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SALVATION SOLDIERY

CHAPTER 15: A MERRY CHRISTMAS

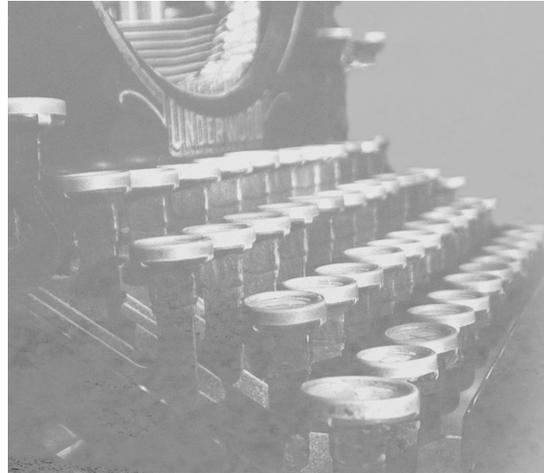
"Is any Merry? Let him sing."

THIS is reckoned a merry time. It is considered in this country the correct thing to wish everybody a Merry Christmas, and to get one yourself if you can. We pity those who have anything which makes them sad just now, and so it has become an annual custom to be merry, and to help to make other people as merry as you possibly can.

Now, we have no objection to this at all; indeed we like the idea of special periods of rejoicing if you have anything to rejoice over, and it suits The Salvation Army, which believes in being merry all the year round in general, and at special times in particular.

We like the word merry, and we will have it in religion if you please. Many people think it altogether out of place there. They will let the children be merry when home for the holidays, having an extra allowance of games and cake. They will let the merchant be merry when his balance sheet has come out on the right side; they will let the sailor be merry when he has got into port, after long tossing on the ocean; they will let the politician be merry when, by fair means or foul, he has carried his candidate; but we who are always overcoming sin and driving devils or rescuing captives or gaining victories over the King's enemies, we soldiers of the Cross must be always solemn, and melancholy, and awful, and have our hearts in our shoes, and our words must be few, antiquated, and learnt out of a book; and our songs all of the Old Hundred pattern.

No, we say, and say it thankfully, that we have not been taught religion after this fashion. If, when slaves find freedom, and tradesmen make fortunes, and kindred, or friends, or neighbours are delivered from some threatened calamity, it is allowable to go mad with joy, and to express it by hiring music, and beating drums, and letting off fireworks, and shouting till hoarse, and everybody says that is all right, then by the same rule, if you please, and whether you please or no, we are the slaves who have now our freedom, the people who have made our fortune; we are the men who have seen our kindred and friends and neighbours saved from damnation; and therefore we have a right to be merry. We ought to be merry, we should be hypocrites if we



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were not merry, but we are merry, and it is only natural and divine that we should express it; so bring out the music, new music, the merriest music; there's a time for everything, and this is the merry time. Now for the song; everybody sing – husbands, wives, children; neighbours, strangers, everybody sing – Praise the Lord.

"Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and harp.

"Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with string instruments and organs.

"Praise Him upon the loud cymbals: praise Him upon the high-sounding cymbals."

And let the very trees of the field join in the chorus by clapping their hands.

What is the good of it all? Oh, it not only expresses the joy we possess, but it helps us along – not the words and sentiments only, but the music has a divine effect upon divinely influenced and directed souls. Music is to the soul what the wind is to the ship, blowing her onward in the direction in which she is steered. Now, sailor, look to your helm, here is a fair wind, and a stiff one too, right behind you. On you go, faster and faster. But mind you are going right. Captain; see to your compass, and consult the stars, and examine your chart; be sure, oh, be doubly sure that you are right, for, if you are steering wrong, the wind will soon carry you on to the rocks of destruction. All right! do you say? Then blow away, ye winds, this mariner has a tight ship and a good cargo, and he is steering her straight for port. Blow away, and blow him home.

Just so, my comrades, the course of our souls was once straight towards the Niagara of damnation; the music and merriment of the world was blowing us faster and faster towards it, but the Almighty fired the alarm guns, and we heard the signal, turned the ship round, and now we are sailing straight towards the port of glory. Do you want to go faster and faster, to rouse desire and stir up prayer, and strengthen faith? Then bring in the music, raise the song. Sing of other heroes and their doings. Sing of the Victor of the cross. Sing of the blood and the fire, and the death shout, and the glory gates, and sing of everything that you have read about in your Bibles, or had revealed to you by the Holy Ghost, that has happened, or is going to happen, on the road to



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glory, or in the glory land when you get there,

Oh, if you are merry, sing, and sing on till you are merrier still, and every poor, trembling, doubting, weak-kneed soul about you loses his doubts and tremblings and is merry too.

We are not allowed to sing that tune or this tune, do you say? Indeed! Secular music, do you say, belongs to the Devil? Does it? Well, if it did I would plunder him of it, for he has no right to a single note of the whole seven. But we deny it. He's the thief; it is he that has stolen it, and in appropriating it we only get our own again. Every note, and every strain, and every harmony is divine, and belongs to us. By and bye, sin, and devils, and lost souls will only have the discords left; all the weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth will be theirs; and all the songs, and hallelujahs, and harmonies will be ours.

So consecrate your voices and your instruments. Bring out your cornets, and harps, and organs, and flutes, and violins, and pianos, and drums, and everything else that can make melody. Offer them to God, and use them to make all the hearts about you merry before the Lord.

Only let us, as far as possible, have harmony! Now harmony of soul must have much to do with harmony of voice, if it has not to do with harmony of instruments. It must be, that a man whose heart is in beautiful union and harmony with the will and purposes of God, and, consequently, full of heavenly merriment, must be far better conditioned for making merry and heavenly sounds. There must be, at least, something pleasing to God and men and the soul of the musician in such correspondence. So, this Christmas, let us all get into tune, and let there be this heavenly correspondence between the inside "heart" instrument and the outside voice, or whatever other instrument the merry sounds may be produced upon.

There is a stale, old argument used by the Gentile world about forgiving your enemies and rubbing off grudges, and all that sort of thing, as being a peculiarly gracious duty to be practised at Christmas time. That docs not apply to our ranks, surely? Your Salvation Army people don't burden themselves with the memory of grudges and



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enmities. They forgive as they go along. But before the Lord there are some who, on trying their hearts by the great inspired tuning fork, the Word of God, wilt find they are too high – too sharp! To these we say, come down, This is the very time of the year to get low – not only into the village of Bethlehem, but to the stable – that is the penitent form, where you will be sure to meet your Saviour. Come down! If low and flat, then come up, my comrades! Here is the pitch. No apologies, excuses, or talk about impossibilities. "All things are possible to him that believeth." If the gate is strait you must go through it, however painful the squeeze. If the violinist's strings could cry out for mercy, he would not heed their cries. He must reach the required pitch, or he not only makes a discord himself, but spoils the harmony of the choir. So, my comrades, screw up – higher still! Never mind the pain – the doubtful must go, the duty must be done, the consecration must be made, the faith must be exercised; the crowd pressed through – the hem of His sacred garment touched, and then the harmony will be reached and the glory realised. And, now, strike off, with hearts and instruments in harmony, and do your best, and earth, and hell, and heaven will gather to listen, and your music shall be welcome and gladdening to the ears and heart of the King of kings.