"CHRISTIS KIRK OF THE GREEN"
An examination of the poem, and a study of its
generic descendents in Scottish vernacular litera­
ture from the fifteenth century to the twentieth.

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

M. A.
in the Department of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April, 1960
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Abstract

In this paper, I first examine the Middle Scots poem, "Christis Kirk of the Green" (referred to as "Christ's Kirk"), and then study the poems in the Scottish vernacular which have been influenced by it. "Christ's Kirk", which may have been composed in the fifteenth century, has popular merry-making for its theme, and its creator has used a distinctive stanzaic form in his depiction of the sights of a rural fair.

In my investigation, I have considered first the structural and thematic antecedents of "Christ's Kirk". My next step has been to examine its bibliographical and literary history. Thereafter, I have studied other poems of the same genre composed before the year 1560: "Peblis to the Play", "Sym and his brudir", and "The Justing and Debait at the Drum". The employment of the "Christ's Kirk" stanza -- or a modified form thereof -- for satirical accounts of social gatherings in eighteenth-century Scotland is the theme of Chapter 5, and its use by a modern poet describing the Edinburgh International Festival is examined in the final chapter of this thesis.

By a study of these poems, drawn from five centuries of Scottish vernacular literature, I have demonstrated that the tradition established by "Christ's Kirk" has continued to be useful up to the twentieth century as one literary method of chronicling, in a satiric fashion, the actions of people at popular gatherings.
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Acknowledgment

I wish to make grateful acknowledgment to Mr. R.G. Sutherland (Robert Garioch) for supplying a typescript copy of "Embros to the ploy", and for his permission to quote, in extenso, from the poem.
CHAPTER I
Introduction

In the year 1568, George Bannatyne, an Edinburgh merchant, collected, within one manuscript volume, all the poems in Middle Scots that he could find. One of the pieces that he transcribed into his anthology was "Christis Kirk of the Green", which, in his version, runs as follows:

1 Was never in Scotland heard nor seen
   sic dancing nor deray,
   Neither at Falkland on the green,
   Nor Peblis at the play,
   As wes of wooeris as I ween
   At Christ Kirk on ane day;
   There came our kitties waschen clean
   In their new kirtillis of grey,
       Full gay,
   At Christis Kirk of the green. 10

2 To dance thir damosellis them dicht,
   Thir lasses licht of laitis,
   Their glovis was of the raffel richt,
   Weil prest with mony plaitis;
   They were so nice when men them nicht,
   They squealit like ony gaitis,
       So loud
   At Christis Kirk of the green, that day. 20

3 Of all thir maidens mild as mead
   Was nane so jimp as Gillie;
   As ony rose her rude was reid,
   Her lyre was like the lily;
   Fu' yellow, yellow was her heid,
   But scho of luve was silly,
   Thoch all her kin had sworn her dede,
   Scho wald haif bot sweet Willie
       Alone,
   At Christis Kirk of the green. 30

4 Scho scornit Jock and skraipit at him,
   And murionit him with mockis;
   He wald haif luvit, scho wald nocht lat him,
   For all his yellow lockis;
   He chereist her, scho bade gae chat him,
Scho compt him nocht twa clockis;
So shamefully his short gown set him,
His limbis was like twa rokkis,
Scho said,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

5 Tom Lular was their minstrel meet,
O Lord! as he cou'd lance;
He playit so shill and sang so sweet,
Whill Towsy tuk a trance.
Auld Lichtfute there he did forleit,
And counterfutit France;
He use himself as man discreet
And up took morice dance,
Full loud,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

6 Than Stevin come steppand in with stendis;
No rink micht him arrest,
Platfute he bobbit up with bendis,
For Mald he made request,
He lap whill he lay on his lendis,
But risand he was preist,
Whill that he hostit at baith th'endis
For honour of the feast
That day,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

7 Syne Robene Roy begouth to revel,
And Dwiny till him druggit;
"Lat be, "quo' Jock; and ca'd him javell,
And be the tail him tuggit.
The kensy cleikit to the cavell,
But Lord! than gif they luggit!
They pairtit hir manly with a nevell;
God wait gif hair was ruggit
Betuix them,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

