

CHARLES DIDBIN, AUTHOR OF THOREAU'S FAVORITE SONG



1745

March 15: Charles Didbin was born in Southampton, the eighteenth son of a poor silversmith (his sailor brother Tom was 29 years older than Charles).

1754

Charles Didbin's talent for music was first noticed when he entered the College of Winchester at age 9. The organist there, Mr. Fussell, gave him some instruction, the only instruction he would ever receive, and the lad began to sing at the Cathedral, but in addition at concerts during races in the area. He would make himself the principal performer in a weekly amateur concert.

After Charles Didbin had been rejected for a position as organist at Waltham in Hampshire, his older brother Tom the sailor brought him to London and got him a job tuning harpsichords for a music seller in Cheapside. When Tom Didbin returned to sea, he was captured by a French man-of-war.

Charles Didbin found a publisher, Thompson, of St. Paul's Church-yard, who was willing to pay him three guineas for six ballads.

Charles Didbin was hired as a chorus-singer at Covent Garden.

1762

The manager of Covent Garden hired the 17-year-old Charles Didbin, a chorus-singer there, to compose *The Shepherd's Artifice*. For a time he would both compose and perform in ballad operettas.

1767

Although Charles Didbin's operetta *Love in the City* failed, his music had been praised and he was beginning to make a name for himself.

1768

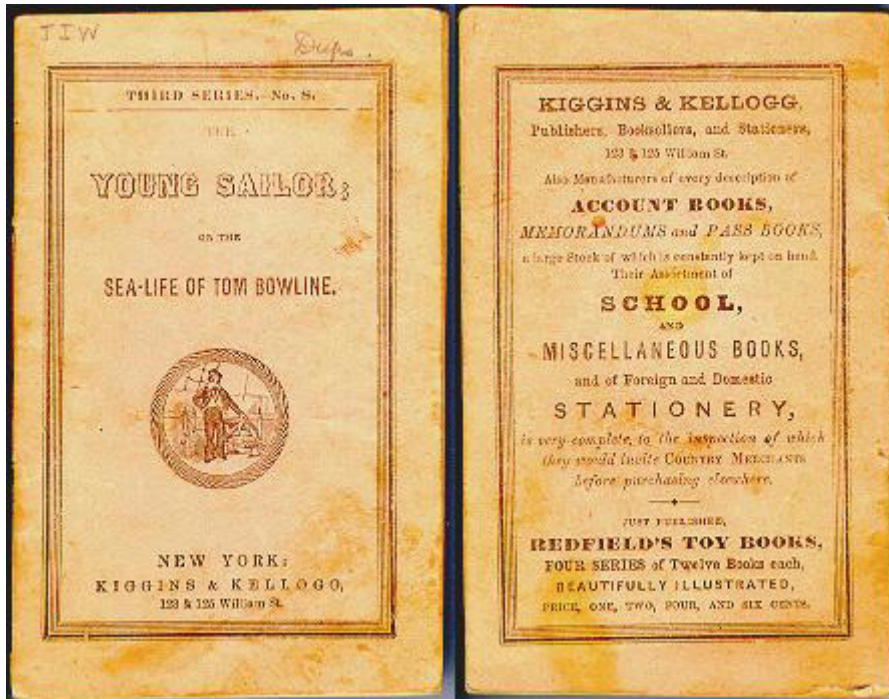
This year brought Charles Didbin's greatest early success, *The Padlock*. For several years he would be producing music for London theatres.

1773

December 20: I have come across a historical document at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island that may shed some light on the background of the song "Tom Bowling" that Charles Didbin would compose in 1790, that Henry Thoreau would so enjoy to sing. It has become clear that



the name "Tom Bowling" is merely a version of "Tom Bowline," an pseudonymous name for a sailor very similar to the name "Jack Tar." A Jack Tar would be a British sailor whereas a Tom Bowline would be a (white) sailor of any nationality.



