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The Prayer in the Wilderness

THE PRAYER IN THE WILDERNESS.*

Soul of our souls! and safeguard of the world!
Sustain—Thou only canst—the sick at heart;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto Thee and Thine!—WORDSWORTH.

In the deep wilderness, unseen, she pray'd,
The daughter of Jerusalem:—alone,
With all the still, small whispers of the night,
And with the searching glances of the stars,
And with her God, alone! She lifted up
Her sad, sweet voice, while trembling o'er her head
The dark leaves thrill'd with prayer—the tearful prayer,
Of woman's quenchless, yet repentant love:

“ Father of spirits, hear!

Look on the inmost soul, to Thee reveal'd;
Look on the fountain of the burning tear,
Before Thy sight, in solitude unseal'd!

“ Hear, Father! hear and aid!

If I have loved too well, if I have shed,
In my vain fondness, o'er a mortal head
Gifts, on Thy shrine, my God, more fitly laid:

“ If I have sought to live

But in one light, and made a mortal eye
The lonely star of my idolatry,
—Thou, that art Love! oh, pity and forgive!

“ Chasten'd and school'd at last,

No more, no more my struggling spirit burns,
But fix'd on Thee, from that vain worship turns!
—What have I said?—the deep dream is not past!

“ Yet hear!—if *still* I love,

Oh! still too fondly—if, for ever seen,
An earthly image comes, my soul between
And Thy calm glory, Father! throned above:

“ If still a voice is near,

(Even while I strive these wanderings to control,)
An earthly voice, disquieting my soul,
With its deep music, too intensely dear:

“ O Father, draw to Thee

My lost affections back!—the dreaming eyes
Clear from their mist—sustain the heart that dies;
Give the worn soul once more its pinions free!

“ I must love on, O God!

This bosom *must* love on!—but let Thy breath
Touch and make pure the flame that knows not death,
Bearing it up to Heaven, Love's own abode!”

Ages and ages past, the Wilderness,
With its dark cedars; and the thrilling Night,
With her pale stars; and the mysterious winds,
Fraught with all sound, were conscious of those prayers.

—How many such hath woman's bursting heart
Since then in silence and in darkness breath'd,
Like a dim night-flower's odour, up to God!

F. H.

* Suggested by the picture of a kneeling Magdalen.