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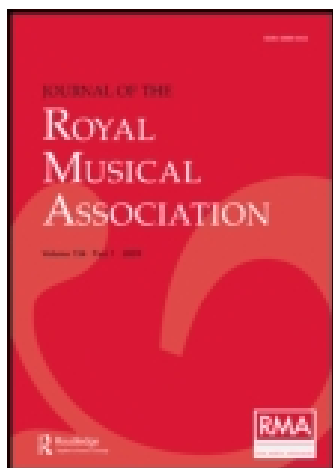
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Alan Gray

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W. G. McNAUGHT, Esq., Mus. Doc., F.R.A.M.,
IN THE CHAIR.

PURCELL'S DRAMATIC MUSIC.

BY ALAN GRAY, Mus. Doc., LL.M.

I HAVE been asked to give some account of Purcell's "Dramatic Music." This term is meant to include such of his stage works as are not of a sufficient scale to justify their being termed Operas. In the latter class are included "Dido and Æneas," "Dioclesian," "King Arthur," "The Fairy Queen," "Timon of Athens," "The Indian Emperor," and "The Tempest." These works therefore I shall not discuss. I may say also that I shall deal only with the musical side of this "Dramatic Music," the editing of which for the Purcell Society has fallen to my lot. And this for two reasons, both very forcible ones. The first is that the dramatic point of view can be far better dealt with, when the operas are under consideration. For most of the music I have to deal with is really not dramatic at all. The second and even more convincing reason is that owing to an imperfect sympathy with stage matters I have not the requisite knowledge to deal with the subject, and it is better that I should leave it to more skilled hands.

The editing of the works which, when completed, will fill three volumes of the Purcell Society's publications has been a tiresome matter, as they are very numerous and "scrappy," and the authorities are distributed over a wide area. If the subject-matter consist of a solid work and a solid MS. or printed edition to work from, the job is comparatively a small one. But in this case there are ~~forty-two~~ ^{forty-two} works, each comprising a varying list of items—say half a dozen. Each of these items may be contained in half a dozen different libraries in London or elsewhere. So you will see that the work has been of an awkward character, and

it would have been quite impossible to carry it out but for the labour of years which the Secretary of the Society has devoted to the subject. One feature has been that, with the exception of half a dozen songs which have been apparently put together in one volume for some unknown purpose, there is an entire absence of autographs. From this one volume, which has been lately discovered in the library of Gresham College, one draws two conclusions. The first is that as a rule the plainer version of an ornate air is the original; the second is that Purcell supplied very few figures to his basses, and that most of those that we meet with in MSS. and printed versions are contributed by later hands. His practice was thus very different from that of Bach, whose figuring is most minute and careful. At the pace at which Purcell must have worked one can hardly expect that he bestowed much care on a troublesome detail.

The old printed authorities that I have had to deal with are not very reliable. The publication called "Theatre Ayres," from which most of the instrumental music comes, is full of misprints, —bars printed twice over, notes placed a line or space too high or low, and other errors. "Orpheus Britannicus," in which a large proportion of the songs are included, is distinguished by very faulty figuring of the bass, and where available the songs printed in the various plays are better. The other printed authorities are as a rule of much later date, and vary much in merit. The MS. authorities are of all dates, and naturally are of varying authority. For many of the works the Tenbury MSS. and Croft's MS. volume of Purcell's works at the Fitzwilliam Museum are most valuable.

Purcell's dramatic career did not begin so early as used to be supposed. Mr. Barclay Squire has exhaustively examined the subject, and has conclusively proved that the old statement that "Dido and Æneas" was written at the age of seventeen is a fable, started by Hawkins, and dwelt upon and improved by subsequent writers. Mr. Squire's investigations have also resulted in the postponement for many years of the date of quite a number of the other works.