The document I found is a slightly larger than postcard-sized flimsy slip of white printed paper with a decorative printed box border, a “handout” prepared in New-York that pertained to the new tea tax. The point is, it is in the form of a fictitious letter from a “Tom Bowline” sailor:

A LETTER,

From Tom Bowline to his worthy Meffmates, the renowned Sons of Neptune, belonging to the Port of New-York.

My dear Boys,

AS the Time is approaching, in which the Ship with the Eaft-India Company's Tea, may be expected to arrive, and be moored in our Harbour, to put the finishing Stroke to our Liberties, and ruin the Trade of our Country, by eſtabliſhing a Monopoly; which will in Time (ſhould it be effected) deprive Numbers of our worthy Merchants of their Sheet-Anchor, and oblige them to quit their Moorings, and ſteer into the Country to take a Trick at the Plough; and will (as ſure as the Devil's in London) drive many of us to the cruel Alternative of ſeeking Employment in a foreign Country, to prevent ſtarving in our own; – and as much depends upon our Steadineſs and Activity, in regard to weathering this Storm; I muſt therefore ſtrongly recommend the Neceſſity of keeping a good Look-out; and that we do, one and all, hold ourſelves in Readineſs, and heartily join our Merchants and other worthy Citizens, in preventing the peſtilential Commodity, from being parbuckled on Shore. I Am,

My Hearts of Oak,
Your Friend and Meffmate,

From my Moorings, in Ratline-Lane, Dec. 20, 1773.

TOM BOWLINE.

1778

This year brought Charles Dibdin's greatest early success, *The Padlock*. For several years he would be producing music for London theatres.

Charles Dibdin left Covent Garden and became one of several parties to build the Circus Theatre (later the Surrey Theatre). Dibdin was appointed sole manager for life and was to be paid one fourth of the profits. However, personal conflicts again arose and Dibdin withdrew from the Surrey in 1785. He then entered a period of financial turbulence. Dibdin financed the building of a theatre, which was destroyed by a wind storm. He turned his hand to writing and began a weekly periodical, *The Devil*, which failed.

1788

After his brother Tom Dibdin's death at sea due to lightning strike while taking part in the India trade, Charles Dibdin decided to himself try his fortune in India, hoping to be received by his brother's friends and connections. To raise money for the voyage he traveled throughout England giving performances of his music. However, this tour was not profitable, as the general public found it difficult to credit that the famous Mr. Dibdin would tour the country. He was “generally viewed as an impostor.” Destitute, he sold the rights to his music. He sold *The Waterman*, for instance, which had made him £200, for a couple of guineas.

When his ship was driven by the winds into Torbay, he there offered a series of his “Entertainments” with great success. He returned to England and began to tour. He wrote music and performed Entertainments named the *Whim of the Moment*, *Poor Jack*, *The Oddities* and others. In addition to the income for performing, Dibdin sold the music to publishers. By his own account he made more money in four months than he had in his whole life.¹

There 's a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft,
To keep watch for the life of poor Jack.

1. Davidson, G.H. THE SONGS OF CHARLES DIBDIN, HOW AND PARSONS. London, 1842, page xx

— *Poor Jack*.

Did you ever hear of Captain Wattle?
 He was all for love, and a little for the bottle.
 — *Captain Wattle and Miss Roe*.

Spanking Jack was so comely, so pleasant, so jolly,
 Though winds blew great guns, still he 'd whistle and sing;
 Jack loved his friend, and was true to his Molly,
 And if honour gives greatness, was great as a king.
 — *The Sailor's Consolation*.

