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Raymond Farr

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H.D.T.: The Holy Man of Walden

by Raymond Farr

Worshipping plainness,
his church his own human nature,
he simplified life,
reduced it to its essential spontaneity,
and tending it, made the most of it.
At night, marking a train's dark passage,
he would pause,
noting also the steel track of his thoughts
which he journaled,
illuminated only by his own mortality
and the reverberations a man's past makes
on his future. And knowing how
"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,"
he counted himself a lucky man,
clearing, planting, writing,
having worked adversity to his own advantage.

His journals hinge on details—
the glint of a flower's physiognomy,
the botany of his own peculiar introspection;
his one subject, his only subject:
our quiet place in the order of things.
For intimate depictions flourished in him,
his Yankee neighbors' *"nutshell of civility"*;
the borrowed axe of his beginning at Walden:
"I returned it sharper than I received it."
If he retreated from them
he also revealed himself to us:
*"I went to the woods because I wished
to live deliberately,
to front the essential facts of life."*
In his nature's curious dishevelment,
he must have walked head down,
aware as anyone.

