THE "JOLLY JACK TAR" AT SEA IN CHARLES DIBDIN'S SONGS

by

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ABSTRACT

Charles Dibdin, actor, playwright, song writer, was granted a government pension in 1803 "for his nearly 100 songs which, it was said, did more to bring in recruits than did all the press gangs together." The circumstance is sufficiently unique to warrant investigation.

Spanning almost fifty years, Dibdin's career falls into three distinct phases. In phase one, 1760-1775, he was employed in the patent theatres. During that period, while developing his musical skills, he demonstrated an inability to work harmoniously with theatre managers. Phase two, which lasted for some thirteen years, was marked by various unsuccessful theatrical ventures. It was a time, however, when he had significant encounters with seamen and the sea. An aborted attempt to emigrate to India in 1788 heralded the beginning of the third phase. Although he had already written twenty-three popular sea songs, the remaining 117 were produced during this final period.

Dibdin's earlier career dictated the form of his last twenty years in the world of entertainment. His inability to cooperate with others led to his becoming a solo performer. He presented what he called "Entertainments"; evenings of dialogue and song. He says, "It was not enough...for me

merely to write love-songs....It was necessary to...give my labours a decided character." Contrary to public opinion, he considered the British tar to be "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic." These were characteristics which, he wrote,

> had not very pointedly been put forward. I thought...the subject honourable, and commendable, and in some degree novel; especially as it would give an opportunity through public duty of expressing private affection.

Therefore, drawing on his experience of sailors and the sea, he proceeded to write songs praising "those heroes who are the natural bulwark of their country."

A brief survey of conditions in the British navy at the time of the Napoleonic wars forms a background against which to assess the songs themselves. Dibdin made little or no direct reference to abuses such as poor pay, poor food, et cetera. It was his opinion that

> A sermon and a song, even a comic song, may have the same drift, and produce the same effect. The song, written to please, may be so managed as to instruct.

Following his own precepts, he concentrated on drawing attention to the plain and manly virtues, stressing honesty and patriotism. His sailor, stoically facing lengthy separation from loved ones, cheerfully enduring storm and battle, and even dying for king and country emerges larger than life; a folk hero; a "Jolly Jack Tar."

The songs gained wide popularity. The lyrics were peppered with colourful nautical jargon which was not only accurate but familiar to a maritime nation and therefore easily understood; the melodic tunes were "catchy" and easily sung; many of the songs fostered the rampant patriotism of wartime Britain; the songs appealed to the sentimental, increasingly humanitarian attitudes of a changing society.

Undoubtedly, Dibdin had contributed in large measure to the development of a new persona for the seaman. It became admirable to be a sailor. Consequently, men volunteered for naval service and Dibdin received a pension. His influence went beyond the navy, however, to the theatre where his "Jolly Jack Tar" became the hero of nineteenth-century nautical melodrama.

We may conclude that, despite the frustrations and disappointments of the early years, the extent of Dibdin's influence ensured that his was a successful career.

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN

Charles Dibdin (1745-1814) was an actor, playwright and songwriter. During a theatrical career spanning some fifty years he wrote more than 1,200 songs, of which about 140 lauding the British sailor became known as the sea songs. His career falls into three distinct phases. In phase one he was employed in the patent theatres. Phase two was marked by several unsuccessful theatrical ventures. Through force of circumstance he finally achieved success as a solo entertainer in the final phase.

Phase One

Born in Southampton, Dibdin, who was destined for the church, was sent to the College of Winchester, where his natural bent for music became apparent. That he had ability as a vocalist seems evident from the fact that he took part in the weekly subscription concerts. George Hogarth[1] tells us that he was 'chief vocal performer,' adding:

> His musical propensities being...nourished by the popularity which his attainments...gained... he abandoned his ecclesiastical studies, and devoted himself...to his favourite pursuit, resolving to depend on it as his means of subsistence.[2]

Consequently, he applied for the position of organist at Weltham, Hampshire. He attributed his rejection to his youth. Hogarth, on the other hand, although he refers to

Dibdin's 'inexhaustible vein of melody,'[3] considered there was

> a sounder reason for his rejection: for, with all his genius and natural gifts, he certainly, even when at the height of his fame, never possessed musical learning and skill sufficient to qualify him for the duties of an organist in any church superior to that of a country village.[4]

It was at this juncture, 1760, that his older brother, Thomas, captain of a merchantman, brought Charles to London. Before returning to sea Thomas secured employment for Charles in the music shop of a Mr. Johnson, leaving the youth to make his own way in a bustling city which was fast becoming the financial and commercial capital of the world. Dibdin says:

> The theatres and the opera-houses were regions of enchantment to me....I have no power of expression that can give the faintest idea of what I felt when I heard the first crash of an overture....I was music mad; but what astonished me most was that, merely from hearing how the parts were combined and worked together in the band, I completely learnt the secret of composition....
>
> The music I have was strongly in my mind from my earliest remembrance, and I know that no master could at any time have been of the least service to me. It lay quietly a hidden spark... coming in contact with its proper fuel, the different performances in town, it at once expanded, and nothing could keep it within bounds....
>
> I instantly became my own instructor....

> I...got his [Corelli] concertos in single parts, and put them into score....From this... exercise, I drew all the best properties of harmony; and...the...secret, that men...may violate ...many of those rules of composition which are dogmatically imposed. To this...knowledge...I added such theoretical particulars as are to be found in Rameau; and having possessed myself of as much science as I conceived necessary...I determined fearlessly to give free scope to my fancy....[5]

In due course Dibdin was introduced to John Rich, manager of Covent Garden, and by December of 1760 his name appeared on that theatre's payroll as a chorus-singer. His theatrical career had begun.

For the next two or three years he was in the chorus or played minor roles. During the 1763-64 season his musical abilities were first officially recognized when he collaborated with Michael Arne on the music for A Fairy Tale, Garrick's production of Colman's adaptation of A Midsummer Night's Dream. During the next ten years, although he did produce some original pieces, most of his work was done in collaboration with Garrick, Bickerstaffe and others, for whom he supplied the music and an occasional song. In two of these collaborations he played major roles. The first, The Maid of the Mill, had its premiere at Covent Garden on 31 January, 1765. Dibdin replaced an aging actor to create Ralph, the brother of the Maid. In that role, and as the black servant Mungo in The Padlock, his success engendered so much jealousy among his fellow actors that, except for his solo entertainments in later life, he soon gave up

appearing on stage. The Padlock, which opened at Drury Lane on 3 October, 1768, is noteworthy because, as Hogarth says:

> It was in The Padlock that Dibdin's musical genius first shone out in all its lustre. The drama is clever and amusing; and such was the charm of Dibdin's fresh and graceful melodies, that the piece acquired vast and lasting popularity. The extent of this may be estimated from the fact stated by Dibdin in his 'Professional Life' that the author of the words [Bickerstaffe] kept the copyright in his own hands, and that 28,000 copies had been sold in 1779.[6]

Dibdin continues the story:

> he [Bickerstaffe] cleared, as near as I can calculate, at least, seventeen hundred pounds. What will the public say, then, when I declare, upon the faith of a man, that I never received, in the whole, for composing that music, but forty-five pounds![7]

In view of Bickerstaffe's profit, Dibdin's remuneration seems meagre indeed. One can only assume that the amount had been agreed upon at the beginning of their collaboration on this particular play and that Bickerstaffe saw no reason to be generous to the younger man. Dibdin encountered similar treatment throughout a financially troubled career.

The age-old problem of remuneration for artistic work may well have been at the root of Dibdin's conflict with Garrick. Although Dibdin says: "I have long enough ago learned to forget injuries, and I flatter myself rancour forms no part of my disposition,"[8] he fills many pages of his autobiography with railing against the "parsimony and

littleness of mind in Garrick."[9] In 1769 Dibdin had made a seven-year contract with Garrick in which "I agreed to receive seven pounds a week for what was worth more than double that sum."[10] The previous year (1768) he had borrowed two hundred pounds from the theatre to clear his brother, Thomas, of debt. Apparently he had not repaid it, as his salary of seven pounds was withheld during the 1773-74 season. In addition to the monetary aspect, Dibdin suggests that Garrick, possibly from jealousy, denied him the opportunities his talents deserved. Evidence from Garrick's letters, on the other hand, indicates an impatience with the younger man whose evident popularity may have induced an insupportable arrogance. The rift widened, and in 1775 Garrick terminated Dibdin's employment as composer at Drury Lane. Hogarth, writing in 1841, at a time when middle-class morality was in the ascendancy, suggests the break was due to Dibdin's abandonment of his mistress, Harriet Pitt, and his sons Charles Isaac Mungo and Thomas John. However, it seems more likely that in the 1770s the reasons were professional rather than moral. Whatever the reasons, there can be no doubt that, at the end of phase one of his career, Dibdin had demonstrated an inability to cooperate with management, a characteristic which would eventually lead to his establishment as a solo entertainer.

Phase Two

The next thirteen years were, on the whole, unlucky ones for Dibdin. In an endeavour to remain in the world of entertainment he embarked on various enterprises with very little success. The first of these was a puppet show, The Comic Mirror, which had a three-month run, and which "was by no means a failure."[11] Nevertheless, it was an enterprise he pursued no further, and he left shortly for France. With reference to this move he says: "Though I had long meditated a trip to France, if it had been possible to have established myself at either of the theatres as composer, I should certainly not have taken that step."[12] Prior to his departure Dibdin and Dr. Samuel Arnold, composer at the Haymarket Theatre, reached an agreement whereby the latter would implement the production of any scripts Dibdin might send him. Eleven pieces were despatched and performed at various London theatres. Notable among these was The Seraglio (1776) which contained the love song "Blow High, Blow Low," the first of the sea songs to meet with instant success. Dibdin followed this with Yo Yea; or, The Friendly Tars, the first of his operas which extolls the hardiness, courage and virtue of the British tars. Some ten years later Dibdin's thoughts will crystalize and, through the songs, a hardy, courageous and virtuous British sailor will emerge as the "Jolly Jack Tar" folk-hero, described by the song writer as "plain, manly, honest and patriotic."[13]

With war threatening, Dibdin returned to England in 1778, and was engaged as resident composer at Covent Garden with a weekly salary of ten pounds. In less than four years he had fallen out with Thomas Harris, manager. Dibdin tells his story:

> In consequence of a difference of opinion with Mr. Harris...that gentleman and I separated. At that time I applied to a friend of mine to enter into some scheme with me, who prevailed on several other gentlemen to join him in building the [Royal] Circus. The history of that place- the infamy of its present occupier...the ill treatment of the proprietors - and my incorrigible weakness and folly in tamely suffering so many impositions, would make up matter for a much larger work...I shall only say that...I found I had nothing for it but to regain the theatres. This was certainly a forlorn hope.[14]

Dibdin's friend was a Colonel West who controlled some property on the South Bank. The Royal Circus, which opened in November, 1782, was intended to compete with Astley's Amphitheatre. Charles Hughes was the principal equestrian and Grimaldi Senior the clown. In 1783, after the death of Colonel West, Dibdin's involvement with the Royal Circus seems to have terminated in a disagreement with Hughes and Grimaldi.

As return to the patent theatres was a "forlorn hope," Dibdin attempted to build a theatre for himself at "Pancras," in the district of Clerkenwell. The structure blew down in a gale and the unfortunate Dibdin lost £290, a sum he could ill afford. Finally, having "pretty well proved

that the theatrical paradise was shut against me,"[15] Dibdin decided to leave England for India, where his deceased brother, Thomas, had been financially successful. To raise the money for the journey, Charles went on a tour of England, recording his experiences in the form of letters in The Musical Tour of Mr. Dibdin. The tour was not financially successful. The book is full of complaints about the reception he received, especially in towns where he was thought to be an impostor, and about the expense and poor quality of the inns where he put up. Liverpool seems to have been an exception, especially with the way in which the seamen there received his song of "Nothing Like Grog." A highlight, however, was the occasion when he performed at a private house for the Prince of Wales, who gave permission for his name to be used on the subscription list for The Musical Tour....

The tour has special significance for the present study because of Dibdin's contact with ships and sailors. He describes a six-mile ferry trip across the Humber river in a storm:

> The wind being almost due south, very strong and squally...I set sail from Hull to Barton....I am sure I shall endure nothing in my voyage to India that will exceed what I then experienced ...the squalls [were] so frequent, strong, and sudden,...I began to think...there was...a chance of 'our being capsized'....

> After our poor little sloop had been buffetted three hours and forty minutes, during which she, above a hundred times, as fairly dived as ever did a duck, our sailors...ran us aground at the mouth of Barton Harbour.[16]

Dibdin draws on this experience, especially the pitching of the ship, in his descriptive songs of storms at sea.

In another "Letter" in The Musical Tour... Dibdin records that he travelled in a coach in which there were two sailors on their way to London to collect prize money owing from the last war which had ended five years earlier:

> They said...it had always been the way to send poor fellows - who earned their little at the risk of their lives - from agent to agent, till what they received was not worth having...they thought it was better to see into it themselves than to trust their affairs in the hands of those land-sharks, the lawyers. That there was something wrong, but they hoped, one day or other, every thing would be righted;...[17]

The "Letter" is dated 20 February, 1788. It is interesting to note that the sailors were discussing the subject of pay which crystallized to become one of the grievances leading to the 1797 mutinies, a grievance which was not fully resolved until 1803. The encounter is significant in the light of Dibdin's later work. The tour had been disappointing because of small audiences and meagre financial returns. His own disappointment would make it easy for him to appreciate the sailors' problems. Several of the songs deal with the consequences of low wages, the perfidy of lawyers and

agents, and the poor rewards for the dangers the sailors faced defending the nation. The "Letter" continues:

> This was one instance, out of a great many, in which I have had opportunity to notice the strong intellectual feelings of sailors. They are honest and liberal, to a proverb...
>
> I have certainly...heard a sailor utter... many good things....Nor do their technical allusions rob what they say of its beauty.[18]

Here we see the observant song writer appreciating the sailors' worth. It is a theme he will pursue. His reference to their "technical allusions" presages his own use of nautical terms in the sea songs.

Eventually Dibdin returned to London and put his affairs in order in preparation for the journey to India. This included selling the copyright of all his musical property:

> The Waterman...which certainly cleared the publisher two hundred pounds, I was compelled to sell for two guineas, and Nothing like Grog, also a very popular song, yielded me no more than half-a-guinea.[19]

His reasons for selling were probably twofold. In the first place, he needed every penny he could raise. Secondly, he must have known that the copyright Act of 1709[20] was difficult to enforce and that claims of plagiarism by an absentee author would have little chance of success. The publisher who bought the property would also be aware of these facts. Therefore, despite the popularity of the songs, the man

seems to have offered "rock-bottom" prices. Dibdin, with departure imminent, had no alternative but to accept. Once again, he seems to have received inadequate payment for his work.

Dibdin then arranged to sail in the Active with a Captain Warrick, and forthwith laid in a sea-stock. After some delay they sailed from Gravesend for Dunkirk to load brandy for Madeira. Dibdin, with his family, went ashore for more supplies, and when he got back "the ship was in a complete state of mutiny."[21] The crew which consisted of the mate, four men and a boy, was upset because, for a two years' voyage, the captain had only laid in "one sweet cask of beef, two casks of water, and one cask of sound biscuit."[22] Dibdin seems to have calmed the men and persuaded the captain to purchase further provisions in Dunkirk. The result was that the captain gave each man a six-livre piece to spend on shore and they all went off, leaving the Dibdins and the boy on board:

> This was about six o'clock. The captain had gone ashore for the night, and the men had been ordered to return aboard by nine. Ten o'clock however came...and as the gates were then shut, it was impossible to see them till the morning. This was not a very pleasant situation, but the cabin-boy was left aboard...and I determined to watch with him upon deck.
>
> We were well moored, and it was perfectly calm; but...it was necessary occasionally to slacken the hawser which was fastened to a kedge anchor. The boy and I managed this...in a very seaman-like manner, till six o'clock in the morning, by which time the tide had ebbed out,

> and all the vessels in the harbour were completely grounded.[23]

Later in the morning Dibdin had to go ashore to arrange for the release of the sailors who, having been upset by the captain's behaviour, had been arrested for setting upon every Frenchman they met. Finally, about 20 August, 1788, the ship sailed. Dibdin continues:

> It had never struck me that while I had gained the hearts of the sailors, I had made a foe of the captain....For about four and twenty hours the wind was tolerably fair, but soon afterwards it encreased with a heavy squall, and...it almost blew a gale.
>
> It is not necessary to go into all the particulars of our kicking about in the channel... for nearly in the whole of five days, I shall... only say, that having been for eight and forty hours terrified and intimidated with the menaces of Beechy Head...we were at length driven into Torbay under a close-reefed sail.
>
> During this time, nothing that can be imagined distressing or inconvenient could exceed what we endured. Our...captain...laid out in every possible way to annoy us.
>
> ...the sailors resented this treatment of me ....They came to me in a body one afternoon... and told me...that if I would say the word, they would throw him overboard.
>
> ...
>
> In company with seventeen sail of ships, we flew like lightning between the two rocks at the entrance to the bay, and cast anchor about two miles from Brixham, where at length we landed; but, to give an idea of the weather...we were six hours before we could hoist...out a boat to convey us ashore.[24]

Dibdin did not re-embark. The second phase of his career was at an end. He had again demonstrated that he was incapable of cooperating with management, and, therefore, could probably only succeed by himself. But the most noteworthy element of this period, and one which was to influence his future work, was the experience he gained of ships and seamen, especially on the aborted journey to India. In its brief duration he not only once again antagonized "management" in the person of the captain, but, more important, established a genuine rapport with the sailors in their own element.