8 Ane bent a bow, sic sturt coud steir him;
Great scaith was't to haif scar'd him;
He chesit a flan as did affeir him;
The tother said: "Dirdum dardum,"
Throuch baith the cheeks he thocht to cheir him,
Or throw the erse half char's him;
Bot be ane acrebraid it come nocht near him,
I can nocht tell what marr'd him,
There,
At Christis Kirk of the green.
With that a friend of his cried, "Fy!
And up ane arrow drew;
He forgit it so furiously
The bow in flinders flew;
So was the will of God trow I,
For had the tree been true,
Men said, that kend his archery,
That he had slain anew
That day,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

Ane hasty hensure callit Harry,
Wha was ane archer heynd,
Tilt up a tackle withouttin tarry,
That torment so him teen'd.
I wait nocht whiddir his hand coud vary
Or the man was his friend,
For he escapit throw michtis of Mary
As man that no ill meant,
But gude,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

Than Lowrie as ane Lyon lap,
And sune a flan coud feddir,
He hecht to pierce him at the pap
Thereon to wad a weddir.
He hit him on the wame a wap,
It buft like ony bledder;
But swa his fortoun was and hap
His doublet was of ledder,
And saved him,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

A yaip young man that stude him neist
Loused off a shot with ire;
He ettled the bern in at the breist,
The bolt flew owre the byre;
Ane cryit Fy! he had slain a priest
A mile beyond the mire;
Then bow and bag fra him he kest,
And fled as fierce as fire
Off flint,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

With forkis and flailis they lat great flappis,
And flung togidder like freikis;
With bowgaris of barnes they beft blue cappis,
Whill they of bernis made briggis.
The reird raise rudely with the rappis,
When rungis was laid on riggis;
The wifis come furth with cryis and clappis:
"Lo where my liking liggis."
Quo' they
At Christis Kirk of the green.

14 They girnit and lat gird with granis,
   Ilk gossip other greivit;
Some straik with stingis, some gaderit stanis,
Some fled and evil mischievit;
The minstrel wan within twa wanis;
That day full well he prievit,
For he came home with unbirsed banis
   When fechtaris were mischievit
   For ever
At Christis Kirk of the green.

15 Heich Hucheon, with a hazel ryss,
   To red can throw them rummil;
He mudlet them down like ony mice,
   He was no barty-bummil.
Thoch he was wicht he was nocht wise
   With sic jangleris to jummill,
For fra his thumb they dang a slice,
   Whill he cried: "Barla-fummill!
   I am slain,"
At Christis Kirk of the green.

16 When that he saw his blude so reid,
   To flee micht no man lat him;
He ween'd it been for auld done feid,
   The far sairer it set him.
He gart his feet defend his heid,
   He thocht ane cried, Haif at him,"
Whill he was past out of all plead;
   He suld be swift that gat him
   Throw speed,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

17 The town souter in grief was bowdin,
   His wife hang in his waist;
His body was with blude all browdin,
   He granit like ony gaist.
Her glitterand hair, that was full golden,
   So hard in lufe him lest,
That for her sake he was nocht yolden,
   Seven mile whill he was chas'd
   And mair,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

18 The miller was of manly mak;
   To meet him was na mowis;
There durst nocht ten come him to tak,
Sa nowit he their nowis.
The bushment haill about him brak
And bickerit him with bowis,
Syne traitorly behind his back
They hewit him on the howis

Behind,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

19
Twa that was heidmen of the herd
Ran upon otheris like rammis;
Than followit feymen richt onafear'd
Bet on with barrow trammis,
Bot where their gobbis was ungeird
They gat upon the gammis,
Whill bludy berkit was their beard
As they had wirreit lambis,
Maist like
At Christis Kirk of the green.

20
The wifis kest up ane hideous yell
When all thir yunkeris yokit;
As fierce as ony fire-flaucht fell,
Freikis to the field they flockit;
Thae carles with clubbis coud other quell,
Whill blude at breistis out bockit.
So rudely rang the common bell,
For reird,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

21
When they had birkit like baitit bullis
And branewood brunt in baalis,
They were as meek as ony mulis
That mangit are with mailis.
For faintness thae forfochten fulis
Fall down like flauchter-flailis,
And fresh men come in and held their dulis
And dang them doun in dailis
Be-dene,
At Christis Kirk of the green.

