

The Chantey-man

BY H. PHELPS WHITMARSH

THE now old-fashioned sea chanteys* hark back to such a remote period that it is impossible to say when or whence they originated, but in the language of the sea, "chantey" means a working-song. Unfortunately these purely salt-water songs were unwritten, being merely handed down from one generation of sailors to another, so that we cannot go farther back than the memory of the oldest living seaman.

Before the steam age, before the steam-propeller, the steam-winch, and the donkey-engine had cut down the sailor's professional value, all work aboard ship was done by hand, and to the "deep-water" sailor, or "wind-jammer," the chantey was as necessary as a military band is to a regiment. As the weary foot-soldier is encouraged to further effort by the inspiring strains of martial music, so the sailor is cheered and helped in his labors by his hauling-songs.

But the chantey has for its foundation something more substantial than its enlivening qualities. Excepting in men-of-war, there is seldom a sufficiently large crew to tally on to the topsail-halyards, for instance, and walk away with them; the hoisting, therefore, has to be accomplished by a series of pulls, and in all probability the chantey was first used for the purpose of insuring unity in pulling. It has the same end, indeed, as the ordinary "singing out" which accompanies all kinds of united effort on shipboard, namely, that of hauling, pushing, or lifting together.

While there is scarcely any kind of sailor's work, whether it be holystoning decks, hauling up the bunt of a mainsail, or stowing cargo, that has not its own appropriate chanteys, the principal ones may be classed under two heads—the capstan or windlass chanteys, and those used when hauling up the ropes.

* Pronounced shanties, and sometimes so written.

All have a line or two of solo and a chorus, the latter being the principal part, and each is built and set to a time and tune peculiarly suited to its needs.

The soloists are known as chantey-men, and they are usually the older men of the forecabin. Time was when no ship's crew was complete without three or four such chanters, and the repertoire of some of these old tars was practically exhaustless. Most of the melodies are undoubtedly of English origin, though in many cases they have been influenced by contact with other nations. Thus we find a number of ancient airs set to words distinctly American, such as those of "Shenandoah," "Sally Brown," and "On the Banks of the Sacramento." The first two doubtless came from some Southern cotton port, as they bear ear-marks of negro singers.

To the landsman the words of a chantey will probably appear as the veriest doggerel, and it may be well to note here that the meaning of his composition was never of the slightest consequence to the chantey-maker. Evidently all he desired to do was to produce something that would sound well. He wanted a good, noisy chorus, with plenty of mouth-opening words, and a rhythm to which the times of hauling would swing naturally. As a rule, the chantey in its entirety possesses neither rhyme nor reason; nevertheless, it is admirably fitted for sailors' work. Each of these sea-songs has a few stock verses or phrases to begin with, but after these are sung, the soloist must improvise, and it is principally his skill in this direction that marks the successful chantey-man. A clever chantey-man, too, is known by his variations. They are of such a nature that they cannot be described on paper, but in listening to the plaintive melodies, like "Storm-along" and "The Lowlands," I have at times been reminded of a Gaelic psalm chant, such as is sung by the Scotch Highland-

ers and their descendants in Cape Breton; and again, they have seemed akin to the weird recitative and chorus of the aboriginal Australian.

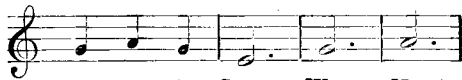
Sometimes the sailor has taken a 'long-shore tune and modified it for his own purposes. "When Johnny comes marching home again," "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp," and "John Brown" are on rare occasions used as capstan chanteys; but it is a singular fact that none of the so-called nautical songs, such as "The Midshipmite" and "Sailing," have ever found favor in Jack's eyes. As a rule, he has a supreme contempt for songs of this stamp, and that because they are usually written by men who have not been to sea, and who therefore do not portray the life truthfully. The strength and charm of the chantey lie in its having been born on salt-water. This it is that gives it a true nautical swing and flavor, that lends to it an original freshness, and makes it smack of old ocean.