Phase Three

Ashore, in financial difficulties, Dibdin returned to London and determined to try his luck with the public once more. Consequently, he prepared and presented a one-man show entitled The Whim of the Moment, the first of the shows which would become known as the Entertainments. He has left the following account:

> On my first night, though the entertainment was allowed to possess considerable merit in itself, backed by the extraordinary circumstance, that one man in so many various ways undertook to perform so arduous a task as to be the sole exhibitor for a whole evening, and this man...a known and acknowledged favourite, I was attended only by sixteen persons;...[25]

Encouraged by his friends, however, he "improved and enriched"[26] the piece, renamed it The Oddities, and moved it

to a location in the Strand. He finally met with sufficient success to encourage him to continue creating similar shows. Hogarth tells us:

> Dibdin published the songs in his entertainments in separate sheets,...but those parts of them which consisted of recitation were never printed, with the exception of The Whim of the Moment,...introduced in...his Tour through England...as they [the recitations] were merely intended to introduce the songs, they were of too slight and ephemeral a character to bear publication; depending...more upon the spirit and humour of their delivery, than...their literary merit. They consisted of little comic dialogues, lively, or pathetic tales, anecdotes, and traits of satire;...[27]

Hogarth's reference to the script of The Whim of the Moment may be the programme which Dibdin recorded in a later edition of The Musical Tour....[28] That programme is in two parts divided by an intermission. In each part, Dibdin tells stories about two different groups of characters, alternating episodes in their adventures. In Part I, for example, one set of characters represents some young people crossed in love. The other group supposes a club of men, of which one of the characters is a Commodore. These characters tell stories and discuss various topics, a device Dibdin uses to introduce songs. For instance, Dibdin would say "'I am glad on't,' said the Commodore, '...Here,' said he - taking the bowl - 'is the only sheet anchor a seaman can trust to....'"[29] Then Dibdin would sing "Nothing Like Grog," accompanying himself on the piano. To give some variety to

the show, Dibdin included the character of an Irishman as a club member. Part II, following the intermission. presented the adventures of two different groups of characters. With reference to the content of the Entertainments, Dibdin says:

> I must confess, had I gratified my inclination...I should have written my performances in a style of elevation, and given them a classical turn; but, I knew that trifles...were best calculated to succeed with the public. Of what use ...to lecture my audience when it was my business to make them laugh, which nothing can do...but broad humour?[30]

One suspects that this observant entertainer varied the dialogue to suit the mood and taste of each audience. The Entertainments were in two or three acts. Often, after Christmas, he would freshen the show by shortening a three-act piece and adding a new one-acter.

As for the actual presentation, John O'Keeffe, writing in 1792, says "his peculiar mode of singing them [the songs] surpassed all I had ever heard."[31] Hogarth has left a more detailed account:

> His manner of speaking was easy and colloquial; ...His voice was barytone (a medium between the tenor and the bass) of no great power or compass, but of a sweet and mellow quality. He sang with simplicity, without any attempt at ambitious ornament, but with a great deal of taste and expression;...he was particularly attentive to a clear and emphatic utterance of the words:[32]

One may speculate that, although he used no "props," he varied his voice to represent different characters. Hogarth

has noted that his "manner of speaking was...colloquial." As several of the songs are written in dialect, no doubt Dibdin was proficient in imitating the speech of various parts of the country, and even of Ireland.

Between 1788 and 1811 he wrote some thirty-four pieces for these Entertainments, twenty-five of which contained sea songs. Dibdin has this to say about his song-writing:

> It was not enough, however, for me merely to write love-songs,...All this without better support would have outraged the cause of music. It was necessary to go beyond what had been already done, and...give my labours a decided character.
>
> I conceived that...duty might assist inclination, and therefore as a prominent feature in my labours, I sung those heroes who are the natural bulwark of their country. This theme... had only been slightly touched upon till I undertook it; and, though we have had some poetic specimens of nautical praise, the character of the British tar plain, manly, honest, and patriotic, had not very pointedly been put forward. I thought therefore the subject honourable, and commendable, and in some degree novel; especially as it would give an opportunity through public duty of expressing private affection.[33]

The statement reveals an astute performer who determined to give a specific nautical focus to most of his works of this period. The sea songs themselves will also reveal the sensitivity of the man to the problems of the sailor's life. Having felt himself that he was persecuted and imposed on by managers, music publishers and lawyers, he was quick to recognize similar conditions which beset the "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic" sailors. A man of his time, and by

now in his mid-forties, he would have been aware that social attitudes were becoming more humane and that an interest in, and a broader sympathy for, the lower classes was beginning to emerge. The continued popularity of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera ensured that songs about the lower classes were acceptable to audiences. And having observed, for more than twenty-five years, the reactions of these audiences which "were like sheep," Dibdin was probably also aware that his songs could contribute to that humanizing trend. As he says, with reference to his first venture of this period, The Whim of the Moment:

> nothing I could do induced the public to attend me....
>
> I had hitherto made little way indeed; but still it was urged by my friends not to relax... that the moment the public began to get a proper relish for the entertainment, as they were like sheep, I should be universally followed.[34]

Furthermore, we read:

> I considered...it...incumbent on me in no instance to outrage propriety or wound morality ....A sermon and a song, even a comic song, may have the same drift, and produce the same effect. The song, written to please, may be so managed as to instruct;[35]

Although in the first year he produced only three sea songs, between 1789 and 1791, forty were presented to ever-increasing audiences. He had a facility for immediately

establishing an empathy with his listeners. John O'Keeffe recorded his impressions:

> In 1792, I saw the senior Charles Dibdin's entertainment in the Strand; it was most excellent. His manner of coming upon the stage was in happy style: he ran on sprightly and with nearly a laughing face, like a friend who enters hastily to impart to you some good news. Nor did he disappoint his audience: he sang and accompanied himself on an instrument, which was a concert in itself - he was, in fact, himself his own band. A few lines of speaking happily introduced his admirable songs full of wit and character,...[36]

Hogarth leaves another contemporary account:

> The writer...was present, when a mere lad, at one of those entertainments, of which he retains that vivid remembrance which always attends the impressions of early youth. Dibdin was then a handsome man, of middle size, with an open, pleasing countenance, and a very gentlemanlike appearance and address. His costume was a blue coat, white waistcoat, and black silk breeches and stockings; and he wore his hair, in the fashion of the day, full dressed and profusely powdered...his air was more of a person entertaining a party of friends...than of a performer exhibiting to a public audience. He was nearsighted: and, when seated at his instrument, he would bend his head close to his book...then, laying it down, throw himself back in his chair, and deliver his song without further reference to book or music....In singing, he accompanied himself with facility and neatness, on an instrument of a peculiar kind, combining the properties of the pianoforte and the chamber organ, and so constructed that the performer could produce the tones of either...separately, or...in combination. To this instrument were attached a set of bells, a side drum, a tambourine, and a gong, which he could bring into play by various mechanical contrivances so as to give a pleasing variety to his accompaniments.[37]

Dibdin has left no record of how he modified the instrument on which he played. Considering the gadgets he attached to it, it is easy to imagine how delighted he would have been with today's electronic keyboards.

Performances originally took place in auction rooms at various locations until, in 1791, he moved to the Royal Polygraphic Rooms in the Strand, naming the location the Sans Souci. As the decade advanced, London's population approached 900,000, with a consequent increase in potential theatregoers. Dibdin, having augmented his income by becoming his own publisher, deemed the time auspicious to build a theatre of his own. He chose a site in Leicester Place and opened his new Sans Souci there in October, 1796. It was there that he performed for the next twelve seasons, with the occasional summer tour to towns in England and Scotland.

The Napoleonic wars spanned most of this phase of Dibdin's career. With the ever-present threat of invasion by France, Britons were naturally very conscious of their navy. The popularity of Dibdin's songs and their effect on morale was such that in 1803 the Tory government awarded him a pension. This subject will be discussed in a later chapter. Partly because of the pension and partly because of age, Dibdin sold his stock and the copyright of 360 songs and retired in 1805. With a change to a Whig government in 1806 the pension was rescinded and was not reinstated until

shortly before his death. Dibdin was forced to return to the theatre. His final performance was in a back room of his shop in 1809.

By 1810 he was in such financial straits that some friends organized a public dinner which

> took place at the City of London Tavern, on the 12th. of April, 1810....All the popular singers ...[gave] their assistance; a large company assembled, and the sum raised amounted to £640 ...this money was invested in the purchase of £ 30 per annum in the Long Annuities, in the names of trustees, for the use of himself, his wife and his daughter....The balance of £80... was paid over to him in cash.[38]

One last Entertainment came from Dibdin's pen. It was The Round Robin, primarily a sea piece, which was presented as an afterpiece at the Haymarket, on 21 June, 1811. It was a failure because, according to Hogarth:

> It was acted...by performers who had been recently engaged from the provinces and who were not sufficiently popular to attract public attention to the songs which...subsequently became so popular.[39]

Charles Dibdin died on 25 July, 1814. The Times, on the 26th., carried only a notice that "Mr. Charles Dibdin, the celebrated song-writer, died yesterday at his house in Camden-town." The Gentleman's Magazine, on the other hand, devoted nearly a full column to

> the celebrated song-writer, in which character he had few equals, for the number and merit of his compositions...it may truly be said that though a great portion of them are in praise of love and festivity, not one passage can be found...of a licentious tendency...they are calculated to support the interests of virtue, and to exercise the best affections of the heart, as well as to enforce the duties of loyalty and patriotism. The influence...upon our gallant Tars has long been known, and probably has strongly contributed to stimulate their heroism, and inculcate submission to the hardships of their profession, and to the will of Providence.[40]

Some fifteen years after his death a memorial was erected to him. His son Thomas John tells the story:

> In 1824, a few gentlemen, who considered it a disgrace that no testimonial had been erected to the memory of the Ocean Bard, whose Songs were so many irresistible appeals to the heart-inspiring the most illiterate with brave and generous sentiments, and exciting to acts of loyalty, bravery, and patriotism, which (in the most arduous of her struggles) assisted to maintain the honour and glory of the British Empire, determined to open a subscription...to defray the expense of some public mark of respect to the deceased...a dinner...was held...under the ...patronage of...[the] Duke of Clarence....The most eminent vocalists...[sang] an excellent selection of the Songs of the deceased....Upward of four hundred...attended, and a sum was collected, which,...[was] insufficient...[and] the matter lay dormant for five years. Finally, in April, 1829,...[a] Musical Performance was given at Covent Garden Theatre...which produced the gross receipt of £600.12s.:...expenses [were] paid...the money...was given to Mr. Sievier, who soon completed the Monument now to be seen in the Veterans' Library at Greenwich Hospital.[41]

There it remains to this day.

Summary

This brief survey of Dibdin's career has revealed that as he was incapable of cooperating with others he had no other choice but to become a solo entertainer. Furthermore, the survey has revealed that he had a certain knowledge of the sea and seamen through his sailor brother Thomas, his few first-hand experiences of sea travel, and his contact with sailors on ship and shore. By his own statement he considered those sailors unsung heroes, "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic," and he determined to correct the neglect. An examination of conditions in the navy in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, which led to the 1797 mutinies, will enable us, in evaluating the sea songs, to discover whether Dibdin achieved his purpose by directly addressing the problems or by subtler means.

NOTES

[1] George Hogarth (1783-1870) was music critic for The Daily News (editor: Charles Dickens) from 1846-1866; for many years music critic for The Illustrated London News, and secretary of the Philharmonic Society; author and editor of some fifteen literary or musical works.

[2] George Hogarth, The Songs of Charles Dibdin..., p. xii.

[3] George Hogarth, Musical History, Biography and Criticism..., p. 322.

[4] Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xii.

[5] Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin..., Vol. I, pp. 20-23.

[6] Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xiii.

[7] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, p. 71.

[8] Ibid., p. 11.

[9] Ibid., p. 106.

[10] Charles Dibdin, The Musical Tour of..., Note, p. 206.

[11] George Speaight, The History of the English Puppet Theatre, p. 115.

[12] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, Note, p. 154.

[13] Ibid., p. xxii.

[14] Dibdin, The Musical Tour..., pp. 10-11.

[15] Ibid., p. 12.

[16] Ibid., pp. 139, 142.

[17] Ibid., p. 143.

[18] Ibid., p. 144.

[19] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. II, p. 240.

[20] Great Britain. Parliament, Sessional Papers, Anno 8° Annae, c. 21 A.D. 1709....An Act for the Encouragement of Learning....

[21] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. II, p. 264.

[22] Ibid., p. 265.

[23] Ibid., pp. 267-268.

[24] Ibid., pp. 271-274.

[25] Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 1-2.

[26] Ibid., p. 3.

[27] Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xix.

[28] Dibdin, The Musical Tour..., Letters LXXV-XCVIII, pp. 307-406.

[29] Ibid., p. 318.

[30] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. III, p. 272.

[31] John O'Keeffe, Recollections of the Life..., Vol. II, p. 323.

[32] Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xx.

[33] Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, pp. xxi-xxii.

[34] Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 2-3.

[35] Ibid., Vol. I, pp. xxii-xxiii.

[36] O'Keeffe, Vol. II, pp. 322-323.

[37] Hogarth, The Songs..., pp. xix-xx.

[38] Ibid., p. xxi.

[39] Ibid., p. 81.

[40] "Obituary;...," The Gentleman's Magazine..., Vol. LXXXIV (Jl.-Dec., 1814), New ser. No. 7, Pt. 2, p. 192.

[41] Charles Dibdin, Songs, Naval and National..., pp. xiii-xv.

CHAPTER II

THE NAVY

The decades during which Dibdin wrote most of his sea songs lauding the British tar practically coincided with the period of the Napoleonic wars. Britain was dependent on her navy not only for defence but also to ensure the safe passage of her merchant fleet. A review of conditions pertaining to the seamen of that all-important navy will contribute to a better appreciation of the songs.

Recruitment

Men entered the service in various ways. There were those who may have volunteered because the offer of a bounty and an advance of pay meant that the man's family would at least have a little money in hand when he sailed. Others who might be termed volunteers were orphans and paupers who entered through the Marine Society, an organization which provided the boys with clothing, bedding and transportation to the ports. Some would volunteer to avoid impressment. A few went to sea for adventure. John Nicol was one, having

> read Robinson Crusoe many times over, and longed to be at sea....To me the order to weigh anchor ...was the sound of joy. To others it was the sound of woe, the order that cut off the last faint hope of escape from a fate they had been impressed into much against their inclination and interest. I was surprised to see so few, who, like myself, had chosen it for the love of that line of life.[1]

The impressed men of whom Nicol speaks were those who had been seized by the press gangs which worked the ports.

> In theory...only able-bodied, British-born seamen between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five...were liable to be pressed. But as the demand for men grew...apprentices, foreigners, the young, the old...aldermen, shopkeepers and wealthy shipowners were forcibly seized....[2]

These press gangs met with great resistance, especially from the men's wives and sweethearts. The gangs even boarded incoming merchant ships and carried off the experienced sailors. Until 1780 merchant crews could consist of twenty-five percent foreigners. In that year An Act for the better Supply of Mariners and Seamen to serve in His Majesty's Ships of War, and on board Merchant Ships, and other Trading Ships and Vessels (Anno 20° Georgii III, C A P. XX, A.D. 1780) was passed by Parliament. By this Act the permissible percentage of foreigners aboard merchant ships in wartime was increased to seventy-five. The Act also stated that any foreign seaman who had served for two years "shall be deemed and taken to be a natural born Subject of His Majesty's Kingdom." Consequently, those men would also be eligible for impressment. As the war progressed the size of the fleet increased, and more men were required to crew the newly commissioned ships. Therefore, Parliament passed Quota Acts in 1795 and 1796 which imposed quotas of men to be supplied by all English and Welsh counties. In order to meet the requirements the authorities frequently emptied the prisons.

The men thus forced to sea might be hardened criminals or even well-educated debtors. A sprinkling of new recruits were known as Lord Mayor's men: ne'er-do-wells, often well-born and well-educated, who were shipped off to sea to save the family name. It was this educated element that is suspected of having considerable influence in the mutinies of 1797.