22
When all was done, Dick with ane aix
Come forth to fell a fiddar;
Quod he; "Where are yon hangit smaix
Richt now wald slain my broder?"
His wife bade him: "Ga hame, gab-glaikis,"
And sa did Meg his moder.
He turned and gaif them baith their paikis,
For he durst ding nane other,
For fear
At Christis Kirk of the green that day.¹

This poem is worthy of more attention than has been paid to it by literary historians. As a description of events at a rural fair in Pre-Reformation Scotland, it is not only a lively and skilful work within a medieval tradition already established, the celebration of communal merry-making, but its own success seems to have made of it a genre piece whose influence was to persist through later Scottish poetry down to the present day. In later poems of this genre, as in "Christ's Kirk" itself, is an all-seeing reporter, who records, without moralising, the incidents of a segment of the human comedy, adopting a tone that is both humorous and lightly satirical. In the best poems of the type he is close enough to the protagonists to learn their names, and sufficiently acquainted with their background to understand the reasons for their actions. Apart from the narrator, the poems of which Christ's Kirk is the prototype, have -- with minor variations -- a common stanzaic form, though later poets dispensed with the alliteration, and employed rhyme only.

It would be pleasant to know more of the literary history of this poem before Bannatyne copied it into his manuscript. Collation of his version with that contained in the Maitland Folio MS.² reveals enough discrepancies to suggest the existence

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of at least two versions of earlier date. These, however, have disappeared, and in the attempt to fix the attribution of the poem, or even to date it with any certainty, we are faced with a situation analogous to that described by Hardin Craig in his study of the mediaeval religious drama in England:

The remains of this drama left us by the Renaissance and the Reformation remind one of the undestroyed parts of a badly bombed city of which a few fine buildings have been spared; also a few ordinary structures and a number of still valuable fragments.  

Similar, probably worse, devastation confronts the student of the older Scottish literature, for the Calvinist Reformation in Scotland proved hostile not to drama only, but to almost every form of secular literature. During the latter part of the sixteenth and the whole of the seventeenth century, while literature in England was flourishing, the voice of Scotland's muse was practically silent. The Reformation sealed the fate of the old school of Scottish verse, which perished, or all but perished, in its prime; and this fate, however undeserved, was exacerbated by the neglect into which the earlier poets and their works fell during the seventeenth century. That century was disastrous for Scottish vernacular literature; the paucity of printed editions at its beginning meant that works of the earlier periods existed mainly in the form of manuscripts; and during the wars, civil and religious, which racked the country, many of these were lost or suffered irreparable dam-

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age. The removal of the Scottish Court to London in 1603 gave Southern English an advantage over the northern tongue, which, when it emerged from obscurity at the start of the eighteenth century, had changed almost out of recognition. In the words of Pinkerton, first editor of the Maitland Folio MS., the seventeenth century -- that dark age in Scottish history -- "threw a total night over Scotland; a night of Gothic darkness haunted by the most shocking spectres of frenzy and fanaticism ... so that the century which stands highest in English history and genius, is one of the darkest in those of Scotland," and during it Scottish language and literature suffered permanent impoverishment.

It is symptomatic of the desuetude into which written Middle Scots had fallen that the revival of interest in it which began at the end of the seventeenth century, and became of increasing moment in the eighteenth, should have been, in its inception, as much etymological as literary. The compiler of a bibliography of Middle Scots poets has this to say on the subject:

The revival of Scots at the end of the seventeenth century is the result of many forces. In one aspect it is but a part of a much wider movement, a renaissance of Old English and the Older Teutonic languages in general. The first traces of a serious study of Scots are of this phase .... In 1691 an Old English student, Edmund Gibson, published an edition of Polemo-Middinia, to which he added a version of "Christ's Kirk" as a "sort of exercise towards a study of Anglo-Saxon."