For hoisting a topsail, or for any other long haul by hand, there are a number of popular chanteys. A few of the best known follow, the words in italics marking the time for pulling:

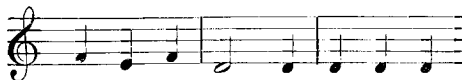
BLOW THE MAN DOWN.



As I was a-walk-ing down



Par-a-dise Street, Way! Hey!



Blow the man down. A pret-ty young



dam-sel I chanced for to meet.



Give me some time to blow the man down.

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

So.: As I was a-walking down Paradise Street,

Cho.: Way! Hey! Blow the man down.

So.: A pretty young damsel I chanced for to meet.

Cho.: Give me some time to blow the man down.

So.: Says she, young man, will you stand treat?

Cho.: Way! Hey! Blow the man down.

So.: Delighted, says I, for a charmer so sweet.

Cho.: Give me some time to blow the man down.

And so on until a loud "Belay!" from the mate announces that the yard is high enough. In a long haul like this a poor chantey-man will repeat each line twice, while a good improvisatore will scorn such a spinning out, and turn the song upon current events, the officers, and the food. A chantey-man invariably alters certain words to suit himself. For instance, the chantey given refers to a notorious street in Liverpool. A Londoner would sing it:

As I was a-walking down Ratcliffe Highway,
A pretty young damsel I chanced for to spy.

And a New-Yorker would make this much-walked street Broadway.

A similar chantey is "Sally Brown." Who Sally Brown was, beyond the statement that she was "a bright mulatto" and "a gay old lady," and that "she's got a baby," I have never been able to discover, but she must have been a *rara avis*, for her charms are sung in half a dozen different ways; and if any one is entitled to be called the sailor's heroine, it is Sally.

Another mythical personage much sung about is "Reuben Ranzo":

So.: His name was Reuben Ranzo.

Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

So.: And Ranzo was no sailor.

Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

So.: He shipped aboard a whaler.

Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

So.: The captain was a bad man.

Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

So.: He triced him in the rigging,

Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo,

So.: And gave him four-and-twenty.

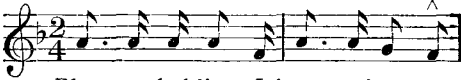
Cho.: Oh! Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

The song goes on to tell of the various vicissitudes that befell poor Ranzo, and

one cannot help pitying him, for, according to all accounts, he had a very bad time of it.

Another rousing topsail-halyard chant is as follows:

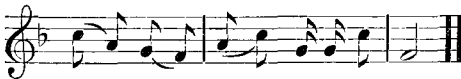
BLOW, BOYS, BLOW.



Blow, my bul-lies, I long to hear you.



Blow, boys, blow. Blow, my bullies, I



come to cheer you. Blow, my bully boys, blow.

BLOW, BOYS, BLOW.

So.: Blow, my bullies, I long to hear you.

Cho.: *Blow, boys, blow.*

So.: Blow, my bullies, I come to cheer you.

Cho.: *Blow, my bully boys, blow.*

So.: A Yankee ship's gone down the river.

Cho.: *Blow, boys, blow.*

So.: And what do you think they got for dinner?

Cho.: *Blow, my bully boys, blow.*

So.: Dandyfunk and donkey's liver.

Cho.: *Blow, boys, blow.*

So.: Then blow, my boys, for better weather,

Cho.: *Blow, my bully boys, blow.*

Then there is a popular chantey relating to the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte. It begins somewhat in this wise:

So.: Boney was a warrior.

Cho.: To me, *way, hey, yah!*

So.: A warrior and a tarrier,

Cho.: *John Fran-swaiv.* (Jean François.)

So.: But the big-nosed duke, he put him through,

Cho.: To me, *way, hey, yah!*

So.: He put him through at Waterloo,

Cho.: *John Fran-swaiv.*

Another favorite conveys the information that "Tom's gone to Hilo." One version opens after the following fashion, which is sung with gusto:

So.: Tommy's gone and I'll go too,

Cho.: *A-way, ey, oh!*

So.: Tommy's gone to Timbuctoo,

Cho.: *Tom's gone to Hilo.*

After running on for a while about the beauties of Hilo, and the delightful life

that Tommy led, and so forth, the song branches off (as indeed most halyard chanteys do) into such words as these:

So.: Up aloft this yard must go.