Former authorities seemed to try to put everything as early as possible. In many cases they assumed that Purcell's music was written when a play was first produced, while as a matter of fact it was often written for a revival. We may take it, then, as proved that Purcell's career as a theatre composer probably began in 1680, when he was about twenty-one years old. I ignore the "Macbeth" music, which some modern writers are anxious to include among Purcell's works. This does not seem to be the opinion of the Purcell Society authorities, as it is not included in their list of projected publications. I do not know the "Macbeth" music well, but I

find it hard to believe, after one has compared it with his other works, that Purcell wrote that Overture, unless indeed it was when he was thirteen, which would be his age when the "Locke" music is supposed to have been produced. For some ten years he did not do much more in this direction, but about 1690 his activity became almost feverish, and during the remaining five years of his short life he had a part in not less than forty-two plays. It is true that some of these only include perhaps a single song, but on the other hand nearly all the lengthy so-called operas are in the list, and many more have Overtures and Act-Tunes, with some songs and concerted music. In fact some of these last, such as "Bonduca," as far as they go, might almost be called operas.

I propose to treat my subject chronologically. Mr. Squire has fixed the date with reasonable certainty in most cases, though for a few works he does not go beyond queries.

To the year 1680 are ascribed two works, "Theodosius" and "The Virtuous Wife." Neither of these works betrays any immaturity. The greater part of the music of "Theodosius," so far as we have it—for there is some missing—was contained in an old MS. in the library of the late Dr. Cummings, and this is the only authority. There is no Overture—at all events we have not got it, and a peculiarity is that songs take the place of the usual Act-Tunes. These features may be due to the fact that the orchestra apparently only comprised two flutes in addition to the continuo. The music as a whole is charmingly *naïf* and fresh, and there is one beautiful song with a great sweep of melody. It might be mentioned that there also exists an emasculated printed version of this song, easier to sing, but with most of its merits simplified and obscured.

Purcell's share in the other work of 1680, "The Virtuous Wife," consists of an Overture and Act-Tunes. In form these differ in no respect from the many specimens of such work that he wrote, but some of his later specimens are certainly more interesting. Still there is no immaturity.

"Sir Barnaby Whigg," in 1681, includes "Blow, Boreas, blow," of which Burney writes: "It was in great favour during my youth among the early admirers of Purcell; but this seems now more superannuated than any of his popular songs." We may perhaps endorse Burney's opinion.

Passing over one or two unimportant productions we come in 1685 to a very interesting work, "Circe." This was long attributed to Banister, who undoubtedly wrote the music for the original production of the play in 1676. But it is impossible to suppose that Banister was capable of writing this fine music. Listen to this massive, rolling, and majestic chorus that opens the scene—such a chorus as Handel might have written forty or

fifty years later. Other choruses and solos of distinguished beauty follow. It is probable that this music was written for a revival of the play which took place in 1685.

The next work of importance to be noticed is the famous "Dido and Æneas," which is now dated about 1689. It does not come into our province to-day. Moreover, it is comparatively well known.

With 1690 begins Purcell's active period of theatrical work. In it is included the full opera of "Dioclesian," the Overture and Act-Tunes to "Distressed Innocence, or The Princess of Persia," several songs and duets in "Pausanias," Overture and songs in "Sir Anthony Love," Overture, Act-Tunes, and songs in "Amphitryon," and two settings of the song "Thy genius lo!" in "The Massacre of Paris."

Of these the "Distressed Innocence" music is fine, but the Purcell Overtures are on such a stereotyped plan and so closely resemble each other, that it is rather difficult to "place them." Of the vocal music, "Amphitryon" has very fresh songs and duets—here the composer had the advantage of Dryden's words—some of which are brilliantly witty. He was not so fortunate in "Thy genius lo!" where he had to set the following:—

"She told thy story in so sad a tone
The angels start from bliss and gave a groan.
But Charles, beware! O dally not with heaven,
For after this no pardon shall be given."

However, Purcell did his best, and one of the settings has many fine points, but "Charles, beware" would beat any one.

In 1691 we have "King Arthur," a complete Opera, Overture and Act-Tunes to "The Gordian Knot Untied," a very fine song ("I looked and saw within the book of Fate") in "The Indian Emperor," and Overture, Act-Tunes, and five delightful songs in "The Wives' Excuse."

The Overture to "The Gordian Knot" displays somewhat more independence of form than usual. Among the airs there is a fine chaconne, and a jig which has for its bass the tune of "Lilliburlero." The significance of this has not been determined. The year 1692 comprises a very beautiful song in "Cleomenes," "No, no, poor suffering heart," the lengthy opera or masque of "The Fairy Queen," beautiful songs in "Regulus" and "Aureng-Zebe," and some other songs in plays, and very important music in "The Libertine" and "Œdipus." Truly a remarkable year's work.

