

## A Prayer for Peace

SAMUEL YATES LEVY

Savannah, November 2, 1863

Samuel Yates Levy, born in 1827, was a member of a distinguished Charleston and Savannah family devoted to the cause of the South. His sister was the famous Confederate firebrand, Mrs. Philip Phillips, who was imprisoned in Washington as a "spy" and later deported to the South. Levy's "Prayer for Peace" was written about four months after the Confederacy's defeat at Gettysburg and after the fall of Vicksburg.

This poem is published, for the first time, we believe, from his manuscript commonplace book, a copy of which is deposited in the American Jewish Archives.

Almighty God! Eternal sire and king!  
Ruler supreme who all things did'st create,  
Whose everlasting praise the angels sing,  
Whose word is mercy and whose thought is fate:

Trembling before thy awful throne we kneel,  
Beseeching mercy at thy gracious hand,  
Praying that in compassion thou wilt heal  
The bleeding wounds of this most suffering land.

We know our sins are manifold, oh Lord,  
And that thy wrath against us is but right,  
For we have wandered wildly from thy word  
And things committed wrongful in thy sight.

But thou, oh Lord, art powerful to save  
And full of mercy, full of love art thou;  
Else had we not the courage thus to brave  
Thy righteous wrath — thus at thy feet to bow.

O'er all our fields, where late the joyful air  
Struck rustling music from the waving grain,  
Now the sad earth is lying stark and bare,  
Or groaning 'neath the burden of our slain.

In sackcloth robed, disconsolate and wild,  
With ashes strewed upon her lovely breast,  
The Country mourns her hearths and homes defiled,  
Weeps for her bravest and bewails her best.

From the cold hearths where lately genial fires  
Beamed upon scenes of innocent delight,  
The little children vainly call their sires  
Or fly their burning homes with wild affright.

Our punishment is very hard to bear:  
We droop and faint beneath thy chast'ning rod:  
Oh list in mercy to our earnest prayer  
And move thy anger from us, oh, our God.

Throw, Lord, thy buckler thick 'twixt us and harm.  
Bid the destruction and the carnage cease.  
Outstretch in power thy all protecting arm,  
Roll back the clouds of War and give us Peace.

And as thou led'st thy chosen people forth  
From Egypt's sullen wrath, oh King of Kings!  
So smite the armies of the cruel North  
And bear us to our hopes "on eagles' wings."

But should thy wisdom still defer the day —  
The wish'd for day our freedom shall be won —  
Oh grant us the humility to say,  
Not human will but Thine, oh Lord, be done.