Cho.: *A-way, ey, oh!*

So.: Up aloft from down below,

Cho.: *Tom's gone to Hilo.*

So.: Oh! did you hear the first mate say,

Cho.: *A-way, ey, oh!*

So.: Give one more pull, and then belay.

Cho.: *Tom's gone to Hilo.*

Other much-used chanteys for work of this nature are "Whiskey Johnny," "Poor Old Man," "Cheerly Men," "The Black Ball Line," and "A Hundred Years Ago." For work requiring only a few pulls, as the tautening of a weather-brace, a different kind of chantey is called for. In this case a turn is kept on the belaying-pin so that the slack can be held after each pull. The hands having laid hold of the rope, the chantey-man usually stands with arms outstretched above the block, and sings:

HAUL ON THE BOWLINE.



Haul on the bow - line, our



bul - ly ship's a-roll - in'. Haul on the



bow - line, the bow - line haul!

So.: Haul on the bowline (bolin),

Our bully ship's a-rollin',

Cho.: Haul on the bowline, the bowline—
Haul.

So.: Haul on the bowline,

Our Captain he's a-growlin',

Cho.: Haul on the bowline, the bowline—
Haul.

So.: Haul on the bowline,

Oh, Kitty, you're my darlin'.

Cho.: Haul on the bowline, the bowline—
Haul.

And so on, all laying back at the last word of each verse and pulling with a will. Again we have a bowline chantey characteristically referring to Jack's "girl in every port":

So.: Once I loafed a Deutscher maid.

Und she vas fat and lazy,

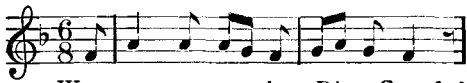
Cho.: Way, haul away, haul away—*Joe.*

So.: And thin I coorted an Irish gyurl,
She—nigh dhruv me crazy.

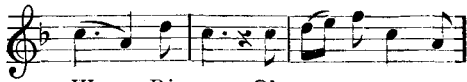
Cho.: Way, haul away, haul away—*Joe.*

The capstan or windlass chanteys admit of a little more leeway in their composition, inasmuch as there is no regular hauling time, the sailors merely tramping around the capstan, or heaving up and down on the handle-bars of the windlass. When heaving anchor on an outward-bound vessel, a common one is "Rio Grande," which runs as follows:

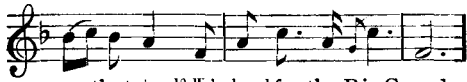
WERE YOU EVER IN RIO GRANDE?



Were you ev - er in Ri - o Grande?



Way, Ri - o, Oh, were you ev - er



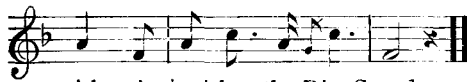
on that strand? We're bound for the Rio Grande.



Way.. Ri - o, Way.. Ri -



o. Then fare you well, my pret-ty young



girl, we're bound for the Rio Grande.

So.: Were you ever in Rio Grande?

Cho.: Away, you Rio.

So.: Were you ever on that strand?

Cho.: We're bound for the Rio Grande.

And away, you Rio,

Way, you Rio;

Then fare you well,

My bonny young girl,

We're bound for the Rio Grande.

So.: Where the Portugee girls can be found.

Cho.: Away, you Rio.

So.: And they are the girls to waltz around.

Cho.: We're bound for the Rio Grande.

And away, you Rio.

Way, you Rio;

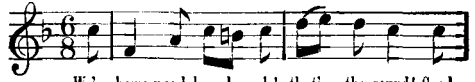
Then fare you well,

My bonny young girl,

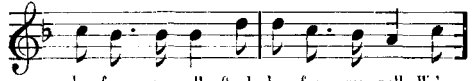
We're bound for the Rio Grande.