The music in "The Libertine" is perhaps better known than that of any similar work of Purcell's. There is the

immortal "Nymphs and Shepherds," with its sequel, "In these delightful pleasant [or fragrant] groves." It is not often that one discovers a new reading that amounts to very much, but there is an important correction in this piece. The high soprano F in the sixth bar should be F \sharp ; the F \sharp is somewhat startling, and the alteration has no doubt been made by a modern editor. In a subsequent Act there is a long incantation scene which is preluded by a kind of chant on "flatt trumpets," or, in other words, trombones. This was subsequently used by the composer in his "Queen Mary" funeral music, and it has been heard at Westminster Abbey on several occasions in recent years. There is also a long and somewhat uninteresting bravura song to the words "To arms, heroic prince."

"Œdipus" also has another long incantation scene, a mixture of recitative and chorus which is the usual form of such things. This particular scene is a striking conception. Included in it is a very ingenious song on a ground bass, "Music for a while." I should like you to have heard this sung, but it was apparently written for a male alto.

To 1693 belongs the music to Congreve's "Old Bachelor." This comprises an Overture and Act-Tunes, a song and a duet. The latter are very charming, and the former are quite up to Purcell's standard. In "The Richmond Heiress" there is a long duet between "a mad man and a mad woman." Representations of insanity seem to have been curiously popular with our forefathers. "The Maid's last Prayer" has some songs and a very long duet, "No, resistance is vain." At one point in this piece the alternating voices repeat the word "No" thirty-six times, a number which is really rather excessive, even for Purcell, who was much addicted to this particular trick. The "Female Virtuoso's" has a duet with a nobly-inspired beginning, "Love, thou art best"—then unfortunately the words, and almost necessarily with them the music, fall off. "The Double Dealer" includes an Overture and Act-Tunes of excellent quality, and "Rule a wife and have a wife" has one song, "There's not a swain." This last piece is a very ingenious adaptation of words to a hornpipe in "The Fairy Queen." The clever person who did it appears to have been "N. Henley, Esq." It had Purcell's sanction, for it is among the Gresham autographs, and it will therefore be included in the Society's new volume.

In 1694 we enter upon the tangled tale of "Don Quixote." It was tangled, that is to say, to the first person who tried to unravel it. I need not say that I am not that person. Purcell wrote music to a play of Dufey. It was so successful that a second part followed in the same year, and a third part in 1695. In the first part there is a long, florid, and somewhat wearisome duet, "Sing, all ye Muses." The splendid "Let the dreadful

engines" is also here, and there is a remarkable trio fully developed with a fine climax. The words in the latter part are unfortunately in the extraordinarily brutal style of the period:—

"Approach, ye fat fiends, that pampered each day
on a garbage of souls,
Broil rashers of fools for a breakfast on coals."

And it is hardly possible to imagine anyone singing them at the present day. Otherwise this trio would well bear reproduction. There is a remarkable ensemble about half way through it.

In the second part there is an interminable duet between a clown and his wife, which concludes with these poetical lines:—

"Let our whole care be our farming affair,
To make our corn grow, and our apple trees bear."

Purcell, however, "plays up" wonderfully, and the piece gets along somehow. There is also a song, "Genius of England," with trumpet obbligato, according to Burney once very popular, though his own criticism of it is very severe. Hawkins speaks of it with enthusiasm which we should now find it hard to share.

"The Married Beau" has the usual Overture and Act-Tunes with songs. This Overture, along with all the later ones, seems to show more definition in its subjects, but the form is the invariable one.

Four more plays of this year have one or more songs or duets. In "Tyrannic Love" is the once celebrated "Hark, my Damilcar," usually printed "Daridcar," and a beautiful song, "Ah, how sweet it is to love." The year's work also includes the opera "Timon of Athens." 1695, Purcell's last year of life, also gives us some of the choicest fruits of his genius. There are the operas "The Indian Queen" and "The Tempest," and contributions to some other plays that I need not refer to in detail. In addition there are the Overture and tunes to "Abdelazer." These tunes seem to me almost the most spirited of all. And the play also includes the beautiful song, "Lucinda is bewitching fair."