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These pieces he elucidated in copious notes, pointing out cognate words in Gothic, Cambrian, Icelandic, Old English, and the English dialects .... Gibson may claim to be the first to treat a Scottish poem as a classic.... but he does not so much illustrate the text by means of notes as make it an excuse for bringing his notes together.5

Even when the revival had assumed a distinctly literary form, eighteenth-century editors, Allan Ramsay for one, felt the necessity for supplying a glossary, or even for translating obsolete words and phrases into terms that would be recognised by their contemporaries. Changes in diction had been accompanied by changes in the quantity of vowel sounds that often led Ramsay astray in the attempt "to fix the orthography to the most frequent manner,"6 one of the stated objectives of the Evergreen, his edition of selections from the Bannatyne MS. A reading of the preface and a perusal of the copious explanatory notes lead one to the conclusion that Ramsay felt he was dealing with poetry whose appeal was mainly antiquarian. In this assumption he could hardly have been further from the mark, for the recovery of fragments of Middle Scots poetry in the popular tradition was but the prelude to an outburst of national verse associated with Fergusson and Burns.

These two poets drew their inspiration from poems in the popular tradition that had existed along with the strong

Chaucerian strain evident in the courtly verse of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Both Fergusson and Burns owned their debt to Ramsay, who, by making available examples of the native habit of Scottish verse, provided them with their materials. Of the body of poetry that Ramsay transmitted, a modern critic has written:

The native element that had its fullest expression in these poets was always active and it had co-existed with verse that had been affected by foreign models. Even the courtly poets were affected by the popular habit...

As an example of a courtly poet affected by the native idiom, we may cite William Dunbar, in whose work there is a fusion of two distinct vocabularies -- aureate diction, ornamented with French and Latin -- and the broadest of broad Scots. While one of these styles predominates in individual poems, depending on whether they were courtly, or satiric and abusive, he was always ready to use the other if it suited his purpose. In "The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," for example, the two categories of vocabulary are found in close juxtaposition. On the setting, he has lavished all the bright colour, ornament, and "anamalit termes celicall" of the grand style:

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Apon the Midsummer evin, mirriest of nichtis,
I mувit furth allane, neir as midnicht west past,
Besyd ane gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris,
Hegeit, of ane huge hicht, with hawthorne treis;
Quhairon ane bird, on ane bransche, so birst out hir notis
That never ane blythfuller bird was on the beuche harde:
Quhat throw the sugarat sound of hir sang glad,
And throw the savour sanative of the sueit flouris;
I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin efter mirthis;
The dew donkit the daill and dynnit the feulis. 1-10

In this setting, the colloquial Scots of the three ladies assails the ear with its harshness. One married woman, for instance, describes her husband in the following terms of gross invective:

I have a wallidrag, a worm, an auld wobat carle,
A waistit wolroun, not worth words to clatter;
A bumbart, a drone bee, a bag full of flewme. 89-91

In like manner, Sir David Lindsay could turn from the courtly mode of "The testament and Complaynt of our Soverane Lordis Papyngo" to the rough humour of "The Justing Betuix James Watson and Jhone Barbour"; and Alexander Scott, (his near contemporary,) was similarly capable of turning from the penning of dainty love lyrics, based on English originals, to the vernacular of his "Jousting and Debait at the Drum".

By the same token, if we accept the claim to the authorship of "Christ's Kirk" that has been put forward on his behalf James I (1425-37) must also be enrolled in the list of those who have enriched the native tradition. That he had literary ability has been attested by contemporary chroniclers, and though his authorship of the Kingis Quhair has been called in
question, his title to that work rests on fairly sure foundations. James, however, spent eighteen years as a prisoner in England, where he came under the influence of the Chaucerian tradition, and the Kingis Quhair is European rather than Scottish in outlook. If, indeed, proof of his authorship of poems in the Scottish vernacular tradition could be confirmed, it would supply even stronger evidence of the strength of the native influence on the courtly poets, but on this point no conclusive evidence has been forthcoming.

As a result, there have existed, and still exist, wide differences of opinion among editors and literary historians. Though such differences are not surprising in view of our fragmentary knowledge of Middle Scots poetry and its authors, they have led to editors following their own predilections in the ascription of the poem, and have caused endless arguments among critics — arguments the more vociferous for the lack of any real proof. Supporters of the theory that James I was the author have pointed out that "Christ's Kirk" is assigned to him in the Bannatyne MS. They have cited, also, a reference by John Major to James as the composer of some pieces of verse in the vernacular, in particular of a poem beginning "At Beltayn".