1790

Charles Didbin composed the song “(Poor) Tom Bowline, or, The Sailor’s Lament” after his brother, Captain Thomas Didbin, was killed by a lightning strike at sea — the 2d stanza is inscribed on Tom’s gravestone in High Gate, London. In the next century Thoreau would be singing and dancing to this, vigorously, at the slightest prompting, or playing it on his flute. This is the song Henry David Thoreau would sing in the cave under the bank of the river, while waiting for the rain to stop. He had the sheet music, for this Didbin was in



effect the Bob Dylan of the first half of the 19th Century, a very popular one-man stage show, a singer who wrote his own lyrics and performed his own accompaniments. Note that such a lugubrious song is technically not a sailor’s “shanty,” because it speaks of a forbidden topic, death at sea, and cannot therefore be used to set a work cadence. The words “gone aloft” seemed always to fill Thoreau’s eyes with tears:

Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bowline,
 The darling of our crew;
 No more he'll hear the tempest howling,
 For death has broach'd him to.

& then he'd sing so blithe and jolly,
 Ah, many's the time and oft!
 But mirth is turned to melancholy,
 For Tom is gone aloft.

His form was of the manliest beauty,
 His heart was kind and soft;
 Faithful below, he did his duty,
 And now he's gone aloft.

Yet shall poor Tom find pleasant weather,
 When He, who all commands,
 Shall give, to call life's crew together,
 The word to pipe all hands.

Tom never from his word departed,
 His virtues were so rare,
 His friends were many, and true-hearted,
 His Poll was kind and fair:

Thus Death, who kings and tars dispatches,
 In vain Tom's life has doff'd,
 For, though his body's under hatches,
 His soul has gone aloft.

The sheet music for this song appears on the following pages.

Andante

f *p* *p*

This system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The first measure has a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by two measures with piano (*p*) dynamics.

cresc. *tr*

cresc. *tr*

This system continues the two-staff arrangement. The first measure is marked with a crescendo (*cresc.*). The second measure features a trill (*tr*) over a note in the upper staff.

f *f* *p*

1. Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bow-ling, The dar - ling of our

f *p*

This system includes the first line of lyrics. The upper staff has a forte (*f*) dynamic at the start, followed by piano (*p*) dynamics. The lower staff also has a forte (*f*) dynamic at the start, followed by piano (*p*) dynamics.

f *f*

crew, No more he'll hear the tem - pest how - ling For

f *f*

This system includes the second line of lyrics. Both the upper and lower staves feature a forte (*f*) dynamic throughout the system.

p death has broach'd him to. *cresc.* His form was of the

man-liest beau-ty, His heart was kind and soft! *p*

f Faith-ful be-low he did his du-ty, *p* And now he's gone a -

- loft, And now he's gone a - loft! *tr*

cresc. *p* *tr*

Charles Dibdin opened another theatre, Sans Souci, but it too failed. He began a series of lectures on music at Leicester Place, and published two books on musical instruction, but without formal training he was not highly regarded as a musician, and these were not successful. However, he continued to tour throughout England, Scotland and Ireland to acclaim. In 1803 the Government voted Dibdin an annual pension of 200 pounds. At the age of sixty he retired to Cranford. However, in 1808 the Grenville administration withdrew his pension and Dibdin resumed his career. He never regained the success he had once enjoyed and a public dinner was held to raise money for him. With those proceeds he was able to retire to Camden Town. In 1813 he had a stroke, and died the following year on July 25.

1814

Charles Dibdin died.

BILLY BUDD: It was the summer of 1797. In the April of that year had occurred the commotion at Spithead followed in May by a second and yet more serious outbreak in the fleet at the Nore. The latter is known, and without exaggeration in the epithet, as the Great Mutiny.... The event converted into irony for a time those spirited strains of Dibdin -as a song-writer no mean auxiliary to the English Government at the European conjuncture- strains celebrating, among other things, the patriotic devotion of the British tar:

"And as for my life, 'tis the King's!"

1828

Nathaniel Hawthorne borrowed the 1808 edition of the WORKS OF ALEXANDER POPE from the Salem Athenaeum. In all likelihood it would have been in this edition that he encountered the MEMOIRS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE, WORKS AND DISCOVERIES OF MARTIN SCRIBLERUS which contains a mocking MEMOIRS OF P.P., CLERK OF THIS PARISH and is attributed to Alexander Pope or to his Scriblerus Club, obtaining its description of the self-important clerk P.P. to insert in THE SCARLET LETTER.