"The Rival Sisters" has a fine contrapuntal Overture. I am inclined to put it among the very best of Purcell's Overtures, and it would well bear to be played in these days. There is only one copy of this known (in the Royal College of Music Library), and in places the text is very confused, the copyist having gone wrong, and tried to correct his errors.

But above all there is the grand work of "Bonduca." Some numbers of this are well known, but there are others as remarkable. The Overture perhaps is not specially distinguished, but the opening chorus, "Hear us, great Rugwith!" is splendid. Besides this there are many fine things—the recitative "Hear, ye

gods of Britain," supposed by Burney to be the first example (and it is a fine one) of accompanied recitative, the charming duet with two flutes obbligato, "Sing, ye Druids," the beautiful song "O lead me to some peaceful gloom," and finally the brilliant "Britons strike home" and "To arms." In fact every number is a masterpiece. The popularity of the music is shown by the very large number of MSS. in existence. Most of this music was printed about a hundred years ago by Clarke-Whitfeld in his "Beauties of Purcell."

To the third part of "Don Quixote" Purcell only contributed one number, the song or cantata "From Rosy Bowers." It was his swan-song—"Sett in his sickness," says the heading. It is as well known as anything of Purcell's, and it deserves its reputation. It is termed a mad song—why, is not obvious; but Mr. Dent informs us that the term relates to the "whimsical variety" of the whole, a feature to which the singer, *Altisidora*, refers, before she sings it. In addition to the above works we may mention a long and striking song—or perhaps it had better be termed "scena"—in a play which has not been identified. It occurs in the Tenbury MS., and has the initials "H.P." It is unlikely that any other composer of the period could have written it.

We may now try and estimate Purcell's growth in his art as exemplified in these works. It should be said that with the exception of a few printed compositions, it is only in his theatrical works that we are in a position to assign dates to any of his work. Beginning with "Theodosius," we have charmingly fresh tunes, all of them in absolutely square, four-bar rhythm. The choruses are equally simple in form. In the next important piece, "Blow, Boreas blow" (from "Sir Barnaby Whigg"), we have a freer and more declamatory style, reminiscent of that of Henry Lawes, but inspired by infinitely more vigour. This style he was to develop until we get such masterpieces of declamation and rhythm as exist in "Bonduca" and the later works. "Let the dreadful engines" is an example of his best work in this direction. Purcell's verbal declamation is nearly always faultless, whether it be carried out in a satisfactory musical manner or not. It might be wished that he had not got into certain tricks of repetition of single words. I have already given one example, and one can take it as certain that whenever the word "all" occurs he may be relied upon to repeat it very many times. This fault arises of course from his desire to paint every word that gives him a chance, and Sir Hubert Parry has drawn an interesting parallel between his practice and that of Heinrich Schütz. But we must disregard this spot on our sun, and only wonder at the marvellous fecundity and wonderful scope of his genius. As regards the form of his instrumental

works, we find all his Overtures on the rigid old "Lulli" pattern : Adagio—more or less of a Fugue—and nine or ten bars of Adagio to close. It is curious that this unvaried Lulli form should have persisted so obstinately, and that Handel forty years later should still almost invariably adhere to it. A certain amount of growth is noticeable in the Fugal section. In the earlier Overtures, after the exposition, the movement rambles somewhat ; but one must remember that Bach was hardly born. In the later Overtures a second subject is sometimes hinted at, and in one of his latest, "The Rival Sisters," the bold original subject is inverted with fine effect. Still, when all is said and done, in none of the works, even the earliest, is there anything of what one can call crudity. There is no crudity in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" Overture, written by Mendelssohn at the age of eighteen, and therefore it is not so wonderful that the same quality is lacking in "The Virtuous Wife," composed when Purcell was twenty-one or twenty-two. I cannot say then that there is any development in these works in the least corresponding to that we find between the choruses of "Theodosius" and those of "Bonduca," or between the songs of "Theodosius" and "Tyrannic Love" that you have heard. I ascribe this to the tyranny of the Overture-form, which, as we have seen, was destined to hamper Handel many years later. And of course the development of instrumental music has always been behind that of vocal music. In the Act-Tunes, considering their number—which must amount to many hundreds,—and the narrow limits within which he worked, his fecundity is quite extraordinary. I propose to play you in different styles an air from "Distressed Innocence," a Rondeau Minuet from "The Gordian Knot Unty'd," and another air from "Abdelazer."