Since these are the opening words of "Peblis to the Play", companion piece to "Christ's Kirk", they have argued that the king was responsible for both.

Opponents, on the other hand, have suggested that the lateness of Major's testimony (1521), and the silence of the one contemporary history of the reign of James, Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*, lessen the value of the sixteenth century historian's statement. They have pointed out that Bannatyne made mistakes in his ascription of other poems, and that Maitland gave the text of both "Peblis to the Play" and "Christ's Kirk" with no ascription. They have remarked, too, that Edmund Gibson, in his edition of 1691, gave the poem to James V (1513-42), though doubt is implied in his ascription, which runs as follows: "Composed (as was supposed) by King James V."

Gibson could not have had access to the *Bannatyne MS.*, and though it is just possible that he used the *Maitland Folio MS.*, which was by that time in the library of Samuel Pepys, it seems more likely that he based his text on an edition of "Christ's Kirk" that had appeared in 1684. Whether Gibson obtained his information from his source (no copies of the text of 1684 apparently having survived), or from oral tradition is not known. In any case the same dubious ascription was given by James Watson in the first edition of his *Choice Collection of*

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comic and serious Scots Poems both ancient and modern,\textsuperscript{12} which appeared in 1706. Watson, however, having learned of the existence of the Bannatyne MS. and of the ascription therein, credited James I with the authorship of the poem in the second edition of his anthology, published in 1713. Since that time editors have shown a fine impartiality in the matter, some attributing the poem to James I, others to James V, others again, taking the line of least resistance, to some anonymous Middle Scots poet.

Indeed it is easy to sympathise with the last, for, on the basis of the correspondence between certain lines in "Christ's Kirk" and those penned by Lindsay in the "Justing Betuix James Watson and Jhone Barbour\textsuperscript{13} a case might be made out for his authorship of the former poem. The similarity of the lines is too close to allow for accidental resemblance;

"Christ's Kirk" has:

\begin{align*}
\text{His lymmis were lyk twa rokkis,} & \quad (38) \\
\text{Ran upoun otheris lyk rammis;} & \quad (182) \\
\text{Bet on with barrow trammis,} & \quad (184)
\end{align*}

Lindsay's poem contains the following lines:

\begin{align*}
\text{Quod Jhone, "Howbeit thou thinkis my leggis lyk rokkis.} & \quad (27) \\
\text{Yit thocht thy braunis be lyk twa barrow-trammis,} & \\
\text{Defend the, man!" Than ran thay to, lyk rammis.} & \quad (33-34)
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{12}Edinburgh, 1706. London, British Museum Microfilm.

There is, however, some slight linguistic evidence that "Christ's Kirk" was composed during the fifteenth century, in which case Lindsay must have been the borrower rather than the originator. Linguistic grounds for assigning "Christ's Kirk" to the fifteenth century are the use of the indefinite article, "a", before consonants. The first recorded use of "ane" before a consonant was in 1462, and this usage did not establish itself until the beginning of the sixteenth century, from which time it became uniform in Middle Scots. When Bannatyne transcribed "Christ's Kirk", the sixteenth century was well advanced, yet "a" occurs eight times before consonants in the manuscript, while "ane" is found only four times. The implication from this is that Bannatyne was copying from a text in which "a" was used, and sometimes changed it for "ane", but more often left it as it was.

The many references to bowmen and their weapons, too, would have topical significance, if "Christ's Kirk" was composed in the fifteenth century. In the course of that century, the Parliament of Scotland, on at least four occasions, enacted legislation on the subject of archery practice and "wapinschaws", or periodical musters of able-bodied men with their weapons. The most detailed of these acts was passed in 1458; it dealt with the number of musters to be held during the year, and laid down standards for target practice. It may well be, therefore,

that the poem was composed at some time between 1460 and 1500, though the dating is necessarily tentative. Such a dating would, of course exclude James I's claim to the authorship of "Christ's Kirk", but, to my mind, a stronger reason for denying this is the brevity of his residence in Scotland in comparison with his years in England during youth and early manhood.