Although press gangs were in existence at least as early as 1688, they appear to have been much less active than during the Napoleonic wars because for centuries, according to Michael Lewis:

> The seaman population was a largely inbred society, composed almost exclusively of hereditary sailors...entirely uneducated...remarkably efficient [at sea]...the merest children... on shore...a down-trodden company...[with] no idea of how to improve their lot.[3]

By the end of the eighteenth century, with the increased pressure brought on by the greatest war Britain had fought, the composition of the crews was changing through the assiduity of the press gangs and the Quota system. As we shall see this change would have a direct bearing on the mutinies.

Dibdin has only one song which relates to the subject of recruitment, and that one concerns the press gangs.

Pay

In 1653 seamen's wages were set at 24s. a month for an able seaman, and 19s. for an ordinary seaman.[4] Despite a continual increase in the cost of living over the years, it was not until after the Spithead mutiny in 1797, almost a century and a half later, that the rates were raised to 29s. 6d. for able, and 23s. 6d for ordinary seamen. These amounts were again raised in 1805. Deductions were made for the Chatham Chest, founded in 1590 when

> The masters, mariners, shipwrights, and seafaring men, employed in the service of Q. Elizabeth, did...voluntarily give and bestow, and consent to have stopped out of their wages, ...of every mariner, seaman, and shipwright, receiving 10s. or more per month, 6d. per month - Out of every grommet [sic], receiving 7s. 6d., fourpence...of every boy receiving 5s....2d.- For the perpetual relief of mariners, shipwrights, and seafaring men, as by reason of hurts and maims received in the service, were driven into great distress and want.[5]

The men, who might be at sea for years, were not paid off until the ship returned to England with its commission completed. At that time they were given a "ticket" which could be exchanged for cash at the Pay Office in London, but which was usually handled by one of the "buying fraternity"[6] who would naturally deduct a commission.

Because pay rates were much higher, service in the merchant fleet was preferable to that in the navy. The merchant sailor, however, might be impressed before docking

with the result that he might also have to wait years before collecting what was due to him.

Pay might be augmented by prize money. Recompence was made by the navy for captured vessels and their cargoes, provided they were not proved to belong to neutral nations. Agents were appointed to handle the settlement, a process which might take years to complete. For example, the Parliamentary Debates for the years 1803-1804, record the

> Order of His Majesty in Council, approving Committee Report submitting to his Majesty's favourable Consideration the Claim of Viscount Hood, on Behalf of himself, and of the Officers, Seamen, and Marines serving under his command at Toulon, in the Year 1793. - Dated 31st August, 1803.[7]

The value of the ships, ordnance and ordnance stores involved in this settlement, which had taken about ten years to conclude, was £262,336 14s. 10½d. The amount, after deduction of the agent's commission, would be divided among the officers and crew according to a share system proclaimed by the king at the outset of hostilities.

When we discuss the mutinies we shall find that the subject of pay formed one of the prime grievances.

The examination of the songs will reveal that most references to pay illustrate the sailors' generosity. There are some, however, which reflect the difficulties of collecting the money and the consequences for the families.

Accommodation

Once aboard, the living quarters were cramped, at best. A few statistics about, for example, a Third-Rater, will give an indication of just how crowded the sailors were. Third-Rate ships were two-deckers, normally equipped with 74 guns. The guns were distributed between the two decks, with the greater number on the lower, or gun-deck. The ships of this class, which were built in 1793, had gun-decks measuring about 180 feet in length with a beam of almost 50 feet. Living in this space with the guns would be a crew numbering approximately 600 men. The transformation from "dormitory" to "gun-deck" is described by Samuel Leech:

> With a rapidity which would surprise a landsman, the crew dress themselves, lash their hammocks and carry them on deck, where they are stowed for the day...every hammock has its appropriate place. Below, the beams are all marked, each hammock is marked with a corresponding number ....They are also kept exceedingly clean. Every man is provided with two, so that while he is scrubbing and cleaning one he may have another to use. Nothing but such precautions could enable so many men to live in so small a space.[8]

Leech's account is from the mid-eighteen hundreds. Although the routine was probably unchanged over many years, one suspects that the seamen of the 1790's did not enjoy the luxury of two hammocks. Silas Neville, a landsman, has left the following comment:

> I have always thought a ship with all the conveniences that can possibly be contrived a most terrible place to live in - the dirty appearance of the men in between decks - the smell of their bedding, cookery, etc. is to me nauseous.[9]

Perhaps Neville was on one of the older ships, as various methods of ventilating the lower decks were being introduced in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Dibdin does not concern himself with accommodation, possibly because working-class conditions were so poor that there was not much difference between ship and shore. As we shall see, his "mission" was to improve the public image of the sailor rather than to criticize the navy.

Food

Provisioning was the responsibility of the Purser. According to J.G. Bullocke, in his account of the causes of the Spithead mutiny:

> The quality of the food was generally vile and the quantity insufficient. The staple articles of food were biscuits, salt beef, salt pork, pease, oatmeal, sugar, butter and cheese....Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were meatless days, the men being compensated...by...sugar, butter, and cheese, not issued on meat days; half a pint of pease per head was issued on four days...the only commodity issued daily was one pound of biscuits to each man. Such a dietary was...woefully lacking in vital constituents; particularly...vegetables...though it must be stated that the more thoughtful and humane Captains...made efforts to obtain these from time to time....They [the men] were grouped in messes of six, and each mess received the allowance of four men calculated at fourteen ounces to the pound....

> The meat was invariably stale....Nor did all consist of flesh...there was a liberal quantity of bone...and...fat which...had become dirty. It was occasionally made a degree more tasty by being converted into various hashes and stews....[10]

These hashes and stews might be quite inedible because of the verdigris which had formed inside the copper pots in which they were prepared. To continue with Bullocke's account of the rations:

> There was always water, but it was not always drinkable...after being stored in a dirty cask for some time it became truly noisome and filled with marine flora....Beer, while it lasted, was the staple drink, but it was 'small beer' and... it soon went rancid. Then wine was sometimes served out, and finally...the sailor's delight- 'grog.' Two issues a day were made of this potent liquor - a gill of rum at midday, and another in the evening, per man....The men saved the midday tot and added it to the evening issue, thus producing a draught of colossal potency; some went further and bought the tots of others, generally by...bartering them for meat or biscuit.[11]

Grog was the subject of one of Dibdin's most famous songs. It was from Admiral Edward Vernon, nicknamed "Old Grog" because of his grogram boat-cloak, that the drink derived its name. Vernon, concerned about the drunkenness induced by the potent rum, gave orders that

> the daily allowance of half a pint of rum per man be mixed with a quart of water, 'in one Scuttled Butt kept for the purpose, and to be done upon Deck and in the presence of the Lieutenant of the Watch,' who would see that the men were not docked of their proper allowance. The

> Admiral added that men 'that are good husbands may from the Savings of their Salt Provisions and Bread purchase Sugar and limes to make the water more palatable to them.'[12]

The daily issue of lemon juice was not instituted until 1795, despite the fact that Dr. James Lind had proved its efficacy against scurvy in 1747.

Dibdin has little to say about food. He leaves it to Thackeray who, in recounting the adventures of "Little Billee," records

> There were three sailors of Bristol city
> Who took a boat and went to sea.
> But first with beef and captain's biscuits
> And pickled pork they loaded she.[13]

Discipline

Discipline was harsh during the Napoleonic wars, more severe, in fact, than in the earlier years of the century. The change was probably due to the press gang and Quota systems having introduced a criminal element into the hereditary crews. Punishments ranged from gagging to keelhauling and flogging. No shore leave was allowed because it was felt that the men would desert.

The severity of the punishments depended on the captain. An example of the worst sort was Captain Hugh Pigot whom Bullocke describes as being "not merely a martinet; he was an unfeeling bully of the worst order - a very devil incarnate."[14] At the other end of the scale were men like

Captain Talbot who voluntarily left his ship during the Spithead mutiny and who received the following from his men:

> Captain Talbot...we now join our earnest wishes and desires that you will once more join the flock of which you are the tender shepherd. We wish by this to show you, Sir, that we are men that loves the present cause as men ought to, yet we are not elevated that degree to neglect our duty to our country and our obedience to you, and...the command of the ship belongs to you, sir, which command we, the ship's company, resign with all due honour, respect and submission hopeing [sic] you will always continue to do as you have heretofore done, to hear a man's cause as well as an officer's.[15]

The one order these men would not have obeyed at this time was, of course, "Weigh anchor."

A result of discipline is a well-ordered crew which, in a crisis, immediately obeys commands. Rear-Admiral Richard Kempenfelt, when discussing victories, attested to that fact: "It is a maxim that experience has ever confirmed, that discipline gives more force than numbers."[16]

The seamen themselves seem to have approved of discipline, provided it was meted out with justice. Bécher-vaise, a Jerseyman, wrote in his reminiscences:

> I would always choose a ship in which every duty was attended to strictly, in preference to one in which a man did almost as he liked. Indeed, I've frequently heard old seamen say (when two ships were in commission and both wanting hands) 'I'll go with Captain -----: he's a taut one, but he is Captain of his own ship.'[17]

These "old salts" would realize a well-disciplined crew's prompt response to commands could mean the difference between life and death. On a less dramatic level, they would also realize that the threat of severe punishments tended to deter that new criminal element from indulging in petty crimes, like theft.

Dibdin's lines "Nor care a rope's end..." ("The Sailor's Bring-Up," Songs, p. 267)[18] which might refer to the cat-o'-nine-tails, and the line "The halter was made for the neck" ("A Sailor's Philosophy," Songs, p. 65) are the closest he comes to commenting on naval discipline. However, the sense of duty and devotion to good officers expressed by Talbot's crew are themes of importance in the songs.

Hazards: Battles, Storms and Shipwreck

Extracts from John Nicol's accounts give a vivid impression of the horrors of sea encounters. At the battle of Cape St. Vincent, 14 February, 1797, he says:

> I was stationed in the after magazine, and could see nothing; but I could feel every shot that struck the Goliah, and the cries and groans of the wounded were most distressing....Those who were carrying ran like wild creatures,...
>
> ...At length, the roar of the guns ceased, and I came on deck to see the effects of a great sea engagement; but such a scene of blood and desolation I want words to express....[19]

At the Battle of the Nile, 1 August, 1798, Nicol was again stationed in the powder magazine:

> Any information we got was from the boys and women who carried the powder....When the French Admiral's ship blew up, the Goliah got such a shake, we thought the after-part of her had blown up until the boys told us what it was.... In the heat of the action, a shot came right into the magazine, but did no harm, as the carpenters plugged it up, and stopped the water that was rushing in....There were some of the women wounded, and one...died....One woman bore a son....When we ceased firing, I went on deck ...and an awful sight it was. The whole bay was covered with dead bodies, mangled, wounded, and scorched...
>
> ...[I heard about] a lad who had the match in his hand to fire his gun. In the act of applying it a shot took off his arm; it hung by a small piece of skin. The match fell to the deck. He looked at his arm,...seized the match in his left hand, and fired off the gun before he went ...to have it dressed....[20]

Here indeed is an example of bravery and devotion to duty. In addition to direct hits, there was also the danger of being wounded by flying splinters of oak from the gunwales. Another point of interest about this quotation is that it confirms the presence of women aboard.

Storms, a very real threat to the small ships, were, if possible, an even greater threat to the men who sailed them. Many a man, drenched and working in the high rigging, must have lost his hold and fallen to the deck or to a watery grave. Samuel Kelly, working in a postal packet, has left a vivid description of the hazardous conditions:

> In this ship I was stationed...in the main-top, and I imagine I have slept hundreds of hours in this top, even when the ship has been rolling nearly gunwale in, and often pitching with very sudden jerks against a head sea, but through

> mercy I was never thrown out....The greatest trouble I had...was attending the sails that were hoisted on a long top-gallant mast full thirty feet in the hoist....When all the sails were set,...[it] was not only a very painful and teasing employment, but also very dangerous, as this mast used to bend and spring like a coachman's whip....[21]

The storms, driving the ships too close to shore, were probably the cause of the majority of shipwrecks. Another cause would be uncharted hidden rocks, especially in foreign waters unfamiliar to the seamen. Undoubtedly some were caused by false beacons set by beachcombers. Although navigational aids had improved in the last half of the eighteenth century, surveys of Britain's coastline were only completed very slowly. There were few lighthouses or beacons. And so to all the other dangers of life at sea was added that of being shipwrecked on a foreign shore or even almost within sight of home.

Some of Dibdin's most dramatic songs were written about battles, storms, shipwrecks and the fear of them which haunted the women left at home. It is in these songs that he lauds the hardihood, courage and sense of duty that sets his sailor apart from the common man. Nor does he neglect the wounded. There are other songs which narrate the pitiful state to which they, as Greenwich Pensioners, were reduced

Mutiny

Apart from the victories, the most important event in the navy during the closing years of the century was the mutiny at Spithead. Although there were other mutinies in 1797, notably at the Nore, the one at Spithead was by far the most significant with the most far-reaching results.

The nation had such confidence in the navy that, Lewis tells us:

> Boney might threaten invasion, but while our ships stood between him and us, we could all sleep soundly in our beds.
>
> Judge then the shock, the near-panic, when, with appalling suddenness, the country learned, on April 16, 1797, that the whole Channel Fleet had refused point-blank to raise its anchors when ordered to do so by its Admiral,...[22]

If the nation was taken by surprise, the Admiralty should not have been. There had been a growing unrest for a number of years and various petitions regarding punishments had been sent to the Lords of the Admiralty. Even Captain Thomas Pakenham had written to them. His subject was pay and the unfairness of having raised the pay of the army and naval officers in 1795 without doing anything about that of the seamen, which remained at the rates set in 1653. Aggravating the problem was the fact that "it had long been the established custom not to pay wages at all until they were six months overdue."[23] Another cause of complaint was the

14 ounces to the pound for measuring rations, the other two ounces being, by statute, the prerequisite of the Purser.

It is unlikely that the old seaman class would ever have managed to unite to execute such a mutiny. The consensus seems to be that it was the arrival of the educated Quota men among them which made it possible. These men made them aware of their wrongs and provided the necessary leadership. The mutiny was conducted in an orderly and restrained manner by a committee of two Delegates from each ship. In order to reassure the nation they pledged to weigh anchor if there were any intimation that the French fleet had sailed to invade. To secure the sympathy and good opinion of the merchants they determined that only the 16 ships of the line should be involved, ordering the smaller vessels to continue their convoy duty of the merchant fleet. Further, the Delegates petitioned the Admiralty:

> MY LORDS
>
> We, the seamen of his majesty's navy, take the liberty of addressing your lordships in an humble petition, shewing the many hardships and oppressions we have laboured under for many years, and, which, we hope, your lordships will redress as soon as possible....
>
> The first grievance we have to complain of, is, that our wages are too low, and ought to be raised, that we might be better able to support our wives and families in a manner comfortable ....

> That our provisions be raised to the weight of sixteen ounces to the pound, and of a better quality....
>
> That there might be granted a sufficient quantity of vegetables, of such kind as may be the most plentiful in the ports to which we go; which we grievously complain and lay under the want of.
>
> That your lordships will be pleased seriously to look into the state of the sick on board his majesty's ships, that they may be better attended to....
>
> That we may in somewise have grant and opportunity to taste the sweets of liberty on shore, when in any harbour, and when we have completed the duty of our ship, after our return from sea ....
>
> That if any man is wounded in action, his pay may be continued till he is cured and discharged ....
>
> Given on board the Queen Charlotte, by the delegates of the fleet, the 18th day of April, 1797.[24]

There were delays, but finally on 8 May, the Seamen's Bill meeting all demands received Royal Assent, a Royal Pardon was granted all participants, copies of the pertinent documents were sent to each ship, and the fleet weighed anchor on 17 May.

Meanwhile, on 12 May, mutiny had broken out in the ships at the Nore. The conduct of the affair was a far cry from the disciplined proceedings at Spithead. Despite the fact that the main grievances had already been resolved, the leaders at the Nore felt it incumbent upon them to add others. The Admiralty, fearing further outbreaks, remained

adamant. Parties of mutineers went ashore, alarming peaceful townsfolk and the militia was sent to Sheerness. The mutineers blockaded the Thames, thereby forfeiting the sympathy of the public in general, and the London merchants in particular. Ships began to desert the cause and the few which remained had surrendered by mid-June. The affair was a fiasco which did nothing to improve the sailors' lot.

Some six years later there was a naval enquiry which led to the passage of An act for the encouragement of seamen, and for the better and more effectually manning of his Majesty's navy; for regulating the payment of prize-money... (Anno 43° Georgii III, C A P, CLX, A.D. 1803). This Bill deals chiefly with the disposition of captured vessels. In an attempt to prevent fraud, it contains sections on the appointment and bonding of agents to handle the sale of the prizes, and the distribution of the prize-money. Its passage, a direct result of the mutiny, alleviated abuses of corruption which were not included in the grievances.

