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To The Woods Nathaniel Smith

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Nathaniel Smith

TO THE WOODS

"tolle lege, tolle lege"
-Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, xii

You start to the woods, a gentle warm-walking morning. A sudden afterthought sends you back through the battered screen door into the house; you take the plant guide in your hand before setting out again under the sugar maples and white pines of the familiar road. Now, uphill and down, you look back and ask yourself why on earth take a book to the woods? That old obsession, the need to name: thou aardvark, thou zebra, thou wild geranium (or Bicknell's cranesbill, is it?) of palmate leaf and quintuple violet petals, thou odoriferous skunk cabbage rising from a pond of murk, thou phloxy wild sweet-william. Are you, then, so weak? Could you not cast down the book, go naked of knowledge, read only the paths and turnings of the woods? The leaf mold sucking at your foot tells you you can, the honeysuckle air tells you you can, the blue binding of the universe tells you you can.