THE SCARLET LETTER: It is a little remarkable, that - though disinclined to talk overmuch of myself and my affairs at the fireside, and to my personal friends - an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public. The first time was three or four years since, when I favoured the reader - inexcusably, and for no earthly reason that either the indulgent reader or the intrusive author could imagine - with a description of my way of life in the deep quietude of an Old Manse. And now - because, beyond my deserts, I was happy enough to find a listener or two on the former occasion - I again seize the public by the button, and talk of my three years' experience in a Custom-House. The example of the famous "P. P., Clerk of this Parish," was never more faithfully followed. The truth seems to be, however, that when he casts his leaves forth upon the wind, the author addresses, not the many who will fling aside his volume, or never take it up, but the few who will understand him better than most of his schoolmates or lifemates. Some authors, indeed, do far more than this, and indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed only and exclusively to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing him into communion with it. It is scarcely decorous, however, to speak all, even where we speak impersonally. But, as thoughts are frozen and utterance benumbed, unless the speaker stand in some true relation with his audience, it may be pardonable to imagine that a friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest friend, is listening to our talk; and then, a native reserve being thawed by this genial consciousness, we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself, but still keep the inmost Me behind its veil. To this extent, and within these limits, an author, methinks, may be autobiographical, without violating either the reader's rights or his own.

In this pseudomemoir the "P.P." person admits to having produced an illegitimate child.

Charles Didbin. A SELECTION OF DIBDIN'S SONGS, DEDICATED WITH PERMISSION TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF CLARENCE, LORD HIGH ADMIRAL, &C. &C. Illustrated by T. Jones. (London, 2 volumes, T. Williams: "Williams Pocket Edition of Dibdin")

Other songs people report that Thoreau sang were “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England,” “The Burial of Sir John Moore,” “Evening Bells,” “Row, Brothers, Row,” and “Canadian Boat Song.” Caution is necessary, for we have information only that Thoreau sang these songs, not that they were ones he would particularly have chosen to sing or to be identified with: claims that these were songs he particularly enjoyed may well be claims filtered by the musical sensitivities of others.

The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England

Here is Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans’s “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England”:

Look now abroad – another race has fill’d
Those populous borders – wide the wood recedes,
And towns shoot up, and fertile realms are till’d;
The land is full of harvests and green meads.

—William Cullen Bryant.

The breaking waves dash’d high
On a stern and rock-bound coast,
And the woods against a stormy sky
Their giant branches toss’d;

And the heavy night hung dark,
The hills and waters o’er,
When a band of exiles moor’d their bark
On the wild New England shore.

Not as the conqueror comes,
They, the true-hearted, came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
And the trumpet that sings of fame;

Not as the flying come,
In silence and in fear;
They shook the depths of the desert gloom
With their hymns of lofty cheer.

Amidst the storm they sang,
And the stars heard and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free!

The ocean eagle soar’d
From his nest by the white wave’s foam;
And the rocking pines of the forest roar’d
This was their welcome home!

There were men with hoary hair
Amidst that pilgrim band;
Why had **they** come to wither there,
Away from their childhood’s land?

There was woman’s fearless eye,
Lit by her deep love’s truth;
There was manhood’s brow serenely high,
And the fiery heart of youth.

What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?
They sought a faith’s pure shrine!

Aye, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod.
They have left unstain’d what there they found
Freedom to worship God.

Canadian Boat Song

Here is Thomas Moore’s “Canadian Boat Song”:

Faintly as tolls the evening chime,
Our voices keep tune and our oars keep time.
Soon as the woods on the shores look dim,
We’ll sing at St. Anne’s our parting hymn.

Why should we yet our sail unfurl?
There is not a breath the blue waves to curl;
But when the wind blows off the shore,
Oh! sweetly we’ll rest our weary oar.

