

**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

# The War Prayer

by **Mark Twain**

Adapted and arranged by  
**Charles W. Whitman and C. Michael Perry**



Newport, Maine

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## **THE WAR PRAYER**

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**ORDER #3330**

# **THE WAR PRAYER**

## CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Readers include:

Female 1

Female 2

Female 3

Female 4

Male 5

Male 6

Preacher (Male)

Angel (Male)

The production can be done simply with music stands as reader's lecterns or can be semi-staged or fully staged and costumed. The important concept of the play is in its unity, its ensemble feel. Even though the Angel speaks forever the other actors need to be fully involved.

**THE WAR PRAYER** by *Mark Twain*. 4M 4W. About 10 minutes. A stirring adaptation of Twain's somber and disturbing ode to war. A simple setting of chairs and a podium would be sufficient. Costumes may be worn but unified dress is also workable. This is an actors piece. Talent and creativity will be tested! It is simple to stage and has a dynamic impact. It can be done as a Reader's Theatre but has worked best when fully memorized. It is the story of a town praying for victory in their war and the Angel who comes to the church to tell them what their prayer will mean to their enemy and themselves. Order # 3330.

## THE WAR PRAYER

**F1:** It was a time of great and exalting excitement.

**F2:** The country was up in arms.

**F3:** The war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism.

**M5 & 6:** The drums were beating, the bands playing, the toy pistols popping.

**ALL:** The bunched firecrackers hissing and spluttering,

**F4:** On every hand and far down the receding spread of roofs and balconies a fluttering wilderness of flags flashed in the sun.

**F1:** Daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue, bright and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by.

**M5:** Nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest deeps on their hearts and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks the while;

**M6:** In the Churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid in our good cause in the outpouring of fervid eloquence which moved every listener.

**F2:** It was indeed a glad and gracious time, and the half dozen rash spirits that ventured to disapprove of the war and cast a doubt upon it's righteousness straight-away got such a stern and angry warning that for their personal safety's sake they quickly shrank out of sight and offended no more in that way.

*(PAUSE)*

**WOMEN:** Sunday morning came.

**MEN:** Next day the battalions would leave for the front;

**PREACHER:** The Church was filled; the volunteers were there, their young faces alight with martial dreams -

**M6:** Visions of the stern advance, the gathering momentum, the rushing charge, the flashing sabres, the flight of the foe, the tumult, the enveloping smoke, the fierce pursuit, the surrender! --

**F2:** Then home from the war, bronzed heroes, welcomed, adored, submerged in seas of glory!

**F3 & 4:** With the volunteers sat their dear ones, proud, happy and envied by the neighbors and friends who had no sons and brothers to send forth to the field of honor, there to win the flag.

**F1 & 2:** Or failing, die the noblest of deaths.

**F3:** The service proceeded;

**F4:** A war chapter from the Old Testament was read;

**PREACHER:** The first prayer was said;

*(Silence a moment)*

**M5:** It was followed by an organ burst that shook the building,

**MEN:** And with one impulse the house rose, with glowing eyes and beating hearts, and poured out that tremendous Invocation:

*(The PREACHER leads the CONGREGATION)*

**ALL:** God-the-all-terrible!

Thou who ordainest,

Thunder thy clarion

And lightning thy sword!

*(The PREACHER prays)*

**F1:** Then came the "long" prayer. None could remember the like of it for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language.

**M5:** The burden of it's supplication was that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers and aid, comfort and encourage them in their patriotic work;

**PREACHER:** Bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in Thy mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory -

*(The ANGEL enters -- The PREACHER freezes in his prayer, unaware of the ANGEL'S presence)*

**M6:** An aged stranger entered

**ALL:** And moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle,

**WOMEN:** His eyes fixed upon the Minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet,

**F4:** His head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders,

**F2:** His seamy face unnaturally pale,

**F3:** Pale even to ghastliness.

**M5:** With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way;

*(The ANGEL ascends to the PREACHER'S podium a continues to do the actions suggested by the reader's lines)*

**F3 & 4:** Without pausing he ascended to the Preacher's side and stood, there, waiting.

**F1:** With shut lids, the Preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in fervent appeal:

**PREACHER:** Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord, Our God, Father and Protector of our land and flag!

**F2:** The stranger touched him and motioned him to stop aside -

**F4:** Which the startled minister did -

**F1 & 3:** And took his place.

*(PAUSE. The ANGEL looks out over the CONGREGATION)*

**F4:** During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes in which burned an uncanny light;

**ANGEL:** I come from the throne -- bearing a message from Almighty God!

**F2:** The words smote the house like a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention.

**ANGEL: (FILLS OUT THIS AND THE FINAL PAGE OF THE SCRIPT)**