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Essays in Idleness

Yoshida Kenko

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Essays in Idleness Yoshida Kenko
Yoshida Kenko (c. 1283-1352) was a Buddhist priest, a reclusive scholar and poet who had ties to the aristocracy of medieval Japan. Despite his links to the Imperial court, Kenko spent much time in seclusion and mused on Buddhist and Taoist teachings. His Essays in Idleness is a collection of his thoughts on his inner world and the world of Japanese life in the fourteenth century. He touched on topics as diverse as the benefits of the simple life ("There is indeed none but the complete hermit who leads a desirable life"), solitude ("I am happiest when I have nothing to distract me and I am completely alone"), lust ("What a weakly thing is this heart of ours"), the impermanence of this world ("Truly the beauty of life is its uncertainty"), and reading ("To sit alone in the lamplight with a book spread out before you, and hold intimate converse with men of unseen generations--such is a pleasure beyond compare"). To enter Kenko's world is to enter a world of intimate observations, deceptively simple wisdom, and surprising wit.

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