Utawas’ Tide! this trembling moon
Shall see us float o’er thy surges soon.
Saint of this green isle! hear our prayers,

Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The Rapids are near and the daylight’s past.

Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast,
The Rapids are near and the daylight’s past.

Oh, grant us cool heavens and favouring airs.

Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast,
The Rapids are near and the daylight's past.

The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna

Here is Charles Wolfe's "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna":

| | |
|--|--|
| Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note, As his corse to the rampart we hurried; | We thought, as we hollow'd his narrow bed, And smooth'd down his lonely pillow, |
| Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot O'er the grave where our hero we buried. | That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head, And we far away on the billow! |

| | |
|---|--|
| We buried him darkly at dead of night, The sods with our bayonets turning; | Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone, And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him, |
| By the struggling moonbeam's misty light, And the lantern dimly burning. | But little he'll reck, if they let him sleep on In the grave where a Briton has laid him. |

| | |
|---|--|
| No useless coffin enclosed his breast, Not in sheet or in shroud we wound him; | But half of our heavy task was done, When the clock struck the hour for retiring; |
| But he lay like a warrior taking his rest, With his martial cloak around him. | And we heard the distant and random gun That the foe was sullenly firing. |

| | |
|---|--|
| Few and short were the prayers we said, And we spoke not a word of sorrow; | Slowly and sadly we laid him down, From the field of his fame fresh and gory; |
| But we stedfastly gazed on the face that was dead | We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone. |
| And we bitterly thought of the morrow. | But we left him alone with his glory! |

The Campbells Are Coming

When Thoreau danced "The Campbells Are Coming," his movements were "more like Indian dances" than ballroom figures as he went around the room deliberately stomping on people's toes. It was not the dancing lessons he attended as a child, that taught him to spring over the center table in his sister's conservatory full of potted plants, "alighting like a feather on the other side . . . not the least out of breath [and continuing] his waltz until his enthusiasm abated,"² no, **that** he evidently acquired from his bully Uncle Charles, who loved to amaze people at the side of the road by unexpectedly vaulting his yoke of oxen and vaulting back again (1962a, IV:466). At any rate, this is what Thoreau danced:

| | |
|--|--|
| The Campbells are coming o-ho, o-ho! | Great Argyle he goes before; |
| The Campbells are coming o-ho! | He makes the cannons and guns to roar; |
| The Campbells are coming to bonnie Lochleven | With sound o' trumpet, pipe and drum; |
| The Campbells are coming o-ho, o-ho! | The Campbells are coming o-ho, o-ho! |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Upon the Lomonds I lay, I lay; | The Campbells they are a' in arms |
| Upon the Lomonds I lay; | Their loyal faith and truth to show, |
| I lookit down to bonnie Lochleven | With banners rattling in the wind; |
| And saw three perches play. | The Campbells are coming, o-ho, o-ho. |

2. *Outlook* 63 (1899):820, quoted in Harding 1982, pp.265-6.

1852

February 21: Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 425, Volume 17, New Series, this date offered an article on Charles Dibdin and his ditties:



DIBDIN'S SAILOR-SONGS.

In a recent article in this Journal,³ we gave our opinion of practical sea-life, and incidentally alluded to the songs of Dibdin. The paper excited some interest; and we may, therefore, venture to say a little more about these celebrated songs, concerning which the public in general has always had, and still has, a very erroneous impression.