When homeward bound, the following chantey usually finds favor:

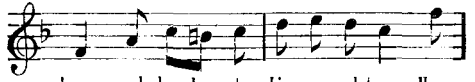
WE'RE HOMEWARD BOUND.



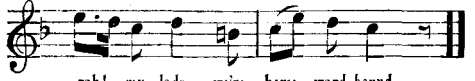
We're home-ward bound, ah! that's the sound! Good-



by, fare you well, Good-by, fare you well. We're



home-ward bound, to Liv-er-pool town. Hur -



rah! my lads, we're home-ward bound.

The second stanza runs thus:

So.: We're loaded down with sugar and
rum,

Cho.: Good-by, fare you well,

Good-by, fare you well.

So.: The sails are set, and the breeze has
come,

Cho.: Hurrah! my lads, we're homeward
bound.

After a blow a suitable chantey is:

Old Storm-along, he is dead and gone,

Ay—ay—ay—Mister Storm-along.

Oh! Storm-along, he is dead and gone,

To my way, yah, Storm-along.

And there are many more, some gay and some cheery, like "Santa Anna"; others, like "The Lowlands," mournful as the sighing of the wind in the shrouds.

There are no chanteys more suggestive of the old-times wooden ships than those used at the pumps. Of these there are quite a number, some suited to the everyday work of clearing the bilges, and some adapted for more serious times. Where heavy weather has caused the vessel to leak more than usual, and the crew are weary from pumping, nothing could be more appropriate, doleful though it be, than "Leave her, Johnny, leave her":

So.: Heave around the pump-bowls bright,
Cho.: Leave her, Johnny, leave her.
So.: There'll be no sleep for us to-night,
Cho.: It's time for us to leave her.

So.: Heave around or we shall drown,
Cho.: Leave her, Johnny, leave her.
So.: Don't you feel her settling down?
Cho.: It's time for us to leave her.

So.: The rats have gone, and we the crew,
Cho.: Leave her, Johnny, leave her.
So.: It's time, by —, that we went too,
Cho.: It's time for us to leave her.

The quaintest little hauling-song of all, "Bunt Chantey," is only sung aloft when stowing a large sail, and it is confined to one short verse—if I may call it a verse. When a mainsail is being furled, and "all hands and the cook" are laid out on the yard and have the "skin" of the sail in their hands, a few simultaneous lifts are required to bring the heavy roll of canvas on to the yard. Then above the booming of the wind in belly of the topsails, above its howling as it hurries past the multitudinous ropes, comes the "bunt" cry:

WE'LL PAY PADDY DOYLE.



Way—ay—ay—ah,

followed by the strange chorus:

We'll pay Paddy Doyle for his *boots*.

At the last word every one gives a vicious hoist, and it is continued until the sail is in place and the gaskets are passed. This chantey doubtless originated in the superstition that bad luck would follow when shore bills were left unpaid, and the song is addressed to the Storm Fiend in hopes of appeasing his wrath.

A crew feeling that they are being worked unnecessarily, or that the vessel is being handled in an unseamanlike way, show their displeasure by refusing to sing. If very badly treated, they will not even give the usual rope-cries, but exasperate their officers by hauling in absolute si-

lence. On the other hand, a contented "crowd" will chantey on every occasion, noisily tramping around the decks and cheerily singing their way from port to port. And surely no life has more need of such heart-lightening influence than that of the common sailor.

In this age the chantey-man is very little in evidence. His place is rapidly being taken by the hiss and clank of the steam-winch, and at the present rate at which progress is making new conditions he will soon be as extinct as the dodo. And with these new conditions we have a new class. But what a difference between the old-time sailor-man and the modern follower of salt-water! Steam with its labor-saving devices, iron sailing-ships, wire-ropes, screw rigging, and the 'longshore rigger have made the ancient art and craft of the sailor, with few exceptions, unnecessary. The principal end of seamen in these times is to use a chipping-hammer, a painter-brush, and the bucket of "soogey-moogey"—a compound for cleaning paint-work. The mariner of old in American vessels hailed from Cape Cod, the coast of Maine, and the Eastern seaboard. In English ships he was a native of the British Isles. Skilled in the mysteries of knots and splices, sail-making, and seamanship in general, steeped in brine and tar and the traditions of his calling, hewn into shape by his constant battle with the elements, he was a sailor to the backbone—a man whose blood ran Stockholm tar, and whose every hair was a rope-yarn. To-day the vessels of both nations are manned by foreigners. And with the advent of this new element the quaint customs and practices of the old-time sailor's life are fast dying.

