The Lords of the Main

Sargent's edition gives as "Nottingham Ale" as the melody. Claude M. Simpson reminds us that "Nottingham Ale" is "Lillibulero," a tune with a history of political activism (usually pro-monarchy and, if memory serves, always Protestant) dating back to 1688 (455). Sargent calls the original song, "the Eng-

When Fac-tions in league with the treach-er-ous Gaul, Be-gan to look big and par-

Echo pro-claim'd their Al-ly good and great! By sea and by land

hove! says Jack Lan-yard, French, Con-go, Span-iard, Have at you—re-mem-ber we're

Lords of the Main! Lords of the Main—ay Lords of the Main— the

Tars of Old Eng-land are Lords of the Main!
When Faction, in league with the treacherous Gaul,  
Began to look big and paraded in state;  
A meeting was held at Credulity Hall,  
And Echo proclaim'd their Ally good and great!  
By sea and by land  
Such wonders are plann'd;  
No less than the bold British Lion to chain!  
Well hove! says Jack Lanyard,  
French, Congo and Spaniard,  
Have at you—remember we're Lords of the Main!  
Lords of the Main—ay, Lords of the Main—  
The Tars of Old England are Lords of the Main.

Though party-contentions a while may perplex,  
And lenity hold us in doubtful suspense;  
If perfidy rouse, or ingratitude vex  
In defiance of Hell we'll chastise the offense  
When danger alarms,  
'Tis then that in arms  
United we rush on the foe with disdain:  
And when the storm rages  
It only presages  
Fresh triumphs to Britons, as Lords of the Main.  
Lords of the Main—ay, Lords of the Main—  
The Tars of Old England are Lords of the Main.

Let Thunder proclaim it, we're Lords of the Main.  
Then Britons, strike home—make sure of your blow:  
The chase is in view; never mind a lee-shore.  
With vengeance o'ertake the confederate foe:  
'Tis now we may rival our heroes of yore!  
Brave Anson and Drake,  
Hawke, Russell and Blake,  
With ardour like your's we defy France and Spain!  
Combining with Treason  
They're deaf to all reason:  
Once more let them feel we are Lords of the Main.  
Lords of the Main—ay, Lords of the Main—  
The first-born of Neptune are Lords of the Main.

Nor are we alone in the noble career;  
The Soldier partakes of the generous flame:  
To glory he marches, to glory we steer;  
Between us we share the rich harvest of fame.  
Recorded on high,  
Their names never die,  
Of heroes by sea and by land what a train!  
To the King, then, God bless him!  
The World shall confess him  
"The Lord of those men who are Lords of the Main."  
Lords of the Main—ay, Lords of the Main—  
The Tars of Old England are Lords of the Main.

This item was published in Rivington's Royal Gazette, a New York paper, on February 16, 1780. It was unsigned, but attributed to Stansbury. Since the summer of 1779, Britain and Spain had been warring, a good omen for the American Patriots, but not for the Loyalists.

"Credulity Hall" is Stansbury's satiric term for Carpenter's Hall, later renamed Independence Hall, the meeting place of the first colonial Congress, for which Stansbury has the equally satiric (and presumably racist) term, "Congo." "Confederate" in the third verse reflects the use of the term to refer to the American revolutionists; the original (ineffective) constitution of the USA was known as the Articles of Confederation. The newly independent colonies at first united only loosely; hence, they were merely a "confederation." The concept was later revived by the south in secession, which termed itself the Confederate States of America, as opposed to the United States of America.

Gillian B. Anderson gives another setting of this item in her impressive collection/bibliography of Revolutionary era material (759-60).

Other Airs for Odell/Stansbury Songs

Five other airs are named in Sargent's collection: "When Britain First At Heaven's Command," "The King's Old Courtier," "Black Sloven," "Cesar and Pompey were both of them, &c.," and "Come my Kitten, my Kitten...." It crossed my mind that the Ballad Ustserve might be able to provide information on some of these tunes, so I put out a call to <ballads@mailbase.ac.uk>, naming a few of them, and got two replies.

First, from Steve Roud:
A song called "Black Sloven," commencing "Last Valentine's Day...." is in Universal Songster Vol.3 (1825/6) p.99, but text only. The Masque (c1785 edn.) has a song commencing "What a noise there has been...." to the tune of "Cesar and Pompey Were Both Horned" (text only). Convivial Songster (1782) pp.26-7 has a song commencing "Hey my kitten, a kitten...." (with music). Various other early 19th cent broadsides and songsheets have songs to the tune of "Hey My Kitten" or "Ho my kitten."

Bruce Olson also responded:
"Black Sloven" is a song with tune in The Universal Magazine, 1771. (BUCEM)

Allan Ramsay in the 4th volume of The Tea Table Miscellany reprinted "Hey my kitten, my kitten," without music, but with the tune direction "Yellow Stockings." Wm. Stenhouse in Illustrations to the Scots Musical Museum said it was by Jonathan Swift, but I don't know where he got that information. The song is on a single sheet song with music, and with a quite variant version of the tune in The Scots Musical Museum, #558. See the Scots and Irish tune indexes on my website for several other copies and variants of the tune. One Irish collection calls the tune "The Kitten."

I don't have a copy of "Black Sloven" (a horse, if I remember correctly.) Here's an ABC for the tune for combining "Oh, my kitten, my kitten" (5 verses, no attributions or publisher's imprint) from the single sheet song issue in the Library of Congress. I also transcribed the tune from another copy at the Folger Shakespeare Library.