We commence with an assertion which will startle many – namely, that Dibdin's songs never were, are not, and never can be, popular with sailors. About six years ago –if we recollect rightly as to date– the Lords of the Admiralty, considering that Dibdin's songs had always been "worth a dozen pressgangs," as the common saying is, ordered that twenty of the best songs should be printed on strong paper, and presented to every man and boy in the royal navy. This act, however, is not so much to be regarded as a strong evidence of the private opinion of the nautical magnates in question –but the chief of them is invariably a *landsman*– as of their deference to the force of public estimation on the subject of the songs. Let it not be thought, from the tenor of our subsequent remarks, that we ourselves are at all prejudiced against Dibdin. So far is it the reverse, that we were brought up from childhood "in belief" of that gifted lyricist: our father repeated to us in early life his finest songs, and we have never ceased to regard him with sincere admiration. He was a man of true genius in his peculiar walk, and it has been well and truly said of him, that, "had he written merely to amuse, his reputation would have been great; but it stands the higher, because his writings always advocate the cause of virtue: charity, humanity, constancy, love of country, and courage, are the subjects of his song and of his praise." Dibdin himself was not a sailor, and his knowledge of sea-life, of seamen, and of sea-slang, is generally attributed to the instructions of his brother, the master of a ship. This brother was subsequently lost at sea, and Dibdin is said to have written

3. See "The 'Romance' of Sea-Life," No. 414 of the Journal.

Poor Tom Bowling as his elegy. Dibdin's sea-lore was, therefore, altogether second-hand and theoretical; and his songs, on the whole, present an idealised and exaggerated embodiment of the characteristics, life, and habits of seamen; but it is wonderful how accurately and skilfully he introduces allusions to sea-man[oe]uvres, and how very rarely he errs in nautical technicalities. They were written in war-time, when the nation was excited to a pitch of frenzied enthusiasm by a succession of unparalleled naval victories – when a prince of the blood trod the quarter-deck, and Nelson was "Britannia's god of war." Their popularity with *landsmen* was then incredible. Everybody sang Dibdin's sea-songs, deeming them a perfect mirror of sea-life and seamen's character. The truth is, he has exaggerated both the virtues and the follies of sailors to an absurd degree; and his blue-jacketed heroes are no more to be accepted as a fair type of sailors, than are Fenimore Cooper's Chingachgook and Leatherstocking as types of the Red Men and trappers of North America. Herein, we conceive, is the primary cause of Dibdin failing to enlist strongly the sympathies of real blue-water tars; and the very same reason, with some modifications, prevents all prose works, descriptive of sea-life, from being favourably received by practical mariners. We have heard the "sailing" portions of the finest works of Cooper and others scoffed at by seamen; and the very best book on sea-life ever written, Dana's *TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST*, is held in no sort of esteem by the very men for whose benefit the author avows he wrote it, and whose life he has so vividly, and, as we think, faithfully described. Every sailor we have questioned concerning that book – and there are few sailors who have not read it – declared that he "thought nothing of it;" and that all his messmates laughed at it as much as himself. They say that Dana "makes too much" of everything, and that he gives false and exaggerated notions of life on shipboard. We personally deny this; but sailors, as a body, are such prosaic people, that they will make no allowance whatever for the least amplification of bald matter of fact. If the author dilates at all on his own feelings and impressions, they chuckle and sneer; and if he errs in the least – or the compositor for him – in his nautical details, they cry out that he is a know-nothing, a marine, a horse-jockey, a humbug. To please seamen, any book about their profession must be written precisely in the lucid and highly-imaginative style of a log-book – their sole standard of literary excellence. Sailors are shrewd and sensitive, enough in some respects. They do not like to be flattered, and cannot bear to be caricatured; and they feel that Dibdin has – unconsciously – been guilty of both towards them. According to his songs, sailors lead a life of unalloyed fun and frolic. He tells us nothing about their slavery when afloat, nothing about the tyranny they are frequently subjected to; and in his days, a man-o'-war was too often literally a floating pandemonium. He makes *landsmen* believe that Jack is the happiest, most enviable fellow in the world: storms and battles are mere pastime; lopped limbs and wounds are nothing more than jokes; there is the flowing can to "sweethearts and wives" every Saturday night; and whenever the ship comes to port, the crew have guineas galore to spend on lasses and fiddles. In fine, both at sea and ashore, according to his theory, jolly Jack has little to do but make love, sing, dance, and drink – grog being "his sheet-anchor, his compass, his cable, his log;" and in the *True British Sailor*, we are told that "Jack is always content." Now, Jack knows very well this

is all "long-shore palaver, and he gives a shy hail to such palpable lime-twigs. "Let the land-lubbers sing it!" thinks he; "I'll none on't!"