Another technical feature is the extraordinary vigour and unconventionality of his part-writing. I may say that this feature is more likely to be appreciated by one who has to copy out a work than by a reader or player of the same. The copyist is always finding a part going a different way from what he expects. The reader may overlook this, unless he examines very closely—the player will hardly notice it in the general effect. And what strong basses ! Brahms's reported habit of estimating a new composition from the treble and bass, and covering up the middle parts, would assuredly answer triumphantly for Purcell.

The following illustrations were sung by Miss Lewis :—

1. "No, no, poor suffering heart" ("Cleomenes").
 2. "Ah ! how sweet" ("Tyrannic Love").
 3. "Ah ! cruel, bloody fate" ("Theodosius").
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DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN : You will all agree that we owe Dr. Alan Gray a very hearty vote of thanks for his excellent paper, and also to Miss Lewis who so very kindly came forward at the last moment to assist with the illustrations. I believe the lady is a pupil of Mr. Walter Ford, whom we all know as an apostle of purity of diction and purity of style and finish. But before I ask the meeting to discuss this paper, I have the sad duty of announcing that since we last met the Musical Association has suffered a great loss by the death of Dr. T. Lea Southgate. Dr. Southgate was a prominent member of this Association, one of the most prominent in some respects ; certainly he was more frequently in evidence than any other member during the many years he was with us. He had a wonderful mind, a wonderful memory, wonderful power of inquiry, and a wonderful facility of literary expression. Hardly any of the papers brought before the Association in recent years escaped his attention ; on almost every topic we discussed he was a living encyclopædia. I do not pretend that what I now say is an adequate tribute to his memory. We shall have an opportunity of paying that tribute formally through our Council. Meanwhile, I think it is right we should put on record how deeply we regret the loss of so distinguished a member of our Association. As to the paper we have just heard, I think in this country we ought to be much gratified that we have so many "greatest" composers. In the previous paper read before the Association, Miss Glyn very ably indeed claimed Byrd as the greatest English composer. To-night Dr. Gray has explicitly stated that Purcell was our greatest composer. Dr. Gray referred to a choral piece he would have liked us to hear. In view of what we are told as to sight-reading skill in former times, if Pepys were reading such a paper he would have, as a matter of course, called upon the audience to sing it straight away. I wonder whether we, the Musical Association, could have done that. Although I am a great admirer of Purcell, I must say that in my time as a choral conductor, having much to do with choral music, I have often deplored that I was unable to find important choral material in his works. I remember when the Huddersfield Choir came to London to show off British music before the International Musical Society, on the occasion of the great Congress held in 1911, many of us were much put about to find some big, choral illustration from

Purcell. Happily some one in *The Times* suggested the fine chorus "The Soul of the World." It was at once put into print and rapidly rehearsed by the Huddersfield Choir, and it made an excellent impression. It is short, but it is magnificent, and represents Purcell at his very best. Most of his choruses are too short, and do not make good performing selections. In proposing a vote of thanks to Dr. Gray, I think the audience ought to know that he has been kind enough to come out of his turn to take the place of Mr. Jeffrey Pulver, who was to have read a paper to-night but who, unfortunately, is ill. We are very grateful to Dr. Gray for filling the gap.

[The votes of thanks to Dr. Alan Gray and Miss Lewis were carried by acclamation.]