The chantey, from a musical point of view, is crude enough, its melody is doubtful, and the voices that sing it are untrained—ay, even hoarse and cracked,—and yet in my memory there clings no song more in harmony with the wild freedom of the sea, no sound more cheery and stirring on stormy nights, than when

Blow, my bullies, I long to hear you,

Blow, boys, blow.

Blow, my bullies, I come to cheer you,

Blow, my bully boys, blow,

is being bellowed through a score of lusty throats.

Editor's Easy Chair.

AMONG the many letters which the Easy Chair has received since its conference on the state of poetry, in a number of last spring, one of most decided note was from a writer confessing herself of the contrary-minded. "I love some children, but not childhood in general merely because it is childhood. So I love some poems rather than poetry in general, just because it is poetry. . . . I object to the tinkle. I object to the poetic license which performs a Germanic divorce between subject and verb, so that instead of a complete thought which can be mastered before another is set before the brain, there is a twist in the grammatical sequence that requires a conscious effort of will to keep the original thread. The world is too busy to do this; reading must be a relaxation, not a study. . . . When poetry conforms in its mental tone to the spirit of the times; when it reflects the life and more or less the common thought of the day, then more of the common people will read it."

There were other things in this letter which seemed to us of so much importance, that we submitted it as a whole to a Woman's Club of our acquaintance. The nine ladies composing the club were not all literary, but they were all of æsthetic pursuits, and together they brought a good deal of culture to bear on the main points of the letter. They were not quite of one mind, but they were so far agreed that what they had to say might be fairly regarded as a consensus of opinion. We will not attempt to report their remarks at any length—they ran to all lengths,—but in offering a résumé of what they variously said to a sole effect, we will do what we can to further the cause they joined in defending.

I

The Muses—for we will no longer conceal that this Woman's Club was composed of the tuneful Nine—acknowledged that there was a great deal in what their contrary-minded sister said. They did not blame her one bit for the way she felt; they would have felt just so themselves in her place; but being as it were professionally dedicated to the beautiful

in all its established forms, they thought themselves bound to direct her attention to one or two aspects of the case which she had apparently overlooked. They were only sorry that she was not there to take her own part; and they confessed, in her behalf, that it *was* ridiculous for poetry to turn the language upside down, and to take it apart and put it together wrong-end to, as it did. If anybody spoke the language so, or in prose wrote it so, they would certainly be a fool; but the Muses wished the sister to observe that every art existed by its convention, or by what in the moral world Ibsen would call its life-lie. If you looked at it from the colloquial standpoint, music was the absurdest thing in the world. In the orchestral part of an opera, for instance, there were more repetitions than in the scolding of the worst kind of shrew, and if you were to go about singing what you had to say, and singing it over and over, and stretching it out by runs and trills, or even expressing yourself in *recitativo secco*, it would simply set people wild. In painting it was worse, if anything: you had to make believe that things two inches high were life-size, and that there were relief and distance where there was nothing but a flat canvas, and that colors which were really like nothing in nature, were natural. As for sculpture, it was too laughable for anything, whether you took it in bass-reliefs with persons stuck onto walls, half or three-quarters out, or in groups with people in eternal action; or in single figures, standing on one leg, or holding out arms that would drop off if they were not supported by stone pegs; or sitting down out-doors bareheaded where they would take their deaths of cold, or get sun-struck, or lay up rheumatism to beat the band, in the rain and snow, and often without a stitch of clothes on.

All this and more the Muses freely conceded to the position of the contrary-minded correspondent of the Easy Chair, and having behaved so handsomely, they felt justified in adding that her demand seemed to them perfectly preposterous. It was the very essence and office of