Noteworthy from this brief account is that, prior to the mutinies, the public had taken the navy for granted; no attempt had been made to establish parity of pay with the army; the general health of the crew was jeopardized by inadequate and insufficient food; the sick, who if properly cared for could have returned to active duty, were neglected; those wounded in defence of their country lost pay during their periods of recovery. These were the faults

of the public and their parliament. The mutineers, by vowing to return to duty if invasion threatened, demonstrated that patriotism which was one of Dibdin's major themes. Avoiding controversial issues, apart from the plight of the pensioner, the song writer makes no reference to the mutinies in the songs. It is possible, however, that the improved image of the sailor which he had helped to create had some influence on the Members of Parliament who voted on the various Bills.

Morale

Among the motley crew of seasoned seamen, volunteers, impressed and Quota-men there would undoubtedly be factions. Nevertheless, as in any combatant service, shared grievances and hardships would engender a certain comradeship, a cohesiveness. There is evidence that this cohesiveness existed, for example, in the well-conducted Spithead mutiny under the leadership of Quota-men fully supported by the sailors.

For entertainment there was a musician on board most of the ships, usually a fiddler. On Saturday nights, with the grog flowing, there were perhaps some scuffles, but there would also be dancing and singing. There were even amateur theatricals. To quote Robinson:

> We have found notices of amateur performances on board men-of-war as far back as the time of the Restoration. Many of our great commanders, Nelson among them, approved of this form of entertainment as a means of keeping the devil out of the minds of the sailors, and they fostered the aptitude for acting among officers and men...who laid themselves out to amuse their shipmates. It was by this means that...the monotony of life...was broken, and the good humour, well-being, and needful discipline...were maintained.[25]

In addition to discipline, crews were forged into teams by example. Consider the case of Sir Edward Pellew. A midshipman under his command recorded the following:

> Whenever there was an exertion required aloft, to preserve a sail or a mast, the captain was foremost in the work....I remember once, in close-reefing the main topsail, the captain... ordered us aloft. On gaining the topsail yard, the most active and daring...hesitated to go upon it, as the sail was flapping violently, making it a service of great danger; but a voice was heard from the extreme end of the yard, calling upon us...to save the sail,...A man said, 'Why, that's the captain'....He [the captain] had [climbed] over the backs of the sailors, had reached the topmast head...a feat ...which will be allowed by seamen to demand great hardihood and address.[26]

This sort of example, coupled with justice in disciplinary matters, produced such a degree of devotion in crews that Nicol, for instance, could say of his captain, "not a man on board but would have bled for Sir C.M. Knowles...."[27]

For further proof there is a letter from a crewman to his father after the Battle of Trafalgar. He wrote: "Our dear Admiral Nelson is killed!...all the men in our ship who

have seen him are such soft toads, they have done nothing but blast their eyes, and cry, ever since...."[28] These were the men, who to quote Nicol once more: "When everything was cleared, the ports open, the matches lighted, the guns run out, then we gave them three such cheers as are only to be heard in a British man-of-war...."[29] We may conclude that, on the whole, morale was high, especially after the major grievances had been corrected.

Many of Dibdin's songs draw attention to the various aspects, such as cheerfulness and devotion to duty, which signify high morale.

Summary

Although Britons had long been aware of the need for a navy which defended their shores and convoyed their merchant ships, the shock induced by the 1797 mutinies indicates that the service had been taken very much for granted. Prior to those events the populace had probably given very little thought to the inhumane press gang recruitment, poor pay, poor food, lengthy separation from loved ones, dangers of battle, storm and shipwreck, which this survey reveals to have been the daily lot of the sailor. It was, no doubt, the threat of invasion which induced the Admiralty to meet the Spithead demands and quell the other uprisings.

An examination of the songs will reveal that Dibdin has only one song about the press gangs, and that he ignores

the problems of food and discipline. He does address some of the aspects of the pay issue, but does not mention the low rates. He concentrates, rather, on those elements of the sailor's life from which he can develop his "Jolly Jack Tar" folk-hero, "plain, manly, honest and patriotic."

NOTES

1 The Valiant Sailor, p. 7.

2 Frank E. Huggett, The Past, Present and Future of Life and Work at Sea..., p. 53.

3 Michael Lewis, Spithead..., pp. 124-125.

4 Pay rates given in this paragraph are taken from Huggett, pp. 42, 56, 61 and 73.

5 Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, 1805, cols. 887-888.

6 Lewis, Spithead, p. 122.

7 Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, 1803, col. 1169.

8 Michael Lewis, A Social History of the Navy..., p. 275.

9 Huggett, p. 59.

10 J.G. Bullocke, Sailors' Rebellion..., pp. 196-197.

11 Ibid., pp. 198-199.

12 Oliver Warner, The British Navy..., pp. 61-62.

13 William Makepeace Thackeray, "Little Billee."

14 Bullocke, p. 287.

15 Huggett, p. 66.

16 Warner, p. 83.

17 G.J. Marcus, Heart of Oak..., p. 121.

18 Quotations from the songs are taken from George Hogarth, The Songs of Charles Dibdin.... The references will be made in the body of the text as shown in this example. In some instances the title of a song may form part of the text and will not be repeated in the reference.

19 Huggett, p. 69.

20 Ibid., pp. 69-70.

21 Ibid., pp. 58-59.

22 Lewis, Spithead, p. 126.

23 Ibid., p. 121.

24 Huggett, p. 60.

25 Charles Napier Robinson, The British Tar in Fact and Fiction..., p. 245.

26 Marcus, pp. 45-46.

27 Huggett, p. 69.

28 Marcus, p. 244.

29 Huggett, p. 69.

CHAPTER III

THE SONGS

A contemporary of Charles Dibdin's sons wrote:

> Gratitude to the three Dibdins for doing justice to the British sailor! Congreve has made him a sea calf - a tarpaulin; and the elder Colman, a crimp and a bully; - but the Dibdins have raised him to the rank of a rational being, with feelings and affections....Old Charles has written sea songs that cut the heart in twain with their pathos...[1]

The unnamed writer, probably a sailor himself, in deploring the character of the seaman presented on stage is no doubt referring to the sailors Ben, in William Congreve's Love for Love, (1695), and Captain 'O Cutter in the elder George Colman's The Jealous Wife, (1761). Ben is depicted as a "rough diamond" of whom his father, calling him an "impudent tarpaulin,"[2] says "he wants a little polishing."[3] Furthermore, Miss Prue calls him "you ugly thing...you great sea-calf...you stinking tar-barrel."[4] Captain 'O Cutter in The Jealous Wife, is the sole representative of the sea-faring fraternity in the cast. The contemptuous attitude towards the sailor is evident from the following dialogue:

Servant: Captain 'O Cutter to wait on your Ladyship.
Lady Freelove: O the hideous Fellow! The Irish Sailor-Man...
Lord Trinket: Let Him in....He is the best Creature to laugh at in Nature. He is a perfect Sea-Monster, and always looks and talks as if He was upon Deck...
Lady Freelove: Well - send the Creature up...
Lord Trinket: ...Here the Porpus comes.[5]

The Captain has been made an Irishman, a traditional figure of fun and ridicule. Through the services of Lady Freelove he has obtained the post of "crimp" in charge of a press-gang. He reveals himself as a bully in the following speech:

> This Pressing is hot Work...I spied tree stout Fellows, belonging to a Marchant-man. They made down Wapping. I immadiately gave my Lads the signal to chase, and We bore down right upon Them. They tacked, and lay to. We gave Them a tundering Broadside...We took Them all, and They now lie under Hatches, with Fifty more...[6]

The unfavourable image of the sailor portrayed in these examples can hardly have been ameliorated by the fact that, according to Charles Napier Robinson, "It is characteristic of the time [1775] that the most popular character Garrick could assume in speaking the prologue to several of his plays was that of a drunken sailor."[7] Given that the theatre, among other functions, mirrors the society of its time, we can assume that this image of crude, almost sub-human, drunken bullies represented the public concept of the character of seamen. Considering the shock administered by the Spithead mutiny, that public evidently also took these

men, the country's first line of defence, much too much for granted. Dibdin, as we have seen, held a different view, believing them to be "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic."[8] It was this new image that he sought to establish through the songs.

By describing the sailors as "plain" Dibdin implied that they were very much like the average, unsophisticated man, with similar loves, hopes and beliefs. As such, they were entitled to at least the public indifference afforded the ordinary citizen rather than the ridicule to which they were subjected. That Dibdin saw something more in the seamen he knew is evident from his use of the word "manly," a word which suggests they were brave, stoic, self-disciplined, compassionate, generous and honourable. Having experienced dishonest dealings himself, he was apparently impressed by the sailors' basic honesty as it is a virtue to which he draws particular attention. Furthermore, he called them "patriotic," believing them to be zealous in defending the freedom and institutions of their country. As patriots they would be loyal to the king, take pride in the execution of their duties and be prepared to accept the perils, hardships and consequences of service in the navy.

Dibdin's prime purpose was to establish that his fictitious sailor was not a bizarre character, but quite ordinary like the average man in the audience: a character with whom that man could identify. His sympathy would be

enlisted for the mythical figure who faced danger at sea and corruption ashore. When Dibdin enhances that character with all the manly virtues, stressing honesty and patriotism, he creates a folk hero to be admired and emulated. That folk hero was the "Jolly Jack Tar," "plain, manly, honest, and patriotic."

"Plain"

Lewis, discussing the composition of real crews prior to the influx of pressed- and Quota-men, says, "The seaman population was...composed almost exclusively of hereditary sailors."[9] It was in the tradition of their class and a source of pride that sons should follow in their fathers' footsteps. Dibdin has his "...sailors.../...[who] love and feel like other folks," ("Yo Heave Ho!," Songs, p. 182),[10] mirror that tradition. In "Since, Jack, Thou Art a Seaman's Son" we read:

> Since, Jack, thou art a seaman's son,
> ...
> 'Tis pretty near time I begun
> To larn thee a tar's edication:
> ...
>
> And when thou'st left the sea,
> ...
> Teach thy young son
> This course to run,
> (Songs, p. 79)

In another song we find that "...round the happy cottage grew/Young tars to guard the nation:" and "...all the wives

.../Had launch'd a growing navy:-" ("The Tizzies," Songs, p. 281).

The foregoing also establishes the character as a family man, an impression which is strengthened by a line from "The Sapling," "His children cling about his knees." (Songs, p. 225). But before the family there will be love, an emotion common to everyone in the audience. What more natural than that the young men should be proud of their girls and boast of their beauty, in fact "...to describe .../Each his best manner tried," ("Saturday Night at Sea," Songs, p. 93). To most of them their "best manner" will be to express their admiration, like any ordinary man, in the jargon of their trade. Consequently, Dibdin's seamen describe their girls in nautical metaphor, employing the same terms they use to praise the ships they love. Thus, in "Saturday Night at Sea," we have "...'My Peg.../A frigate neat and trim," and Poll "Sailing in comely state;/Top-ga'nt sails set, she is so tall,/She looks like a first rate:" (Songs, p. 93). And in "Anna, Anne, Nan, Nance, or Nancy" we read, "My love's a vessel trim and gay,/Rigg'd out with truth,..." (Songs, p. 204). Other characters expressed their pride in their girls in other ways. Sailing among the Greek islands, one of them is given a lecture on the graces of the goddesses. His comment is "Just see but my Nancy,/You'll find all their charms splic'd together in one." ("One," Songs, p. 221). Another finds his Nancy's "...charms are so

num'rous, so various, so clever,/They produce in my mind such a string,/...I could sing on forever," ("Nancy," Songs, p.188). Reflecting the Romantics' interest in nature, another singer is more specific about his Nancy. In "Nature and Nancy" he says, "Give me the rich health, flesh and blood, and blue veins,/That paints the sweet face of my Nancy." (Songs, p. 195). In "The Wife" there is evidence of mature love. The sailor says "we have only one heart," and his wife's love for him is obvious from the care and thought she has given to the contents of his sea-chest:

> If I want to examine my chest,
> What delight to my heart does the rummage produce
> ...
> The cordials and comforts, so tidily plac'd,
> ...
> And the needles and housewife her fingers have grac'd
> (Songs, p. 242).

The inevitable partings were sad at the best of times, as the audience could appreciate, but the length of these partings, "Sail seven long years," ("Saturday Night at Sea," Songs, p. 93) or longer, made them even more poignant. Dibdin sets the stage in "The Sailor's Return": "Bleak was the morn when William left his Nancy!/...Cold as the fears that chill'd her dreary fancy," (Songs, p. 119), and Tom Tough tells of the emotion:

> When from my love to part I first weigh'd anchor,
> And she was sniv'ling seed on the beech below,
> I'd like to cotch'd my eyes sniv'ling too...
>
> But the worst on't was that time when the little
> ones were sickly,
> And if they'd live or die the doctor did not know:
> ...
> I thought my heart would break...
> ("Yo Heave Ho!," Songs, p. 182).

The couples would follow the age-old custom of real people of exchanging tokens. The good luck charms would signify constancy and ward off danger to ensure a happy reunion. One man had "A riband near his heart.../The pledge he swore to bring safe home" ("Bonny Kate," Songs, p. 110). Another had "The semblance of each charming feature,/...worn around his neck." ("Ben Backstay," Songs, p. 94). And Jack, off watch

> His true-love's tokens overhaul'd:
> The broken gold, the braided hair,
> The tender motto, writ...
> Upon his 'bacco-box...
> ("The Token," Songs, p. 133).

The broken coin suggests that his girl had the other part, indicative of their unity. In an age of superstition the braided hair is particularly significant, as it proves her complete trust that her sailor will not use it to have her bewitched. The practice of exchanging tokens continues in our own century, as witness the lyrics of a song of 1930: "Oh, give me something to remember you by/When you are far away from me, dear./Some little something meaning love cannot die,".[11] Viewing and touching these tokens would

evoke strong memories of the beloved and bring some solace to the yearning spirit.

It was these thoughts which sustained the mythical sailors in times of adversity. For example, in "The Sailor's Journal" we read:

> we prepared for battle:
> ...
> To Providence I trusted life,
> Put up a pray'r, and thought of Nancy.
> (Songs, p. 155).

In speaking of the songs he wrote, Dibdin makes specific reference to this one:

> The same impulse that inspired the words, has generally given birth to the music, and those that are the most celebrated, have been produced with the least trouble. I begun and completed The Sailor's Journal in half an hour;[12]

Dibdin himself found thoughts of his wife sustaining: "My heart, with thoughts of thee, my dear,/And love, well-stor'd,/Shall brave all danger, scorn all fear," ("Blow High, Blow Low," Songs, p. 28). The song was included in his comic opera, The Seraglio, (1776), and he has this to say about it:

> In this piece I introduced the first of those sea songs that have received so much applause from the public, "Blow high, blow low." It was written in a gale of wind, on a thirteen hours passage from Calais, where I had been with some friends on a party of pleasure. It arose out of reflections that I was on my return to her, who has since lent inspiration to so many similar sentiments, of which this was a specimen.[13]

Another source of strength to the character, and one which he shared with the average man, was a simple belief in Providence. Already noted in the quotation from "The Sailor's Journal," there are many other references throughout the songs. "Little Ben" says "If there's a Pow'r that never errs,-/And certainly 'tis so -/For honest hearts what comforts drop -" (Songs, p. 110); "Poor Jack" avers that the chaplain "prov'd clearly to me,/That Providence takes us in tow:" (Songs, p. 87); and in "Yo Heave Ho!" we read "But in Providence I trust,/For you see, what must be must;" (Songs, p. 182). Although the majority appear to have had this attitude towards life, there were also those who subscribed to the biblical injunction "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." In "A Sailor's Philosophy" we find

> Then drink and sing - hang pain and sorrow,
> ...
> He that's now alive and lusty - to-morrow
> Perhaps may be stretch'd on the deck.
> (Songs, p. 65).

Dibdin knew that the real sailor, like the average man ashore, was concerned for the welfare of his family. Therefore, the "Jolly Jack Tar" must reveal a similar concern. Evidence that it preyed on the minds of the characters is found in "The Sailor's Dream." Jack, in a nightmare, sees his Nancy who "...as she seem'd to breathe her last,/A frightful monster held her fast," (Songs, p. 264). In this instance, Jack's disturbed state of mind is probably due to

the battle fought earlier in the day. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine that it might also have been prompted by his knowledge of the hardships his family endured in his absence. Harsh as the long separations were to the men, their lives were at least full of activity. For the women there was only the waiting. "Four tedious years had Nancy pass'd in grief," ("The Sailor's Return," Songs, p. 119). Seeing a shipwreck, this girl with "Her tender heart, with frantic sorrow thrilling," is convinced that her sailor was aboard. Another source of despair would be the false report of death. This was something which some members of a war-time audience would have experienced and their sympathies would be aroused by the words

> ...her mis'ries to refine,
> ...
> ...with swoll'n eyes, she spells the line
> Where newspapers have kill'd him:
> ("Love's Probation," Songs, p. 177).

As John Masefield says in "Posted as Missing," "It's rough on sailors' women."[14] Another girl is beset by

> One Pest, a knowing and false friend,
> ...
> He teas'd her with each doubt and fear,
> That his vile suit might thrive;
> ...
>
> He kept Jack's letters back, - forg'd news,
> Her virtue to ensnare,
> And did her patient ear abuse,
> To drive her to despair:
> ("Jack's Alive," Songs, p. 280).