Dr. FROGGATT: There are just one or two points I would like to mention. First, with regard to the date of "Dido and Æneas." The traditional date is 1677, then it was put at 1680, and now the date in favour is 1689. Mr. Barclay Squire is a great authority on matters connected with Purcell. But Dr. Cummings was also a great authority on the same subject, and I distinctly remember,—I cannot give the date because for some weeks past I have not had access to my own small library—a Paper in the *Musical Times* by Dr. Cummings, which appeared not more than a year or two before his death, and I should say it was his last word on that subject. In it he has distinctly inclined to the traditional date, 1677. I think the reason 1680 was given was because a play-bill was discovered bearing that date for a performance of "Dido and Æneas" at Mr. Josiah Priest's School or Academy for young gentlewomen at Chelsea. But Dr. Cummings pointed out in his Paper that there was nothing in that play-bill to show that it was the first performance, and I believe it has been established that Josiah Priest's Dancing School or College was moved to Chelsea from a more central part. [A Member: Leicester Square.] Yes; as I have said, I am speaking entirely from memory. What ground, then, Mr. Barclay Squire has for giving 1689 as the date, I do not know. And there is another point. I have noticed that in the scores of Purcell (there are very few that I possess of his dramatic works) there is a certain amount of development in the writing for the viola. In "Dido and Æneas" the writing suggests that it was rather an early work. For instance, in the choruses you find the violas invariably doubling a voice-part. If you come to later works, "King Arthur" and "Bonduca," there is considerably more independence given to the viola part. For instance, in "King Arthur," the only double stop in the whole work is given to the viola, and that seems to suggest that an early date for "Dido and Æneas" might be possible. Of course, on the other hand, Mr. Barclay Squire may have authority for a later date which is

incontrovertible. I do not know. With regard to the development of the viola part in Purcell's latest works, there is still another point. There is an Overture—which I hope may be regarded as authentic—to “King John,” in which there are two parts for violas. And there is one other point in regard to which I should be grateful for any information Dr. Alan Gray may give. In an Overture printed in the edition of the Musical Antiquarian Society as an Appendix (the second Overture to “King Arthur”) there are not only two viola parts, but there is also the kettle-drum part, which is a puzzle to me, and of which I have never met with any explanation. This drum part absolutely follows the parts for the trumpets. I do not suppose that Purcell had three kettle-drums at his disposal, yet here four or five are implied. I am sure that not only the tonic and dominant, but the supertonic, and I think the mediant also, are given to the drums; and I would like to know how this drum-part was played in the last decade of the 17th century. In conclusion, I would like to associate myself with our Chairman in appreciation of the delightful Paper to which we have listened.

Dr. W. A. AIKIN: There is one general thought about Purcell I should like to refer to, which of course is not involved in Dr. Gray's Paper, but is a thing that, in thinking about Purcell, we ought always to remember, that he died in the fullness of his work, and left a most tremendous gap behind him, especially in regard to English singing. With Handel, during the fifty years of his life in England, singing became, and continued to be for the next two centuries, practically Italianized. That is a thing from which we are struggling to get free. It is only by going back into the past, into the works of Purcell, that we can reach some clear rule by which we may continue our English singing traditions in this country. So that the more we know about Purcell, and the more we understand him, the more we feel capable of building up what is justly and truly an English school of singing. That is one general aspect of the subject that I should like to add to the record of our feelings about Purcell.

Dr. ALAN GRAY: With respect to Dr. Froggatt's remarks about the date of “Dido and Æneas,” Mr. Barclay Squire has written a most detailed article on the subject which appeared in the “Dictionary of National Biography” years ago. He goes minutely and ingeniously into the whole question, supporting what he says from fifty or more different quarters. In conclusion he does not give the date as 1689, but he says “somewhere between 1689 and 1690.” There are many things pointing to this, such as, for instance, the words “We are Protestants and English nuns,” which fixes it after the Revolution of 1688. As to what has been said about “King Arthur,” I confess I did not know it. I believe I have the music in an Antiquarian Edition. It has not

yet come out in the Purcell Society Edition. I did not notice that the viola parts are the same as the bass.

Dr. FROGGATT: But in the chorus they double the tenor in the vocal parts.

Dr. ALAN GRAY: Personally, I should have thought that it belongs to another date. Some of his earlier work seems extraordinarily mature. There is "Theodosius," written apparently three years later than "Dido and Æneas," yet there is no comparison between the two as regards the maturity of the music. "Theodosius" is charming and fresh; but at the same time it is rather babyish in a way.

Dr. FROGGATT: How old was he then?

Dr. ALAN GRAY: He would have been about eighteen or nineteen. I must thank Dr. Aikin, his statement was news to me. We knew that Handel was responsible for much, but I did not realise that he was absolutely responsible for all the mischief he introduced. Apparently this is another sin that must be counted against him. To Miss Lewis I feel deeply indebted for singing so charmingly, and for stepping into the breach at the last moment.
