



Essays in Idleness

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Despite the turbulent times in which he lived, the Buddhist priest Kenko met the world with a measured eye. As Emperor Go-Daigo fended off a challenge from the usurping Hojo family, and Japan stood at the brink of a dark political era, Kenko held fast to his Buddhist beliefs and took refuge in the pleasures of solitude. Written between 1330 and 1332, *Essays in Idleness* reflects the congenial priest's thoughts on a variety of subjects. His brief writings, some no more than a few sentences long and ranging in focus from politics and ethics to nature and mythology, mark the crystallization of a distinct Japanese principle: that beauty is to be celebrated, though it will ultimately perish. Through his appreciation of the world around him and his keen understanding of historical events, Kenko conveys the essence of Buddhist philosophy and its subtle teachings for all readers. Insisting on the uncertainty of this world, Kenko asks that we waste no time in following the way of Buddha.

In this fresh edition, Donald Keene's critically acclaimed translation is joined by a new preface, in which Keene himself looks back at the ripples created by Kenko's musings, especially for modern readers.

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