These factors, the lengthy separations, witnessing ships foundering, and false reports, contributed to the mental anguish of the fictitious women. There were also physical hardships. "...short-allowanc'd, they at home/Had neither beef nor biscuit." ("The Tizzies," Songs, p. 281). One girl, presumably at the mercy of an unscrupulous landlord who sent his minions, recounts "'They took,...my very bed;/The sticks they seiz'd, and sold in pieces;" ("Water-Cresses," Songs, p. 222). The conditions depicted in these two songs were probably very close to those of real life endured by sailors' wives as a result of naval pay policies. Some of the women of the songs were unable to survive the situation. For example, "...on a rock poor Peg reclin'd,/Mad as the waves,..." ("Mad Peg," Songs, p. 161). Other female characters solved the problem in a different way. For example, Poll Pennant "...cunningly repair'd on board,/Dress'd like a cabin-boy." Later she tells her unsuspecting spouse "'Twas I,...that messmate who/In all your toil took part!'" ("The Cabin-Boy," Songs, p. 282). And Tom Taffrail finds his wife

> ...trick'd out a tar so comely,
> ...
> ...by love directed,
> In man's attire Tom's steps attend:
> ("A Seaman's Ditty," Songs, p. 231).

Throughout literature, before and after Dibdin, heroines have disguised themselves as men for various reasons. It is

possible that Dibdin's lasses may have been the first to do so in order to accompany their lovers into battle.

Eventually there are happy reunions. In "The Meeting" we read, "They dart into each other's arms." (Songs, p. 27). Variations of the line appear in several other songs. These are the reunions of those who have been faithful to each other. That the mythical sailor has been sustained by the thought of his beloved is evidence of his faithfulness to her. Once ashore, we have further evidence in statements like "Jack come home.../In search of Poll, his only pleasure," ("Water-Cresses," Songs, p. 222). Another example introduces the idea of his girl also being faithful:

> That girl who fain would choose a mate
> Should ne'er in fondness fail her,
> May thank her lucky stars if Fate
> Should splice her to a sailor.
>
> ...
>
> If she'd be constant, still his heart
> She's sure will never fail her;
> ("The Sailor," Songs, p. 70).

The examples we have found of the imaginary women at home who "...launch'd a growing navy:-" ("The Tizzies," Songs, p. 281), and also suffered mental agony thinking of their men at sea indicate faithfulness on their part. Of the many statements which strengthen this impression, the following is a good example: "Ben Backstay lov'd the gentle Anna:/Constant as purity was she;-" ("Ben Backstay," Songs, p. 94).

These were the happy reunions. A less fortunate character on his return has news of his girl's death:

> Oh, fate!-her death defac'd the letter -
> Instant his pulse forgot to move;
> ...
> He heav'd a sigh - and died for love!
> ("Jack Ratlin," Songs, p. 74).

Similarly, Anna, receiving the token she gave her Ben from a different sailor, realizing Ben had died, "...grew pale, sunk down, and died." ("Ben Backstay," Songs, p. 94). To die for love demonstrates faithful, self-less devotion. How much more poignant if the lovers are united in death! In "Mad Peg" we have

> The surge, in breakers loud and hoarse,
> Her love cast up a lifeless corse:
> ...
> The shock returning reason brings;
> ...
> She clasps her love, and yields to fate!
> Their mourning friends their relics save,
> And these true lovers find one grave.
> (Songs, p. 161).

Another instances concerns Tom Taffrail, whom we have already met: "His own life ebbing.../He smil'd, in death, that he had perish'd/With his dear wife..." ("A Seaman's Ditty," Songs, p. 231). This song also introduces another folk theme. We read: "True pleasures are for no one mortal:/ A storm arose no skill could mock;". Evidently the gods, jealous of their perfect love, sent the storm which caused the death of Tom and his wife.

Dibdin as a realist also presents the characters of the untrustworthy sailors and the faithless women. The few songs dealing with these characters indicate that they were, in his opinion, in the minority, and thereby strengthens the image of the true and the constant. In one of the songs we read of a sailor's perfidy:

> Alas! where shall I comfort find?
> My peace is gone,...
> ...
> I listen'd to his flatt'ring tongue,
> Nor did I ere
> Suspect a snare
> From one who went to sea:
> ("Alas! Where Shall I Comfort Find!," Songs, p. 94).

And one quotation will suffice to illustrate the faithless girl,

> Came home for consolation:
> ...
> I rush'd, and found my friend and wife
> Lock'd in each other's arms!
> ("Poll and My Partner Joe," Songs, p. 288).

Dibdin sums it all up in two lines: "Thus, 'mongst the girls they left behind,/A lot of true and false they find;" ("All Girls," Songs, p. 156). Actually, the majority of the women in the songs were "true." Whether Poll, Bet or Nancy, by their love, faithfulness and long-suffering they contribute to a composite character which represents the average woman. The imaginary female "role model" is a worthy mate for the imaginary sailor.

Two other aspects of the character of the average man which Dibdin's sailors exhibit are naivety and prudish morality. On the subject of naivety, "Change for a Guinea" gives us:

> ...though brave at sea, when you get him ashore
> A tar often turns out a ninny;
> ...
>
> The landlord's sweet daughter now comes in his view,
> ...
> He fix'd on her eyes, while she penetrates his,
> And cheats him while changing his guinea:
> (Songs, p. 192).

As for prudery, it is revealed by Jack's behaviour at the opera where, describing the dancing, he says "...she hopp'd, and she sprawl'd, and she spun round so queer,/'Twas, you see, rather oddish to me;/And so I sung out, 'Pray, be decent, my dear,-" ("Jack at the Opera," Songs, p. 213).

So far, the songs have revealed a man who takes pride in his heritage; a family man proud of his wife and children and concerned for their welfare who parts from them with emotion and the superstitious exchange of good luck charms; a man who is sustained in hardships by his belief in Providence and thoughts of the woman he loves; a man who proves constant in love, slightly naive and prudish. It is the picture of an average man whose image will be enhanced by the manly qualities Dibdin ascribes to him.

"Manly"

Manly. The word suggests physical beauty as well as the moral attributes which contribute to living honourable lives. As proof that Dibdin's sailors possessed the physical qualities we have a line from "Tom Bowling," "His form was of the manliest beauty," (Songs, p. 97). In another song Dibdin refers to the sailor's "...manly brow..." ("The Sailor's Maxim," Songs, p. 169). As for honourable lives, the song writer says "Honour his guardian spirit..." ("All's One to Jack," Songs, p. 175), and "To sail through life by honour's breeze;-" ("Lovely Nan," Songs, p. 144). Honourable lives end, of course, in honourable deaths. To quote from "The Sailor's Maxim" again, we find "Better death earn'd with honour than ignobly to live." (Songs, p. 169).

The manly folk hero must be self-disciplined, "...to no passion a slave," ("The True English Sailor," Songs, p. 108). Of each it must be said that "He knows no jealous folly;" ("A Sailor's Love," Songs, p. 65). In "Every Man His Own Pilot" we read

> ...in steering in life,...
> To one course in your conduct resort,-
> ...
> And neither to starboard incline nor to port.
> (Songs, p. 219).

Expressing the same idea in a different way we have:

Of discipline th' obedient mind
Must study ev'ry part;
Yet is the secret hard to find,
To discipline the heart:-
Thus, lest the passions overwhelm
The judgment, reason court
To rule the heart...
("Of Discipline th' Obedient Mind," Songs, p. 83).

Gallantry to women is part of manliness. As one of Dibdin's sailors sings, "...ev'rything female from peril to save/Is the noblest distinction that honours the brave." ("The Nancy," Songs, p. 174).

We find evidence of stoicism in songs like "The True English Sailor" (Songs, p. 108), and "All's One to Jack" (Songs, p. 175). In the former, we have the line "The rough and the pleasant he takes as it comes," and in the latter, "His mind's made up, come what come will:/...'Tis all one to Jack." Closely related to this stoicism is the courage of the sailor who "Brave[s] battle, quicksand, storm;" ("Nancy and Home," Songs, p. 251) and "...meets the danger like a man" ("All's One to Jack," Songs, p. 175). There are many references in the songs to the fact that the sailor is "...to fear a stranger;" ("The Flowing Can," Songs, p. 92). Dibdin emphasizes the overall courage of the crew by introducing the opposite in his song, "Swizzy," in which his sailor says:

If, bold and brave, thou canst not bear
Thyself from all thou lov'st to tear,-
If, while winds war, and billows roll,
A spark of fear invade thy soul, -
If thou'rt appall'd when cannons roar,
I prithee, messmate, stay ashore;
(Songs, p. 103)

The image of the folk hero which is beginning to emerge is strengthened by lines like the following: "That my friend, Jack or Tom, I should rescue from danger,/Or lay my life down for each lad in the mess,/ Is nothing at all;-" ("True Courage," Songs, p. 187). In "Friendship Put to the Test" Dibdin commemorates an incident in which a sailor aboard the man-of-war, the Barfleur, when all other means failed, jumped overboard to help his floundering friend. The mythical hero "Jack," with the allegorical surname "Lifeboat," is a true reflection of the brave and loyal real sailor. The audience, recognizing the truths contained in the song, might well begin to think that there were elements of truth in Dibdin's representation of sailors in his other sea songs.

Kindness and generosity are attributes we should expect to find in the 'manly' and Dibdin does not disappoint us. There are many references to the fact that "...sailors kind and honest are," ("Alas! Where Shall I Comfort Find?," Songs, p. 94). "Bill Bobstay" is a good example of generosity. He says "'For money.../What's the good on't,... but to succour a friend?'" (Songs, p. 111). We have another example in "The Last Shilling." Dibdin, in a rare flight of

whimsy, has the shilling tell some of its adventures, one of which is as follows:

> A Jack Tar, all his rhino but me at an end,
> ...
> Though hungry himself, to a poor distress'd friend
> Wish'd it hundreds, and gave his last shilling:
> (Songs, p. 196).

Once again, Dibdin emphasizes the good by exposing the evil of false friends. Here is the story of Ben Block:

> His heart was all kindness and love;
> ...
> He lov'd a fair maiden nam'd Kate;
>
> ...
>
> A false friend his mild nature abus'd,
> And sweet Kate of the vilest of wrongs,
> To poison Ben's pleasure, accus'd:
> ...
>
> The venom accomplish'd its end:
> Ben, all truth and honour himself,
> Suspected no fraud in his friend.
> On the yard while suspended in air,
> A loose to his sorrows he gave;
> ...
> And plung'd in a watery grave.
> ("The Watery Grave," Songs, p. 98).

Kindness and generosity extend to compassion for the defeated opponent. In one of the songs the captain saves from drowning a man who had threatened his life. The captain tells his crew that "A hero's true glory's to spare!" ("When Last in the Dreadful," Songs, p. 68). From "True Courage" we learn that "...'tis the poor wounded stranger;/And the poorer, the more I shall succour distress:" (Songs, p. 187).

The same song reveals that it is no disgrace for the manly sailor to shed a tear. Sentimentality is a luxury the strong and fearless can well afford:

> Why what's that to you if my eyes I'm a wiping?
> A tear is a pleasure, d'ye see, in its way;
> 'Tis nonsense, for trifles, I own, to be piping,
> But they that ha'n't pity, why I pities they.
>
> ...
>
> The heart and the eyes, you see,
> feel the same motion,
> And if both shed their drops, 'tis
> all to the same end:
> And thus 'tis that ev'ry tight lad
> of the ocean
> Sheds...his tears for his friend.

By the same token, the manly can feel grateful, as we read in "The Nancy," "Ne'er ingratitude lurk'd in the heart of a tar;" (Songs, p. 174).

Finally, the manly will have a strong sense of duty and show qualities of leadership. One of Dibdin's sailors says "I love my duty,.../Love truth and merit to defend,-" ("Lovely Nan," Songs, p. 144). As for leadership qualities, without them such a paragon as Tom Bowling could hardly have been "The darling of our crew;" ("Tom Bowling," Songs, p. 97).

Thus, to the attributes of the average man Dibdin has added those of self-discipline, gallantry, stoicism, courage, kindness, generosity, sentimentality, a sense of duty and qualities of leadership. These are the attributes which contribute to leading an honourable life. One of his

sailors sums it all up when he says he "By manners love[s] to show the man;" ("Lovely Nan," Songs, p. 144). Dibdin himself uses the adjective 'manly.'

"Honest"

Dibdin, who felt himself cheated on many occasions, seems to have been particularly impressed by the honesty of the sailors he encountered and to have considered it a sufficiently significant attribute to warrant specific mention. Consequently, he stresses the honesty of his "Jolly Jack Tar" in many of the songs. An obvious example, of course, is the song entitled "The Honest Tar" from which we learn that "A sailor, and an honest heart,/Like ship and helm, are ne'er apart;" (Songs, p. 68). Another example is found in the lines "How should Jack practise treach'ry, disguise, or foul art,/In whose honest face you may read his fair heart;" ("The Sailor's Maxim," Songs, p. 169). One of Dibdin's sailors has this advice for the girls: "If love that no hazard can mar/You are seeking, you'll certainly find it/In the kind honest heart of a tar." ("The Heart of a Tar," Songs, p. 32). As in other instances, Dibdin stresses honesty by drawing attention to the opposite, namely dishonest behaviour. Already we have seen how the naive character was short changed in "Change for a Guinea." In "The Sailor's Sheet-Anchor" Dibdin gives the following account of how his hero was cheated ashore:

What though he to a friend in trust
His prize-money convey,
Who, to his bond of faith unjust,
Cheats him, and runs away:-
What's to be done? He vents a curse
'Gainst all false hearts ashore,
(Songs, p. 88).

Dibdin sums it up in "The Sailor's Defence":

If tars of their money be lavish,
...
'Tis because we're not muckworms, nor slavish,
Like lubbers who ne'er go to sea:
What's your cunning, and such quivication,
And them sly manoeuvres, to we?-
To be roguish is no valuation
...

As for cheating, light weights, and short
measures,
And corruption and bribery, d'ye see,
...
You've ashore, actions, writs, cesseraries,
And a regiment of counsel to fee;
...
We never trust lawyers at sea.

...
Honest hearts find a friend and a brother
In each worthy that ploughs the salt sea.
(Songs, p. 294).

Dibdin, having developed a plain and manly folk hero, thought it important to emphasize his intrinsic honesty.

"Patriotic"

As with honesty, Dibdin chose to draw particular attention to patriotism. It is an attribute one would expect of the manly. It is also evident in the average, plain man in wartime. Indeed, in one song we read "...our peasants, at

a word/...would turn each ploughshare to a sword,/Their country to defend." ("Britannia's Name," Songs, p. 265). As Dibdin saw it, however, to face the hardships and hazards of life at sea, whether in peace or war, demonstrated that patriotism was an active ingredient of the sailor's character. It becomes an important attribute of his "Jolly Jack Tar" which is celebrated in many of the songs. These sailors of Dibdin's may be naive ashore, but they have no illusions of the life they face at sea. Dibdin's cynicism rarely surfaces in his songs. "Tight Lads of the Ocean" is an exception in which he outlines many of the problems:

> I sing of that life of delight beyond measure,
> That tars calmly lead on the boisterous main;
> Where toil is enjoyment, where trouble's all
> pleasure,
> ...
> Where you fear no diseases but sickness and
> scurvy;
> Where the water stinks sweetly by way of a
> zest;
> Where you walk on your legs, when you're not
> topsy turvy;
> ...
> Ah! give me...the tight lads of the ocean,
> Who, though they're so wretched, lead such
> happy lives.
>
> ...
>
> In short, a tar's life...
> Is, of all other lives,...
> The best life in the world, next to staying
> at home.
> (Songs, p. 121).

Corroborating the pleasures of staying at home is the ploughman in Dibdin's song "The Lucky Escape": "...my friend

was a carfindo aboard a king's ship,/And he ax'd me to go just to sea for a trip;" The lad continues:

> I did not much like for to be aboard a-ship;-
> When in danger there's no door to creep out:
> ...
> But I did not like rocking about:
> By and by comes a hurricane - I did not like
> that;
> Next a battle,...
> (Songs, p. 112).

The upshot of the matter was that the man, once more safe at home, determined to stay ashore, "Nor again leave my plough, to go ploughing the deep."

It is in spite of these drawbacks that Dibdin's patriotic heroes, imbued with the conviction of the rectitude of the institutions and leaders of their country, go to sea to "Assist, uphold your Church and State,/Your great men good, your good men great;" ("Ye Free-Born Sons," Songs, p. 12).

We have already seen evidence of loyalty in Dibdin's characters from their faithfulness to their wives and friends. Within the compass of patriotism that loyalty is extended to include the sovereign. In "Jervis for Ever" we read:

> ...bless the King, and bless the Queen,
> And bless the fam'ly royal;
> ...'twill soon be seen
> That British hearts are loyal:
> (Songs, p. 239).