Dibdin takes the first sip of his *Flowing Can* with the ominous line—

"A sailor's life's a life of wo!"

But what follows?—

"Why, then, he takes it cheerily!"

A pleasant philosophy this; but we happen to know that sailors do *not* take cheerily to "a life of wo" — they would be more than men if they did. He talks coolly about times at sea when "no duty calls the gallant tars." We should very much like to know on board what "old barkey," and in what latitude and longitude, this phenomenon happened, and would have no particular objection to sign articles for a voyage in such a Ph[oe]nix of a ship; for in all the vessels we ever were acquainted with, there was never such a thing heard of, as "nothing to do." As to "Saturday nights" exclusively devoted to pledging "sweethearts and wives" over a flowing can in the forecabin, we are sorry to say, we regard that as little better than a poetic myth.

Doubtless, at the time Dibdin's songs were written, sailors sang them to a considerable extent, for the public enthusiasm would in a way compel Jack to acquiesce in these eulogies on himself; but the said Jack never took them fairly to heart — how could he, when every voyage he made must have given the lie to many of these glowing pictures of life at sea? And from that time to the present, Dibdin's songs have gradually been forgotten among seamen, till, at this day, we question whether there is a foremast-Jack afloat who can sing half-a-dozen of them; and, probably, not many men aboard merchantmen know more than one or two songs of the hundred in question, although they may recollect fragments of several.

Dibdin's songs might be "worth a dozen pressgangs" for manning the navy in war-time, and, for aught we can predicate to the contrary, they may be so again; but we reiterate our conviction, that they never caused sailors to ship aboard a man-o'-war. Landsmen might volunteer by scores through the influence of such stirring, patriotic ditties; but seamen, who "knew the ropes," would never be induced to ship through their agency.

Dibdin does ample justice to the bravery, the generosity, the good-humour, the kind-heartedness of sailors; and, as a class, they deserve his encomiums. His songs abound with just and noble sentiments, and manly virtues were never more constantly and strikingly enunciated by any author. We dearly love Charles Dibdin for this; and as a writer of popular lyrics, we class him as the very first England has ever produced. In this department of literature, we consider he holds the same place in England as Burns does in Scotland; Béranger, in France; Freiligrath, in Germany; and Hans Christian Andersen, in Denmark.

The reader will now ask: "What songs do sailors sing?" We answer, that their favourite sea-songs⁴ are the most dismal, droning doggrel it is possible to conceive; and yet they relish them mightily, because they are stern matter of fact, and in most

4. We must explain that the *working*-songs of seamen — or such as they sing when heaving at the pawl-windlass, catting the anchor, and other heavy pieces of work — are of a different class altogether, and consist chiefly of a variety of appropriate choruses to lively and inspiring tunes. These songs sound well, and are worth anything on shipboard, for they stimulate the men far more than grog would do with only a dead, silent heave or haul.

instances are descriptive of a battle, a chase, a storm, or a shipwreck – subjects appealing powerfully to their sympathies. The following may be taken as a tolerably fair specimen of the style of the genuine “sailors’ songs”: –

“It was the seventeenth day of May, in the year ‘ninety-six,
Our taut frigate the *Ajax*, she from Plymouth did set sail;
Eight days out, com’d a squall from north-east by north,
And then by four bells, morning-watch, it did freshen to a gale.”

