed and undressed her,
and arranged her hair, she looked very charming, and nobody thought about her faults.

At last she was married to a brave warrior, and went away with him to live in another house where there were but few servants. She was sorry not to have as many servants as she had had at home, because she was obliged to do several things for herself, which other folks had always done for her. It was such trouble to her to dress herself, and take care of her own clothes, and keep herself looking neat and pretty to please her husband.

But as he was a warrior, and often had to be far away from home with the army, she could sometimes be just as lazy as she wished. Her husband's parents were very old and good-natured, and never scolded her.

Well, one night while her husband was away with the army, she was awakened by queer little noises in her room. By the light of a big paper-lantern she could see very well; and she saw strange things. What?
Hundreds of little men, dressed just like Japanese warriors, but only about one inch high, were dancing all around her pillow. They wore the same kind of dress her husband wore on holidays, — (*Kamichimo*, a long robe with square shoulders), — and their hair was tied up in knots, and each wore two tiny swords. They all looked at her as they danced, and laughed, and they all sang the same song, over and over again, —

"Chin-chin Kobakama,

*Yomo fuki soro,* —

*Oshizumare, Hime-gimi!* —

*Ya ton ton!* —

Which meant: — "We are the Chin-chin Kobakama; —