Another example of the sentiment comes from "Bill Bobstay" who asserts that "The right of us Britons we know's to be loyal,/In our country's defence our last moments to spend,/ To fight up to the ears to protect the blood royal," (Songs, p. 111). Bobstay introduces the concept that loyalty extends to dying for one's country. As another of Dibdin's sailors expresses it, "And I ax which is noblest - to die in one's bed,/Or while fighting for country and king?" ("The Best Bower-Anchor," Songs, p. 261). Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori, in fact.

Knowing one's duties and executing them cheerfully is also evidence of loyalty. Dibdin lists those duties for us when he says of his sailor that

> In his station, amidships, or fore, or aft,
> He can pull away,
> Cast off, belay,
> Aloft, alow,
> Avast...
> And hand, reef, and steer,
> Know each halyard and jeer,
> And of duty every rig;
> ("A Drop of the Creature," Songs, p. 98).

And, says Dibdin, "Alert to his duty, he readily flies" ("The True English Sailor," Songs, p. 108). Furthermore, "He takes his duty merrily:" ("Every Inch a Sailor," Songs, p. 92).

The "Jolly Jack Tars" experienced such hardships and dangers that only patriots could endure. Some of the hazards are listed in "Nancy Dear":

When fate comes riding in the gale,
And dreadful hurricanes assail
...

For battle should the ship be clear'd,
As death when all is still,
...

When hissing flames now reach the sky,
...
And, as to climb the shrouds they fly,
Grasp the devoted ship;
..., while a yawning wat'ry grave,
Sole chance from fire the crew to save,

...

When shipwreck'd, many leagues from home,
The remnant of the crew
Bewail some Dick, or Jack, or Tom,
Who well they lov'd and knew;
...

And last, when hungry, faint, and sore,
Through danger and delay,
Forc'd, hard extreme, from door to door
To beg his vagrant way:-
(Songs, p. 168).

Dibdin left his audiences in no doubt of the sacrifices patriotism demanded. Some of his best and most dramatic songs deal with storms, shipwrecks and battles. For his vivid descriptions of storms he was able to draw on his own experiences. Coupled with his imagination, he gives us "The Shipwreck":

How hard the lot for sailors cast,
That they should roam
For years, to perish thus at last
In sight of home!
...

> The tempest comes,...
> ...
> ...now we touch old ocean's bed,
> Now reach the sky!
> ...
> She labours so, within this hour,
> That down she goes.
>
> ...
> She splits! she parts!- through sluices driv'n,
> The water flows;-
> Adieu, ye friends! have mercy, Heav'n!
> For down she goes!
> (Songs, p. 104).

When we compare some of the songs with seamen's reminiscences quoted in the previous chapter we can find little fiction in Dibdin's versions. For example,

> One night,...
> ...the scud came on low'ring...
> Jack went up aloft, for to hand the top-ga'ant sail,
> A spray washed him off,...
> ("The Sailor's Consolation," Songs, p. 118),

reminds us of Samuel Kelly's comment that "[the] mast used to bend and spring like a coachman's whip...."[15] Similarly, Dibdin's lines

> When the wild tumultuous battle,
> ...
> Leaves decks with gore -
> When ranks the raking broadside clears -
> ("Three Cheers," Songs, p. 223),

and "The battle - that with horror grim/Had madly ravag'd life and limb,/Had scuppers drench'd with human gore," ("The Token," Songs, p. 133), recall John Nicol's report that "such a scene of blood and desolation I want words to

express...."[16] The songs and the real accounts run so closely parallel that the fictional hero and the real sailor begin to merge. The folk hero becomes a "role model" and some of the glamour rubs off on the real sailor who may even imitate some of that model's behaviour. To be part of the British navy becomes desirable. The number of volunteers begins to increase. The public begins to appreciate the sailor. Dibdin's pension was awarded partly because of his contribution to these changing attitudes.

Dibdin's characters were beset by other hazards caused by dishonest landsmen and corrupt naval officers. In "Jack's Gratitude" we read:

> I've been wounded, and shipwreck'd, and trick'd
> of my pay;
>
> ...
>
> But for all these misfortunes, I'd yet cut a
> dash,
> ...
> If the agent had not run away with the cash,
> And so many brave fellows plung'd into despair.
> (Songs, p. 116).

The reference here is to the agent who arranged for the disposal of a captured vessel and was responsible for the distribution of the prize money. "Jack at the Windlass" speaks of the corruption of many of the ship's officers, saying, for example, "Of the purser this here is the maxim,/ Slops, grog, and provisions he sacks:" (Songs, p. 128). The song was written in 1791. Dibdin was not the first to air

these grievances in the theatre. In 1773, Edward Thompson, in an adaptation of Charles Shadwell's The Fair Quaker of Deal, (1710), included a lively scene in an inn in which Flip, the Commodore, is drinking with his men:

> Hatch: To be free with your Right Reverend Worship's Honour and Glory, I must tell you, being you and I were afore the mast together, it would look as it were something clever of your Honourableness to throw three things over-board.
> Flip: Why, what are those things, Sirrah?
> Hatch: The Boatswain, the Purser and the Bilboes.[17]

The majority of these patriotic characters received meagre rewards for their naval service. A few of Dibdin's sailors who had probably been lucky with prize money, left the sea for comfortable retirement: "Thanks to Fortune, at sea I've no need to break bulk,/For I've plenty of shot in the locker." ("The Letter N," Songs, p. 216). And we have a pleasant picture of another character:

> Old Cunwell, the pilot, for many a year,
> ...
> At last, safely moor'd, with a well-timber'd purse,
> ...
>
> From a kind of poop-lantern, plac'd over the Thames,
> Where he took with his messmates his grog,
> Bound outward or homeward, the ships and their names,
> They spied...
> ("The Look-Out," Songs, p. 252).

Other fictitious sailors were much less fortunate. Some were maimed by direct shots in battle, others by flying splinters from shattered oak bulwarks. But to the end these characters

remain "Jolly Jack Tars." Dibdin believed that "The song, written to please, may be so managed as to instruct;"[18] Consequently, he composed songs about his sailors who are still cheerful, despite their wounds and the fact that, unless they were sufficiently decrepit for admission to Greenwich Hospital, they must beg for their subsistence. We have, for example, "Jack at Greenwich" who recounts "A splinter queer'd my larboard gam,/And, damme! spoil'd my dancing." (Songs, p. 206). Another character sings "By and by, in a brush, I lost my arm,/Tol de rol, de rol de ri! ("Tol De Rol," Songs, p. 176). And in "The Blind Sailor" we read:

> 'I'm blind, and I'm a cripple;
> Yet cheerful would I sing,
> Were my misfortunes triple,-
> 'Cause why, 'twas for my king;
> Besides, each Christian I exhort,
> Pleas'd, will some pittance spare;-
> (Songs, p. 128).

The singer of this song, while expressing his patriotism, also draws attention to the fact that he is forced to beg. Referring again to "Tol De Rol," we learn that

> Next, a squall a tempest led off,
> ...
> I got split, and that way lost my leg:
> Tol de rol, de rol de ri!
> ...
> 'I must now be forc'd to beg:'

Dibdin's compassionate manly "Jolly Jack" of "Who Cares," recognizing the plight of these fellow seamen, speaks of "lubberly landsmen" and says:

> Why now, if they go for to talk about living,
> My eyes - why a little will serve;
> Let each a small part of his pittance be giving,
> And who in this nation can starve?
> (Songs, p. 153).

In a ship prepared for battle another character says:

> 'I no relations have myself,
> ...
> So prize-money, and all my pelf,
> In trust, I give the King!
> His Majesty!...
> ...
> With int'rest will each tar give part,
> Or swell the Chatham chest.
> ("The Sailor's Will," Songs, p. 248).

These songs which reveal the "Jolly Jack Tar's" concern for his brother also reveal the neglect the characters were shown by the "lubberly landsmen." Dibdin's hope to instruct his audiences through these songs seems to have failed, as it was not for almost one hundred and fifty years that countries, like Canada, introduced adequate legislation for the rehabilitation of veterans. Perhaps Dibdin had sown the seed for this social change, but for his sailor patriotism had to be its own reward.

"Cheerfulness" was not an adjective Dibdin used to describe the sailors he knew. It is, however, a dominant characteristic of the "Jolly Jack Tar" folk hero he created. Possibly the song writer considered it evidence of the high morale produced by loyalty and a sense of duty well done. We have already seen that this hero "...takes his duty merrily:" ("Every Inch a Sailor," Songs, p. 92). In "The

True English Sailor" we learn that "Jack dances and sings, and is always content;" (Songs, p. 108). But the really shining example is "Bill Bobstay" of whom it is said "He'd sing like a mermaid, and foot it so lightly,/The forcastle's pride, and delight of the crew!" (Songs, p. 111). Here the character is mirroring those sailors who were encouraged, even by Nelson, to entertain their messmates. Besides delighting the crew, the fictitious sailor pleases his girl best if, in addition to his seamanship, he is "Singing, quaffing,/Dancing, laughing,/Take it cheerily and merrily," ("The Girl Ashore," Songs, p. 12). Although these jolly tars were probably singing and whistling all day long, the main jollity took place, traditionally, on Saturday night when the grog flowed, and they all sang songs like Dibdin's "Nothing Like Grog" and "The Standing Toast" "Was - The wind that blows, the ship that goes,/And the lass that loves a sailor!" (Songs, p. 81). In another song we read "The toast - Great Britain's fleets - three cheers!/And jolly tars sing out - Hurrah!" ("Three Cheers," Songs, p. 223). With this song Dibdin again draws near to the real world. The toast is strongly reminiscent of Nicol's statement that after preparation for battle "we gave them three such cheers as are only to be heard in a British man-of-war."[19]

Summary

"Plain, manly, honest and patriotic." Through the songs Dibdin created a character which embodied all the stated and implied virtues to become a veritable paragon, a folk hero, a "Jolly Jack Tar." In fact, "What mortals can excel us,/Who 'tempt the boist'rous main?" ("Nancy and Home," Songs, p. 251). "Tom Bowling," a song composed as an epitaph for Dibdin's brother, epitomizes the "Jolly Jack Tar":

> His form was of the manliest beauty,
> His heart was kind and soft;
> Faithful below he did his duty,
> ...
>
> Tom never from his word departed,
> His virtues were so rare;
> His friends were many, and true-hearted,
> His Poll was kind and fair:
> And then he'd sing so blithe and jolly,-
> ...
>
> Yet shall poor Tom find pleasant weather,
> ...
> For, though his body's under hatches,
> His soul is gone aloft.
> (Songs, p. 97).

NOTES

1 Charles Napier Robinson, The British Tar in Fact and Fiction..., p. 245.

2 William Congreve, Love for Love, Act V, sc. i.

3 Ibid., Act III, sc. i.

4 Ibid.

5 George Colman, the Elder, The Jealous Wife, Act III.

6 Ibid.

7 Robinson, p. 205.

8 Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, p. xxii.

9 Michael Lewis, Spithead..., p. 124.

10 See Chapter II, Note 18.

11 Reader's Digest Family Songbook, p. 102.

12 Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. III, p. 6.

13 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 169.

14 John Masefield, The Poems and Plays of..., Vol. I, p. 100.

15 Frank E. Huggett, The Past, Present and Future of Life and Work at Sea..., p. 59.

16 Ibid., p. 69.

17 Edward Thompson, The Fair Quaker..., Act III.

18 Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, p. xxiii.

19 Huggett, p. 69.

CHAPTER IV

THE POPULARITY OF THE SONGS

There is ample evidence that Charles Dibdin's sea songs were popular not only in his own time but also for almost a century after his death. This popularity can be attributed to a variety of factors: emotional appeal, words, style and appropriate music.

Audiences

According to Allardyce Nicoll, in the patent theatres during the latter part of the eighteenth century the intellectuals, the professionals and the fashionable shared the pit, the middle classes occupied the first gallery, and the "poorer folk" the upper gallery.[1] Michael Booth includes sailors in the last of these groups.[2] An epilogue of Garrick's, in which he addressed the line "You call for hornpipes, and for Hearts of Oak!" to the second gallery, corroborates Booth's statement.[3] "Hearts of Oak" is, of course, a reference to Garrick's own song of that title, praising the sailors.

There is further proof that seamen were in the audiences. The unknown writer who praised the Dibdins for "doing justice to the British Sailor!"[4] was presumably himself a sailor. His familiarity with the plays of Congreve and the elder Colman mark him as a theatre-goer. Also,

Robinson has given us an account of many of Captain Edward Thompson's crew attending a performance of his The Fair Quaker of Deal at the conclusion of which "they would not permit the audience to separate until they had sung one of the songs which Thompson had written."[5] Further proof is found in an account by Thomas Holcroft:

> When the ballet of the Death of Captain Cook [1789] was first brought forward at Covent-garden theatre, an apparently sea-faring man, in the gallery, frequently annoyed those behind him, by repeatedly rising from his seat during the representation; the consequence of his great attention to the scene as passing. When the savage steals up behind Cook, and lifts the dagger to strike the fatal blow, he rose with violent emotion, and cried out, 'You damm'd villain, what are you about?' Then suddenly recollecting himself, he sat down, and said to those around him - 'I beg your pardon, gentle-folks; but this affects me, for I was with the Captain at the time.'[6]

There is no information about the composition of Dibdin's audiences. As a solo entertainer it is unlikely that his performances would have appealed to the seaman class at first. However, the sailors would have heard many of the songs sung in afterpieces at the patent theatres. As the songs became more and more popular, it is possible that sailors would have attended some of the Entertainments to hear and applaud the new ones.

Dibdin's prime purpose was to reach a wider public with his lauding of the British tar. If he needed assurance that songs about the lower classes were acceptable in that

increasingly humanitarian age, he had only to look at the continuing popularity of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera. Nicoll has pointed out that "One of its [the audience's] most outstanding features was an excessive sensibility, which allied itself to...prudery...."[7] Dibdin, who "considered...it...incumbent on me in no instance to outrage propriety or wound morality,"[8] directed his songs towards that sensibility to arouse sympathy and admiration for his fictional sailors.

Emotional Appeal

Of the songs discussed in the last chapter, those which deal with the long separations and false reports of deaths of loved ones would touch a sympathetic chord in the listener. The romantic idea of two lovers sharing one grave, as in "Mad Peg", would have sentimental appeal. Dibdin's wounded sailors would surely have called forth some measure of pity. Songs about loyalty, bravery and cheerfulness of his tars would arouse admiration. The prudery mentioned by Nicoll is reflected in Jack's words "Pray, be decent, my dear,-" ("Jack at the Opera", Songs, p. 213). In songs like "The Shipwreck" with graphic descriptions of storms at sea, Dibdin caters to the growing interest in the wild forces of nature. Nor did he ignore the appeal of familiar folk themes; for example, the exchange of tokens.

Some of the songs which demonstrated the patriotism of the "Jolly Jack Tar" had an even wider application. In "Britannia's Name" Dibdin refers to the patriotism of soldiers and peasants as well as sailors. Other songs, like "The Pride of the Ocean" in which Dibdin recalls the names of earlier victorious admirals and "Jervis For Ever" extolling that Admiral's victory off Cape St. Vincent, served as reminders of past glories to a nation which was once more in conflict with Napoleon, and fully aware of the threat of invasion. In "The Sailor's Bring-Up" we have "They're [the French] drubb'd; we've nabb'd the Russian fleet,/And sav'd, perhaps, the world." (Songs, p. 267). To have "sav'd, perhaps, the world" would probably have brought the audience to its feet cheering. There would be no doubt about it in their minds, a familiar sentiment in our own times. These songs would have fostered the feelings of national pride, patriotism and the belief in the righteousness of the cause so necessary for the maintenance of a war-time economy.

Mark W. Booth in his The Experience of Songs says:

> To appreciate how an audience experiences what a song says, consider the element of vocal performance of song....The voice of another person who is not, like an actor in a play would be, addressing his voice...to some other specific person...presents itself as a medium of communication from someone else to me... undirected spoken words direct themselves straight towards any listener....Words from a voice are privileged in their power to arrest attention.[9]

The majority of Dibdin's sea songs were written for his Entertainments in which he was the sole performer. In view of Mark Booth's comments we may assume the emotional impact on individuals of Dibdin's audiences was far greater than it would have been if the songs had formed part of a play.

