

A Study on Hisen Mashimo

—From his childhood to his early years as
an elementary school teacher, writer and poet—

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Hisen (Takikichi) Mashimo (1878-1926) was born at Kōmori (now absorbed into Ohe-cho) in Kyoto Prefecture. Kōmori situated at the foot of Mt. Ohe, had been, since the middle ages, the main town of the district owing to its beneficial location midway between Fukuchiyama or Kyoto City and the towns along the Japan Sea like Miyazu and Maizuru. Inns and shops of many kinds lined the narrow street of the town, the only street that was busy. Once the visitor stepped out of this street, he could take in the view of the country with rows of softly shaped mountains and the wide and beautiful Yura-River flowing slowly zigzagging toward the Japan Sea. It is here that Mashimo was born and brought up, where he spent his childhood and youth until he was 18 years of age. It was then in the twenties of the Meiji-Era.

Mashimo's father was a peasant and the family was poor. Soon after graduation from elementary school, Hisen had to find work. It was arranged for him to become apprenticed next door, at a store dealing in silk thread. Working hard and long hours, the bright and sensitive boy longed to return to school, but his desire for further study had not been well

received until his persistent pleas changed his father's mind. He was admitted into the third year class of the newly built "post-elementary" school, and, in his fourth and final year, while still being a student, orders came for him to assist as a part-time teacher at one of the town's elementary schools. After graduation, he left his home town to enroll at the Teachers' College in Kyoto City. There was no railway at that time from his town to Kyoto, so he had to journey on foot and spend the night at inns on the way. In those years Kyoto University was not built yet and Kyoto Teachers' College was the only institute in the Prefecture that provided higher education. Students at Teachers' Colleges throughout the nation were privileged by the government; it provided them with bed, clothing and even a small allowance for personal use. Education, a primary goal during the Meiji Era, was one of the most important national enterprises and students at Teachers' Colleges were, in many respects, treated and even trained similar to those enrolled at the military academies. Since no private lodging was tolerated, all the students were subjects to the rules of dormitory life during the entire four year course.

It was just after the Sino-Japanese War ended. The confusion of the war days still continued and a military atmosphere prevailed over the nation. The military climate was not auspicious for young writers, especially not for an aspirant teacher under government sponsorship. In spite of this, Mashimo began to write short stories and sent them to newspapers and magazines that were well inclined to young talented writers. When a short story won him a prize from a newspaper and it became known to the college teachers, his literary activity was discussed as a serious matter at the

teachers' conference and he was nearly expelled from the school.

In 1899, at the age of 22, Mashimo became a teacher at Yusai elementary school in Kyoto City. The school, though rebuilt, still exist today at the opposit side of Sanjo-Keihan Station. He was a young teacher with dreams and hopes. He kept on writing short stories and poems and many of his works appeared in literary magazines like “ Bunko ”, “ Yoshiashigusa ” and “ Myojyo ”. He was also active in organizing the Kyoto branhces of readers' circles of these magazines. His name became gradually known. Through his literary activities, he became acquainted with many famous writers of his time like Kan Yosano, Tenmin Kobayashi, Shosho Chino and others. One of his important contributions to Japanese literature was his introduction of then unknown Gyohu Sohma to these literary men and his encouragement of the young poet. Later, Sohma recollected that Mashimo was to him like an older brother, caring and supportive, and that he owed much to him what he was as a poet. Mahimo was most active in literature during this time of his life. Most of the themes and motifs of his works were taken from daily life or direct experiences. He had a fine and sensitive feeling for the people and nature around him, especially for the rural characteristics of his birthplace.

In 1903, he wed Takako Fukuda. It was not an arranged marriage, but a love match, in those times a practice that was still frowned upon. These were the happiest days in his life. After marriage he kept on writing poems but in the following year his concern gradually became directed toward education.