SELECTED POEMS OF

UFU

杜甫詩選

Sichuan People's Publishing House

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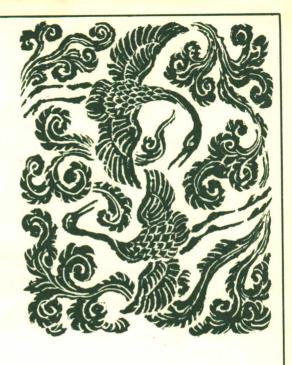
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Foreword

The Tang dynasty(618-907) is a period of florescence in the history of Chinese poetry. Among the many Tang poets Du Fu is undoubtedly one of the greatest. Owing to his high achievements both in thought and in poetic art, he is honoured with the title of "Sage of Poetry", and owing to the profound reflection in his poems of the transition from prosperity to chaos and decline of the Tang empire, people often call his works "History in Verse".

Du Fu (712-770), also named Zimei, was born at Gong County, in present-day Henan Province, of a family noted for good breeding and

cultural attainments. His grandfather was a well-known poet. In his youth Du Fu was fond of travelling, leaving his footprints in the regions comprising the present-day provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Henan and Hebei. In 746, hoping to secure an official post at court, he went to Chang' an. the then capital. Unfortunately he failed in the imperial examination, after which he remained in the capital, living in obscurity and poverty. In 755, the Tartar rebellion broke out. Du Fu fell into the hands of the rebels when Chang'an was occupied. Later he escaped to Fenguiang, temporary capital of the new emperor Suzong, successor to Xuanzong (often called Ming Huang), whose licentious life had cost him his empire. At Fengxiang Du Fu was appointed minor censor, but was soon demoted and sent to Huazhou in present-day Shaanxi

Province. A year later, in the autumn of 759, he abandoned his post and set out for the southwest by way of Qinzhou and Tonggu, stopping at these places for only a short time. In the twelfth moon of the same year, he arrived in Chengdu. With the help of friends he managed to have a thatched cottage built in the western outskirts of the city. This is the celebrated Du Fu's Thatched Cottage, now restored at its original site, that has attracted so many visitors both Chinese and foreign. The Poet lived here in comparative comfort, but not for long, and his mind was never at ease. Even after the Tartar rebellion was put down in 763, the country enjoyed no peace and the people continued to suffer, which made the Poet cry out in anguish, as evidenced in many poems written at that time.

The last ten years of Du Fu's

life was spent in wandering. In 765, he headed east with his family, stopping at Kuizhou in eastern Sichuan for two years. In 768, he sailed down the Changjiang and drifted about in the present-day provinces of Hubei and Hunan. He died in 770 aboard his boat on the Xiang River in Hunan.

Du Fu's extant poems number more than 1,450. The English translations here, about one-thirtieth of the total, are of course hardly adequate to do justice to the Poet's genius. The translator has done his best, though his best may not be good enough.

The Translator February 1981

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