Words

W.H. Auden says that the words best suited for songs are "those which require the least reflection to comprehend."[10] That is, unless comprehension is instantaneous, succeeding ideas are lost. In an audience of mixed intelligence one must cater to the lowest common denominator, as Dibdin did, by using simple words and familiar phrases. From his extensive use of nautical jargon we surmise that the terms were part of the everyday speech of Londoners. The eighteenth-century voyages of exploration emanating from this maritime nation discovered new areas for trade. The expansion of commerce led to an increase in ship-building. Landsmen working around the docks, having picked up the lingo from the sailors, would have no difficulty understanding the language of the songs. Peter Van Der Merwe says that Dibdin "was noted for the care he took in his songs to use correct nautical terminology," and quotes Dibdin's own manuscript anecdote:

> When I published my song of Jack at the Windlass, I received a variety of anonymous letters informing me that I ought to [have called] it Jack at the Capstan. I knew I was right, but I had a sort of wish to argue the point when I should meet with a real sailor. One reason was that I had never sailed in a ship in which there was a capstan. I was in a back parlour with one of these letters in my hand, when a sailor came into the shop and asked for Jack at the Capstan. My man told him, with great simplicity, that he had no such song; he had Jack at the Windlass. Why you dammed fool, said the sailor, in't it the same thing? Give me the song you lubber. The fact was the sailor was a man of war's man; and, therefore, asked for Jack at the Capstan. Had he sailed in a brig, or a snow [sic] he would have asked for Jack at the Windlass.[11]

The jargon, lending colour and verisimilitude, is found in all the songs: heaving the anchor or lead, hauling on the sails, et cetera. "Jack at Greenwich" refers to his larboard gam, coupling the nautical term for "left" with the slang word for "leg." Dibdin's "Jolly Jack Tars" delight in describing their girls in terms they use for their beloved ships. In "Saturday Night at Sea" we find "Cried honest Tom, 'My Peg I'll toast,/A frigate neat and trim," (Songs, p. 93). And in "The Nancy":

> For my ship's call'd the Nancy, and Nancy's my wife.
>
> When Nancy, my wife, o'er the lawn scuds so neat
> ...
>
> As for Nancy, my vessel, but see her in trim,
> ...
> Scudding...
> (Songs, p. 174).

"Hand, reef and steer," summarizing the sailor's duties, is an example of one of the familiar phrases in the songs. It appears in "The Cabin-Boy," "A Drop of the Creature," and "The Girl Ashore." Not only was the phrase in common use, but it is also to be found in plays by authors like Tobias George Smollett and Edward Thompson. Dibdin borrowed "Hearts of Oak" from Garrick's 1759 song and used it in "Nancy and Home," and "Ye Free-Born Sons."

The use of nautical metaphors to describe a man's life was common practice for centuries. Those who knew that

> There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows...[12]

would have no difficulty appreciating Dibdin's "Voyage of Life." To describe Tom Bowling's death as "...his body's under hatches,/His soul is gone aloft." ("Tom Bowling", Songs, p. 97), was possibly more unusual.

The names are as salty as the jargon. For instance, we have Jack Lifeboat, Ben Block, Bill Bobstay, Tom Bowling, obviously sailors, with their surnames derived from ship's gear. Dibdin's use of these metaphorical surnames was not original. Smollett had already used Ben Block, and a character in his novel Roderick Random is Lieut. Tom Bowling, a naval officer. Although Dibdin used various Christian names, "Jack" is the one most frequently encountered. "Jack" may have been a common name at the time.

However, if one considers the proliferation of "Shirleys" in the 1930's following the success of the child actress Shirley Temple, it is not unreasonable to suspect that as the "Jolly Jack Tar" image developed, hundreds of little boys in East London were christened "Jack." Possibly it was the hope that, imitating art, they would turn out to be veritable heroes. As for the girls, they may be "Nan," "Bet" or "Poll." The use of "Poll" or "Polly" was not new, "Polly" having been a lower class heroine dating from Gay's The Beggar's Opera.

Hogarth's comment on the words is that "They are bold and masculine, without the slightest rudeness or vulgarity; and they hence afford delight to the simplest as well as the most cultivated taste."[13] And their use, to borrow a phrase from Robinson, brought "a whiff of brine across the footlights."[14]

Style

The songs vary in quality. Hogarth comments on two songs from The Waterman, namely "The Jolly Young Waterman" and "Then Farewell, my Trim-Built Wherry": "There is more merit in the music...than in the verses themselves."[15] The scansion in some of the songs is strange. Take, for example, "Wives and Sweethearts":

'Tis said we vent'rous die-hards, when
we leave the shore,
Our friends should mourn,
Lest we return
To bless their sight no more:
(Songs, p. 85).

However, the lines were written to be sung, not merely read. Possibly Dibdin spoke the occasional line to introduce some variety to the performance. Alternatively, as he did not write the music down until after the first performance, it would be quite simple for him to add an extra note or two. The same song has an excellent example of rhythmic but meaningless couplets: "What argufies noration?/The rest is all a whim:"

In the majority of the songs, however, the words and metre suit the subject. There is a lyrical quality to

Sweet is the ship, that, under sail,
Spreads her white busom to the gale;
...
Sweet, sailing with a fav'ring breeze;
But, oh! much sweeter than all these,
Is Jack's delight - his lovely Nan.
("Lovely Nan", Songs, p. 144).

In many songs, such as "Poll and My Partner Joe," lines like

Like lightning - for I felt new life!
...
I rush'd, and found my friend and wife
Lock'd in each other's arms!
(Songs, p. 288),

give a feeling of the action. One of Dibdin's most dramatic songs is "The Shipwreck." By alternating longer and shorter lines, Dibdin builds the tension:

> Avert yon omen, gracious Heav'n!
> The ugly scud,
> By rising winds resistless driv'n,
> Kisses the flood.
> ...
>
> She splits! she parts! - through sluices driv'n,
> The water flows;-
> Adieu, ye friends! have mercy, Heav'n!
> For down she goes!
> (Songs, p. 104).

The cry "She splits" recalls a similar cry in Shakespeare's The Tempest.[16]

There is a spontaneity about nearly all the songs. An exception is "The Death of Nelson": "Be the great twenty-first of October recorded,/In the mem'rable year eighteen hundred and five;" (Songs, p. 285). The song compares unfavourably with "The Arrival of Nelson's Corpse": "Great Nelson's corse arrives in sight,/Victorious e'en in death!" (Songs, p. 289). The stilted lines of the first song give the impression that, because of his pension, Dibdin felt impelled to produce a song to commemorate the event. The song was not successful. The second song evokes the measured tread and muffled drum of the solemn procession. One feels the author was probably one of those lining the route.

As in the majority of cases the style complemented the subject matter it would be a contributing factor to the popularity of the songs.

Music

As Dibdin was writing popular songs for his own age, it is not surprising that there is little opportunity to judge the music firsthand. Only one song appears to have survived to be recorded in comparatively recent times. In 1966 Peter Pears, accompanied by Benjamin Britten, recorded "Tom Bowling."[17] The hauntingly melodic tune seems to be well suited to the verses Dibdin wrote as an epitaph for his brother.

Dibdin's formal musical training was negligible. We have his own account:

> I have said nothing yet that can give an idea that I did not learn music regularly like any body [sic] else; it will be proper here to explain the truth. Mr. Fussel,...organist of Winchester cathedral, when I was nine years old, taught me the gamut, and the table which points out the length of the notes, and the divisions of the time; and...five or six common tunes... [which] are the only exercises I ever received from a master. Mr. Kent, a church composer...had also the credit of having taught me; but, except some anthems which he composed for me,...I never received the smallest instruction from him.[18]

And he says, "I...became my own instructor."[19] Hogarth comments that "...Dibdin, as a musician, did not possess much learning or technical skill."[20] His opinion is

supported by the reviewer of Dibdin's Musick Epitomised; A School book in Which the Whole Science of Musick is Completely Explained.... The reviewer, admitting Dibdin's abilities as a song writer, continues:

> We regret that we cannot bestow equal commendation on the present work; but truth compels us to say that its faults are so numerous that we could ill afford room...to point them out.[21]

A later critic, Roger Fiske, having referred to The Waterman (1774) as a "charming libretto," continues "the rest of his career was a long decline...he lost all notion of self-criticism; much of his later music is extremely poor;"[22]

Dibdin, probably anticipating criticism, said

> Whatever is written for music must sometimes have inequalities;...the music must be sorted to the mode of expression as well as the sentiment itself; and thus, there must be a kind of give and take accordance between the music and the words, which is indispensibly [sic] necessary to heighten the effect of both.[23]

And Hogarth considered that Dibdin's

> deficiencies...were of the less importance, from the branch of the art to which he applied himself. He had that which no study can bestow... the gift of melody;...which he improved by incessant exercise,...acquiring freedom, facility, and a constantly increasing range of musical ideas. The songs in his earlier... pieces are closely formed upon those of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries... but his genius soon broke loose from the trammels of imitation; and his innumerable melodies are as remarkable for originality, as for endless variety in form and expression....it is in his

> sea-songs that the most characteristic features of his genius, not only as a poet, but as a melodist, are to be found....the sound is always an echo to the sense;[24]

Evidently, the music had a great and lasting appeal. Benjamin Victor, having seen The Padlock (1768), reported that

> This little Opera was received with general Applause, and performed Fifty-three Nights to crouded [sic] Houses. It was well acted; and without the Aid of Music, would have been an agreeable...Piece - but with the Music (which was happily adapted, and well executed) it proved the most pleasing Entertainment.[25]

More than sixty years after they were first heard two songs from The Waterman elicited Hogarth's comments:

> The orchestra never strikes up the fresh and lively song of 'The Jolly Young Waterman,' without causing a stir of pleasure from pit to gallery. The plaintive and touching air of 'Then Farewell, my trim-built Wherry,' must always be equally a favourite.[26]

Popularity

> As a writer of lyrics for songs Dibdin was certainly the most prolific and most popular in that great culminating period of popular song, which began with 'The Beggar's Opera' in 1728 and continued for more than a century....[27]

Edward Rimbault Dibdin, Charles Dibdin's great-grandson, continues his article with a list of other notable song writers saying that, with one exception, "none of these, however,...supplied their lyrics with a clothing of music;"

Dibdin's melodies were tuneful and easily learnt. One feels that, as happens today, members of the audience left the theatre humming or whistling the "catchy" tunes. It requires little imagination to appreciate how their popularity would spread throughout the city by being sung in the coffee houses, or whistled on the crowded streets. The sailors took the songs back to their ships where, according to a land-lubber, they were not popular. A naval officer of the 1830's countered with:

> We have personally witnessed the hilarity, contentment, and good feeling disseminated by those vilified verses, in the merchant service, in the East India ships and in men-of-war; in ship's galleys and 'tween decks, in store-rooms and in cockpits; in guard-boats and in gun vessels; and from habitually hearing, we, as well as thousands of our Neptunian brethren, have got most of them 'by heart'...
>
> ...the 'Sailor's Journal'...'True Courage'...and the charming strain of 'Lovely Nan,' have saluted our ears on many a Saturday night in Europe and in Africa, in the Atlantic and the Pacific, and, indeed, in various parts of the world, from the Channel to the most remote stations.[28]

The publications, the first of which would have been the song and music sheets sold at the theatres, offer the most concrete evidence of the enduring popularity.

There are two stories about the sale of "Poor Jack," a song from The Whim of the Moment, (1788), the first of the Entertainments. Dibdin was unpopular at the time and unable

to sell a collection of twelve songs. He disposed of them to a music seller for sixty pounds. Hogarth reports:

> Among them was the celebrated Poor Jack; which immediately became popular all over the kingdom, and must have produced to its proprietor many hundred pounds.[29]

E. Beresford Chancellor gives a different account:

> the famous song Poor Jack...[was] so popular... it was not only...vociferously encored...but copies could hardly be printed quickly enough to meet the demand...'Dibdin actually hired a stall ...for...his man, to stand in to deliver out the songs. The crowd and scramble to get them, even wet from the press, was such, that I have seen persons fight for their turn.'[30]

The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980 contains over thirty pages of entries under the name of Charles Dibdin. These entries, of course, are not limited to the sea songs. They record, however, twenty-five publications of "Tom Bowling" released by various publishers and arrangers between the years 1790 and 1898.

Dibdin himself published the first of many collections of his songs in four volumes. This work, A Collection of Songs, reached a third edition. Writing in 1835, Hogarth records:

> An edition of Dibdin's sea songs was published by the late Dr. Kitchiner, in 1824. This collection contains a hundred and one songs, and is sufficiently ample; but the editor was incompetent....The music is full of inaccuracies; and Dibdin's accompaniments, meagre and imperfect as they are, are rendered still more so by frequent

> mutilations. An edition of these songs, by a sound and judicious musician, is...much wanted, and would assuredly be well received by the public.[31]

Hogarth himself set out to remedy the situation, and in 1842 published The Songs of Charles Dibdin...and the Music of the Best and Most Popular of the Melodies. He claims that there are more than a thousand of the songs included in the volume.

Numerous other anthologies were published, some devoted solely to Dibdin's sea songs, while others included sea songs of other authors. For example, Dibdin's son, Thomas John, published Songs Naval and National in 1841. It consisted primarily of his father's songs, but he also included some by himself, his brother and others. In 1863, Bell and Daldy brought out a similar collection, the subscription list for which includes several naval officers, one of whom ordered fifty copies. In the list of Patrons we find the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Minto and the Lords of the Admiralty - five hundred copies. This would seem to indicate that distribution to the ships was contemplated. The last collection, Sea Songs and Ballads, was published by Library Press, London, in 1905.

Other compilations included some of Charles Dibdin's songs, with or without acknowledgement of authorship. In his Memoirs, Dibdin's son, Charles Isaac Mungo, speaks of the number of songs the father and sons wrote:

> from our Songs, pirated, have the majority of Song Books which have been published for years, been principally composed. I have...a volume called The Universal Songster....I will look at it and count the number stolen from us. - I have - the result is as follows - Father, 105- Brother, 31 - Self, 59.[32]

John Ashton's Real Sailor-Songs, (1891), is of particular interest. In his Preface Ashton says:

> In collecting these Sailor-Songs I have had to reject very many not only for want of space, but that they were too obviously the manufacture of - that despised of Jack - the land-lubber: and I have omitted the whole of Dibdin's, as they were songs for Sailors, but not necessarily Sailor's Songs.[33]

He has inadvertently included two of Dibdin's songs, namely "The Greenwich Pensioner" and "The Lucky Escape." Presumably, by 1891, those songs had become so completely absorbed into the popular songs of the day that Ashton was unaware of their author's name. A somewhat similar error occurs in the 1951 Penguin Song Book in which "Tom Bowling" is credited to son Thomas, rather than to the father Charles.

Statistics

The publication history tends to stress the popularity with later generations. There is statistical evidence that the songs were favourites in their own day. The London Stage, which does not record Dibdin's Entertainments, lists one hundred single songs which were included in various afterpieces at the patent theatres between 1792 and 1800.

Twenty-one of these were sea songs, six of which were used more than five times.

Toy Theatre

It is a measure of the popularity of The Waterman, with its songs "The Jolly Young Waterman" and "Then Farewell, my Trim-Built Wherry," that it was included in the repertoire of the Toy Theatre.

Summary

We have discussed Dibdin's appealing songs made popular by sensitive audiences. It was the opinion of a contemporary that "Few of our Melodists have had the good fortune to please John Bull so well, and for such a considerable length of time, as Mr. C. Dibdin."[34]

NOTES

1 Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama..., Vol. III, p. 14.

2 Michael Booth, "The Social and Literary Context," The Revels History of Drama in English, Vol. VI, p. 4.

3 Nicoll, Vol. III, p. 14.

4 Charles Napier Robinson, The British Tar in Fact and Fiction..., p. 245.

5 Ibid., p. 224.

6 Thomas Holcroft, The Theatrical Recorder, Vol. II, pp. 150-151.

7 Nicoll, Vol. III, p. 15.

8 Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin..., Vol. I, p. xxii.

9 Mark W. Booth, The Experience of Songs, p. 14.

10 Ibid., p. 7.

11 Pieter Van Der Merwe, "Charles Dibdin, Jack, and the Windlass," The Mariner's Mirror, Vol. 67, p. 193.

12 William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Act IV, sc. iii.

13 George Hogarth, The Songs of Charles Dibdin..., p. xxvi.

14 Robinson, p. 226.

15 Hogarth, The Songs..., p. 20.

16 William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act I, sc. i.

17 Charles Dibdin, "Tom Bowling," arr. Benjamin Britten. Britten: Six Hölderlin Fragments....

18 Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, p. 21.

19 Ibid., p. 22.

20 Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xxvi.

21 "Review of New Musical Publications," The Gentleman's Magazine..., Vol. LXXXIII, Pt. 1, pp. 253-254.

22 Roger Fiske, "Dibdin, Charles," Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Vol. 5, p. 425.

23 Dibdin, The Professional Life..., Vol. I, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

24 Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xxvi.

25 Benjamin Victor, The History of the Theatres..., Vol. 3, pp. 129-130.

26 Hogarth, The Songs..., p. 20.

27 Edward Rimbault Dibdin, "Charles Dibdin as a Writer," Music and Letters, Vol. XIX, p. 151.

28 Robinson, pp. 349-350.

29 Hogarth, The Songs..., p. xviii.

30 Philip H. Highfill, Jr., et al., A Biographical Dictionary of Actors..., Vol. 4, p. 370.

31 George Hogarth, Musical History..., pp. 323-324.

32 Charles Isaac Mungo Dibdin, Professional and Literary Memoirs..., p. 46.

33 John Ashton, Real Sailor-Songs, p. xviii.

34 "Review of New Musical Publications," The Gentleman's Magazine..., Vol. LXXXIII, Pt. 1, p. 253.

