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The Mountain Poems Of Stonehouse



THE MOUNTAIN POEMS OF STONEHOUSE

translation and commentary by

RED PINE



Synopsis

"The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse [is] a tough-spirited book of enlightened free verse." Kyoto Journal The Zen master and mountain hermit Stonehouse considered one of the greatest Chinese Buddhist poets used poetry as his medium of instruction. Near the end of his life, monks asked him to record what he found of interest on his mountain; Stonehouse delivered to them hundreds of poems and an admonition: "Do not try singing these poems. Only if you sit on them will they do you any good." Newly revised, with the Chinese originals and Red Pine's abundant commentary and notes, The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse is an essential volume for Zen students, readers of Asian literature, and all who love the outdoors. After eating I dust off a boulder and sleep and after sleeping I go for a walk on a cloudy late summer day an oriole sings from a sapling briefly enjoying the season joyfully singing out its heart true happiness is right here why chase an empty name Stonehouse was born in 1272 in Changshu, China, and took his name from a cave at the edge of town. He became a highly respected dharma master in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Red Pine is one of the world's leading translators of Chinese poetry. "Every time I translate a book of poems," he writes, "I learn a new way of dancing. And the music has to be Chinese." He lives near Seattle, Washington.

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Customer Reviews

If you love wilderness, solitude and good poems, then 'The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse,' compiled, translated, and commented on by renowned student of Chinese poetry and Zen scholarship, Red Pine, are a must read. Like his fellow hermit-poet, Cold Mountain, Stonehouse was a disaffected monk, student of both the Buddha and the Way. Disillusioned with ritual and even with the 'path' itself, he retreated into the mountains to live a life of self-reliance and contemplation. "Ultimate reality isn't created/ready-made koans aren't worth a thought/all day I sit by my open window/looking at mountains without lowering the shade." Stonehouse's philosophy is based on two tenets: survival and solitude. "Don't think a mountain home means you're free/ a day doesn't pass without its cares/...things don't always go my way/what can I do but turn to myself." These poems celebrate rugged self-possession and cheerful austerity. Stonehouse found himself closer to the Path and Way within wilderness than he ever did among his teachers and fellow monks. "I was a Zen monk who didn't know Zen/so I chose the woods for the years I had left/...mountains and streams explain the Patriarch's meaning/flower smiles and birdsongs reveal the hidden key." Red Pine's translations are direct and clear. Hyperbole, pretense, and artifice are all absent from these poems. In their place are plain, clean descriptions of a quiet life in the wild. Unlike other hermit-poets, Stonehouse rarely dons the teacher's robe. Whereas Cold Mountain's poems often preach on how to live, Stonehouse's are more oblique and subtle. Yet, even he has a few sublime moments of instruction.

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