Perhaps the most universally popular song among seamen is *Rule Britannia*; but in general they do little more than sing the chorus, and the way in which a crew of tars, when half-seas-over, will monotonously draw out “Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!” –repeating it over and over again, as if they never could have too much of a good thing– is highly amusing. We believe that a decided majority of the songs sang in the fore-castle are not sea-songs at all, but purely land-songs; and, strange to say, the most popular of these are sentimental ditties, such as were, a score of years ago, drawing-room favourites! It is very rich to hear “ancient marineres,” rough as bears, hoarsely quavering, *I’d be a butterfly!* or, *O no! we never mention her;* or, *The days we went a-gipsying, long time ago!* They are also very partial to songs about bandits and robbers.

Well, after all, we have often, when in a tight craft, tossing amid howling billows, complacently repeated –and perchance shall again– the closing lines of *The Sailor’s Consolation*, which, we believe, but are not certain, Dibdin wrote–

“Then, Bill, let us thank Providence
That you and I are sailors!”

1901

Franklin Benjamin Sanborn’s *THE PERSONALITY OF THOREAU* (Boston MA: Goodspeed):

Sanborn recollected, on pages 5-6: When I first saw Thoreau, in the College yard at Cambridge, striding along the path, away from my room in Holworthy, where he had left a copy of *Walden* for me, I knew him not, but was struck with his short and rustic appearance, and that peculiar stride which all who have walked with him remember.


Sanborn fabricated a tendentious recollection which could not have been true or believed by him to be true,⁵ on pages 30-31: One day as I entered the front hall of the Thoreau house for my noonday dinner, I saw under the stairs a pile of books; and when we met at the table, Henry said, “I have added several hundred volumes to my library lately, all of my own composition.” In fact, he had received from his first publisher the last parcel of his unsold *Week*, and for a year or two afterwards he sold them himself upon orders through the mail. [Sanborn did not meet Thoreau until 1855, and Thoreau had received the volume in 1853, so it is unlikely that Thoreau actually said “lately.”]

Sanborn recollected, on pages 37-38: When I first heard Thoreau lecture, as he did every year at the Concord Lyceum, and

5. Franklin Benjamin Sanborn knew very well that he had not met Henry Thoreau until 1855, while Thoreau had long since received these unsold copies and carried them up the steps and stored them in his room, on October 27, 1853.

frequently at Worcester and elsewhere, I did not find his spoken essays so interesting as his conversations. He had few of the arts of the orator, in which Emerson and Phillips excelled; his presence on the platform was not inspiring, nor was his voice specially musical, though he had a musical ear and a real love of melody. But for the thought and humor in his lectures they would have been reckoned dull, — and that was the impression often made. He appeared to best advantage reading them in a small room; or when, as with the John Brown Address, he was mightily stirred by the emotions that a life so heroic excited in his fearless heart. At the age of forty, or thereabout, I heard him sing his favorite song, Tom Bowline, by Dibdin, which to Thoreau was a reminiscence of his brother John, so early lost and so dearly loved. The voice was unpractised and rather harsh, but the sentiment made the song interesting.

Ellery Channing recollected, on pages 66-67: His illness might be passed over by some persons, but not by me; it was most impressive. To see one in middle life, with nerves and muscles and will of iron, torn apart piecemeal by that which was stronger than all, were enough to be described, if pen had the power to do it. It was a saying of his, not unfrequent, that he had lived and written as if to live forty years longer; his work was laid out for a long life. Therefore his resignation was great, true, and consistent; great, too, was his suffering. "I have no wish to live, except for my mother and sister," was one of his conclusions. But still, as always, work, work, work! During his illness he enlarged his calendar, made a list of birds, drew greatly on his Journals; at the same time he was writing or correcting several articles for printing, till his strength was no longer sufficient even to move a pencil. Nevertheless, he did not relax, but had the papers still laid before him. I am not aware that anywhere in literature is a greater heroism; the motive, too, was sacred, for he was doing this that his family might reap the advantage. One of his noblest and ablest associates was a philosopher (Alcott) whose heart was like a land flowing with milk and honey; and it was affecting to see this venerable man kissing his brow, when the damps and sweat of death lay upon it, even if Henry knew it not. It seemed to me an extreme unction, in which a friend was the best priest.



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