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECTS OF THE POPULARITY

The popularity of Dibdin's sea songs affected the general public, the navy, his own career and the theatre.

The Public

Dibdin's most active period of creativity was the last decade of the eighteenth century. It was a decade marked by increasingly humanitarian attitudes and also a time when war and the threat of invasion engendered patriotism through the primitive instinct of protecting one's own property. William Pitt Lennox, "intimately acquainted" with Thomas Dibdin, wrote:

> It is said that the elder Dibdin wrote...songs which were irresistible appeals to the heart, inspiring the most illiterate with brave and generous sentiments, and exciting to acts of loyalty, bravery, and patriotism, which (in the most arduous of her struggles) assisted to maintain the honour and glory of the British empire.[1]

In wartime, a society is charged with a sense of high purpose. By providing the nation with patriotic songs, which it in turn made popular, Dibdin is credited with contributing to that atmosphere.

The Navy

It was also said that the sea songs "did more to bring in recruits that did all the press gangs together."[2] Dibdin was instrumental in changing the persona of the seaman. He had developed a "Jolly Jack Tar" who was "plain, manly, honest and patriotic." It was an image acceptable to the humanitarian and patriotic sentiment of the times. It had become admirable to be a sailor: to be a member of the esteemed seaman class. The enthusiastic volunteers would have a far different attitude to life and work than that of the pressed men, ensuring greater efficiency and higher morale aboard.

With reference to the effect of the songs, a naval officer of the 1830's wrote:

> We have heard many of the best officers in the Service express their conviction that a spirit of loyal bravery, resignation, and humanity had been thereby fostered; and that they have been thus considered by the Naval Administration also is evident from the boys in the Greenwich Asylum being taught to sing them....
>
> Without lauding the whole mass of songs...we think that two or three dozen might be selected, printed, and distributed by Government with much better effect than many of the 'tracts' or even the pamphlet of 'Gazette Letters,' which we remember to have seen circulated to our fleets ....'Tom Bowling' is in so fine a strain of piety, pathos, and melody that it may be safely recommended as a naval anthem. We cannot reasonably imagine that Dick Dock's misfortunes which 'ever claim the pity of the brave,' or Bill

> Bobstay's never keeping a shot in his locker, when 'by handing it out he can succour a friend,' are repeated by all classes of sailors without producing associations of kindly feelings and a corresponding impression of principles.[3]

Furthermore, the success of the Spithead mutiny in obtaining improved conditions for the sailors was probably due, in part, to the more tolerant public attitude which Dibdin had helped to create.

The Pension

The effect of the songs on the public and the navy resulted in Dibdin receiving a pension from the government. From his own account it appears that he was on tour, probably in the summer of 1802, when he received letters which, although not specific, he thought indicated that he might be employed by the government to write war songs. He abandoned what he later claimed would have been a lucrative tour to hasten to London to obtain the appointment. After some negotiation Dibdin began to receive an annuity of two hundred pounds, commencing in June, 1803. The delay was probably due to the fact that Britain and France were at peace in 1802. However, hostilities resumed in May, 1803, and Dibdin's services were evidently needed once more. Although he had been contemplating retirement, he rejected an offer to buy the Sans Souci, keeping the theatre for performances he felt obliged to present. He claims to have

lost money thereby. Attendance may have been dropping. Times and tastes were changing. He was almost sixty and the novelty of a solo performer, which ten years previously had attracted audiences, no longer applied. In addition, he himself says:

> At length I was voted by the public to be outrageously loyal, and people were tired with what they called being schooled by me, when they ought to be considered as competent to judge for themselves...my patriotic sentiments began to be obtrusive.[4]

The Grenville ministry, on coming to power in 1806, cancelled the annuity. One can speculate that the reasons for their action were two-fold. Traditionally a new administration likes to appear to economize by dispensing with the political appointees of their predecessors. A further reason may have been that, although there was no decline in patriotism, Dibdin's waning popularity as a performer indicated that he was no longer the man to compose the nation's patriotic songs. As he had retired in 1805 believing that the emolument was for life, he was again in financial straits and endeavoured to obtain reinstatement. One method he used was to publish his pamphlet The Public Undeceived (1807) in which he told his side of the story. Possibly the publication had some influence because the pension was restored when the Tories regained power in 1807. The amount of the annuity was, however, reduced.

The Theatre

The effect of the "Jolly Jack Tar" on the theatre was the development of the nautical melodrama of the nineteenth century. James C. Cross, author of spectacles produced at Dibdin's old Royal Circus, gave an indication of what was to come with his play The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar (1794). It is an early example of a play in which the central figure is an ordinary sailor, rather than an officer. Although his Will Steady has some of the attributes lauded in the already popular sea songs, the character does not "ring true." The genre came into flower with Douglas Jerrold's Black-Ey'd Susan; or, 'All in the Downs' (1829). His William, of whom a witness says:

> [He's] the trimmest sailor as ever handled rope; the first on his watch, the last to leave the deck;...give me taut Bill afore any able seaman in his Majesty's fleet.[5]

is the epitome of the "Jolly Jack Tar." He is "plain, manly, honest and patriotic." His speech is the nautical jargon we have found in the songs. And his Susan, like her counterpart in the songs, is loving and faithful and, as he says, "has been to me a main-stay in all weathers."[6] No doubt the success of the play can be attributed, in part, to the fact that "The Music...is chiefly Selections from Dibdin's Naval Airs."[7] Another author who capitalized on the continuing popularity of Dibdin's songs was John Thomas Haines. His My Poll and My Partner Joe appeared in 1835. The plot bears

little resemblance to that of the song, but undoubtedly the title attracted audiences.

The "Jolly Jack Tar" also appears in nautical spectacles. For example, in The Siege of Gibraltar (1804) the last scene is "a real representation of the humanity of the English in saving their enemies' drowning sailors."[8] Here is the compassion for the defeated which is characteristic of Dibdin's folk hero. Eventually, however, that folk hero falls into the hands of the satirist. Ralph Rackstraw of W.S. Gilbert's H.M.S. Pinafore; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor (1878), although "...peerless in his manly beauty."[9] and claiming that "There's not a smarter topman in the navy ..."[10] is a caricature of Dibdin's sailor.

The genre of nautical melodrama continued to be popular throughout the century. Succeeding generations in the audiences enjoyed succeeding generations of the folk hero, modified with time, but still exhibiting many of the characteristics of the "Jolly Jack Tar."

Conclusion

Charles Dibdin, with a gift of melody, a love of the theatre and an inability to work in harmony with theatre managers, determined to make a living in the entertainment world as a solo performer championing the unsung sailors of Britain. By developing a folk hero through his songs, he succeeded in creating a new persona for the seamen to the

benefit of both the sailors and the navy. His influence extended to the theatre where his "Jolly Jack Tar" became the hero of nineteenth-century nautical melodrama. Although he died in penury, we must conclude that Dibdin had a very successful career.

NOTES

[1] William Pitt Lennox, Plays, Players..., Vol. II, pp. 80-81.

[2] Philip H. Highfill, Jr., et al., A Biological Dictionary of Actors..., Vol. 4, p. 373.

[3] Charles Napier Robinson, The British Tar in Fact and Fiction, pp. 349-350.

[4] Charles Dibdin, The Public Undeceived..., p. 16.

[5] Douglas Jerrold, Black-Ey'd Susan..., Act III, sc. ii.

[6] Ibid., Act II, sc. i.

[7] Ibid.., Dramatis Personae, Note, p. 4.

[8] Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama, p. 100.

[9] W.S. Gilbert, H.M.S. Pinafore..., Act II.

[10] Ibid., Act I.

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Appendix

A Chronological List of Plays and Entertainments with the Titles of Sea Songs Contained Therein

In this Appendix an asterisk identifies the 13 pieces for which theatre, type of entertainment and first performance date have been identified in Allardyce Nicoll's A History of English Drama, 1660-1900. Vols. III and IV. (1955), or in The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box Receipts and Contemporary Comment. Compiled From the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period. Pt. 4: 1747-1776. ed. George Winchester Stone, Jr. (1962); Pt. 5: 1776-1800. ed. Charles Beecher Hogan. (1968). The information for the remaining 23 pieces has been taken from George Hogarth's The Songs of Charles Dibdin, Chronologically Arranged, with Notes, Historical, Biographical, and Critical; and the Music of the Best and Most Popular Melodies, with New Piano-Forte Accompaniments. To Which is Prefixed a Memoir of the Author. (1842). Abbreviations for type of entertainment and theatre of performance are from Allardyce Nicoll's A History of English Drama, 1660-1900. Vols. III and IV. (1955), with the exception of "K.C." That abbreviation is one which I have selected.

Entertainments

B.O.	Ballad Opera	M.D.	Musical Drama
C.O.	Comic Opera	O.F.	Operatic Farce
Ent.	Entertainment	P.	Pantomime
Int.	Interlude	Ser.	Serenata

Theatres

C.G.	Covent Garden
D.L.	Drury Lane
H^2.	The Little Theatre in the Haymarket
K.C.	King's and Chapman's Auction Rooms
Lyc.	Lyceum
R.C.	Royal Circus
S.W.	Sadler's Wells
Sans S.	Sans Souci
Strand	Strand

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
1773	S.W.	M.D.	England Against Italy.	"Your Finicking Sirs."
*1773	H^2	O.F.	The Trip to Portsmouth. (by G.A. Stevens, music by Dibdin)	"Do You See as a Sailor." "The Girl Ashore." "Hark! The Boatswain." "Now Safe Moor'd." "Ye Free-Born Sons."
*1774	H^2	B.O.	The Waterman; or, The First of August.	"The Jolly Young Waterman." "Then Farewell, My Trim-Built Wherry."
*1775 26 Aug	H^2	C.O.	The Metamorphoses.	"The Meeting."
*1776 14 Nov.	C.G.	C.O.	The Seraglio	"Blow High, Blow Low." "The Signal to Engage."
1777	S.W.	M.D.	Yo, Yea; or, The Friendly Tars.	"The Heart of a Tar." "While Up the Shrouds." "Yo, Yea."
*1779 4 Jan.	C.G.	P.	The Touchstone; or, Harlequin Traveller.	"This Life is Like a Troubled Sea."
1781	H^2	Int.	True Blue; or, The Pressgang.	"The Pressgang."
1782	R.C.	?	The Benevolent Tar.	"Nothing Like Grog." "A Sailor's Love." "A Sailor's Philosophy."
1782	R.C.	?	The Honest Impostor.	"The Sailor."

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
*1783	R.C.	Ser.	Long Odds.	"The Honest Tar." "When Last in the Dreadful."
*1785 8 Feb.	D.L.	C.O.	Liberty Hall; or, A Test of Good Fellowship.	"Jack Ratlin."
1788 Oct.	K.C.	Ent.	The Whim of the Moment.	"Poor Jack." "The Sailor's Sheet-Anchor." "Wives and Sweethearts."
1789	Lyc.	Ent.	The Oddities.	"Alas! Where Shall I Comfort Find." "Ben Backstay." "Every Inch a Sailor." "The Flowing Can." "The Greenwich Pensioner." "Saturday Night at Sea." "The Tar for All Weathers." "Tom Bowling." ("Poor Tom, or "The Sailor's Epitaph.")

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
*1790	Lyc.	Ent.	The Wags; or, The Camp of Pleasure.	"Bonny Kate." "Buxom Nan." "A Drop of the Creature." "Happy Jerry." "Jack in His Element." "Little Ben." "Morality in the Foretop." "Nautical Philosophy." "The Shipwreck." "Swizzy." "The True English Sailor." "The Watery Grave."
1791 Sept.	Sans S.	Ent.	Private Theatricals.	"Bill Bobstay." "Honesty in Tatters." "Jack's Gratitude." "The Lucky Escape." "The Reward of Fidelity." "The Sailor's Consolation," or "Grieving's a Folly." "The Sailor's Return." "Tack and Tack." "Tight Lads of the Ocean."
1793	Sans S.	Ent.	Castles in the Air.	"Jack's Fidelity." "Tack and Half-Tack." "The Token." "Tom Tackle."
1795	Sans S.	Ent.	Christmas Gambols.	"Ned That Died at Sea."
1795	Sans S.	Ent.	Great News; or, A Trip to the Antipodes.	"Lovely Nan." "Tom Truelove's Knell." "The Veterans."

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
1795	Sans S.	Ent.	The Quizzies; or, A Trip to Elysium.	"The Blind Sailor." "Jack at the Windlass." "The Recompense of Constancy."
*1795 10 Oct.	Sans S.	Ent.	The Will o' the Wisp.	"All Girls." "Mad Peg." "Moorings." "The Sailor's Journal." "Who Cares."
1796 8 Oct.	Sans S.	Ent.	The General Election.	"Jack's Claim to Poll." "Nancy Dear." "The Sailor's Maxim."
1797	Sans S.	Ent.	The Sphinx.	"All's One to Jack." "Duncan and Victory." "Love's Probation." "The Nancy." "A Salt Eel for Mynheer." "Tol de Rol."
1798	Sans S.	Ent.	The Tour to Land's End.	"The Anchorsmiths." "The Converted Rake." "Magnanimity." "Nancy." "Nelson and Warren." "True Courage." "Yo Heave Ho!"
1799	Sans S.	Ent.	The King and Queen.	"Change for a Guinea."

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
1799	Sans S.	Ent.	Tom Wilkins.	"The Last Shilling." "Nature and Nancy." "Naval Victories." "The Pride of the Ocean."
1800	Sans S.	Ent.	The Cakehouse.	"Anna, Anne, Nan, Nance or Nancy." "Brother Jack." "The Canary Bird." "Jack at Greenwich."
1801	Sans S.	Ent.	The Frisk.	"Every Man His Own Pilot." "Jack at the Opera." "The Letter N." "The Voyage of Life."
*1803	Sans S.	Ent.	Britons Strike Home.	"The Seaman's Ditty."
*1804 23 Feb.	Sans S.	Ent.	Most Votes.	"A History of the War." "One." "The Sapling." "Three Cheers." "Water-Cresses."
1804	Sans S.	Ent.	New Year's Gifts.	"The Sailor's Will." "The Wife."
1804	Sans S.	Ent.	Valentine's Day.	"A Dose for the Dons." "Jervis For Ever." "The Shipwrecked Tar."
1805	Sans S.	Ent.	Heads or Tails.	"The Look-Out." "Nancy and Home."

Date	Thea.	Type	Play/Entertainment	Song
*1806	D.L.	B.O.	Broken Gold.	"Since Jack, Thou Art a Seaman's Son." "What if the Sailor Boldly Goes?"
1808 Mar.?	Sans S.	Ent.	Professional Volunteers.	"The Best Bower-Anchor." "Gallant Tom." "The Irish Sailor." "The Veteran in Retirement."
1808	Sans S.	Ent.	The Rent Day; or, The Yeoman's Friend.	"Britannia's Name." "The Sailor's Bring-Up." "The Sailor's Dream."
*1811	H^2	C.O.	** The Round Robin.	"I Sailed in the Terrible Frigate." "Of Discipline th' Obedient Mind." "The Standing Toast."

** Nicoll attributes this piece to Dibdin's son, Charles Isaac Mungo. However, it seems more probable that it was the work of the senior Dibdin because:

(i) Thomas John Dibdin, in his Songs Naval and National..., includes "The Standing Toast" in the section devoted to his father's songs;
(ii) As Dibdin never had anything to do with his sons it is unlikely that while he was alive, any of his new songs would be included in a piece by one of them;
(iii) Charles Isaac Mungo Dibdin was probably managing Sadler's Wells at the time and would hardly have had a production at the Haymarket.

Miscellaneous Songs

"The Arrival of Nelson's Corpse."
"The Bag and the Money."
"The Cabin-Boy."
"The Death of Nelson."
"Friendship Put to the Test."
"Jack's Advice to His Friend."
"Jack's Alive."
"Jack's Discoveries."
"Life's Weather Gauge."
"Poll and My Partner Joe."
"The Sailor's Defence."
"Sounding the Bowl."
"The Tizzies."
"The Victory of Trafalgar."
"The War is Over."
"Yeo Heave Ho!"

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Guide to Subdivisions Used in the DSIS Card Catalogue. DSIS. Ottawa: Defence Research Board, 1961.

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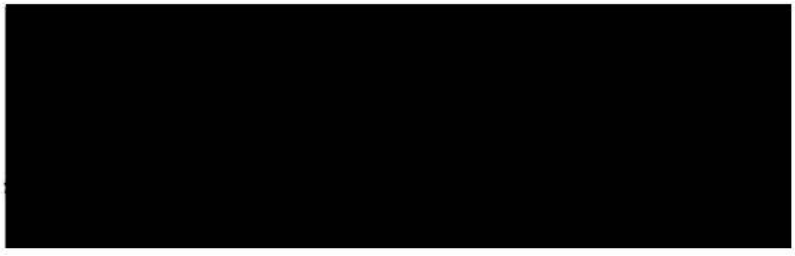
Author: 

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5 Jan. 1988