Though it is annoying to know so little that is definite of the background of a poem whose humorous treatment of communal high-spirits, in a distinctive stanzaic form, has been the exemplar for a significant body of verse over a period of five centuries, the uncertainty that exists in regard to "Christ's Kirk" is by no means unique. Of the three other examples of the form produced by the middle of the sixteenth century, only one, Alexander Scott's "Jousting and Debait at the Drum", can be attributed with any exactitude, for, in the cases of "Peblis to the Play" and "Sym and his brudir", difficulties exist, equal to, or exceeding, those that faced us in the attempt to find an author or an approximate date of composition for "Christ's Kirk".

No such problems confront us in the study of poems in this tradition written in the eighteenth century. Allan Ramsay not only reprinted "Christ's Kirk", but added two cantos of his own to the original. Other poets, notably Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, who used verse forms drawn from popular vernacular verse in Middle Scots, were, as a result, able to add the "Christ's Kirk" stanza to the other metrical patterns which they
employed. Alexander Montgomerie's "Cherry and the Slae" provided a stave suitable for the description of nature; the six-line stanza in rime-couée gave a vehicle for rhymed epistles, addresses to individuals, to creatures of the countryside, and to natural objects. In the same form Fergusson and Burns wrote satires and "flytings" full of invective, "flytings" that Dunbar, himself a master of the type, would have enjoyed. In "Christ's Kirk" they found a form used for the description of robust and unrestrained merry-making, and this depiction of the hurly-burly of a village festival they employed as the foundation for their own humorous poems on popular gatherings in a contemporary setting. Fergusson used the stave in dealing with a fair, a race-meeting, and a civic election. Burns, ranging more widely, employed it for such diverse subjects as a Hallowe'en party, two ecclesiastical assemblies, an outspoken satire on King George III, and one recitative of the "Jolly Beggars."

But the use by Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns of "Christ's Kirk" as a model went far beyond a mere echoing of its stanzaic form, and, just as the early poem is "difficult to classify according to the traditional scheme of types -- lyric, satire, allegory merging into each other in a perplexing way,"¹⁵ so, in their poems, do we find a like confluence. The form, moreover, has survived the decline in Scottish vernacular verse that followed the death of Burns, and it has been used by

¹⁵Smith, op. cit., p.270.
R.G. Sutherland ("Robert Garioch"), one of the modern poets who uses Lallans, in "Embros to the Ploy," whose theme is the behaviour of the cosmopolitan crowd assembled in Edinburgh for the annual festival of the arts.

Since "Christ's Kirk" has given both its stanzaic form and its distinctive treatment of scenes of communal revelry to such a line of successors, representing almost every subsequent period of Scottish vernacular literary activity, there seems to be justification for subjecting it, and other similar poems, to detailed examination. I propose, therefore, to consider its antecedents, metrical and thematic; then to discuss the poem itself from the point of view of the subject and its treatment; next to devote space to an examination of early works of the same type within the critical framework thus established. Later sections of this thesis will deal with the renewal of interest in the form which took place during the eighteenth century, and with its employment by a poet of the twentieth century.
Chapter II

The Antecedents of "Christ's Kirk"

In considering possible sources from which the author of "Christ's Kirk" drew, it is necessary to recall that the poem is in the tradition of popular Scottish verse. Nowhere is this tradition better expressed than in the Scottish ballads which it resembles in the rapid movement from scene to scene and in the introduction by name of characters who play their part, and are then replaced, quite unceremoniously, by others. In stanzaic form, and in the use of alliteration as well as rhyme, the poem has links with the alliterative poetry of Northern England and Southern Scotland. This poetry found its expression mainly in romances, but it was also present in medieval religious drama, particularly in the Towneley Plays which were associated with Wakefield in Yorkshire. It is to the ballads then, and to alliterative verse that we turn in searching out the ancestry of "Christ's Kirk."

If we accept the definition of a ballad as, "A folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in action and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias,"¹⁶ we can see the resemblance to "Christ's Kirk."

In it, the quarrel is rendered in dialogue, and once the opposing forces turn from high words to blows our attention is kept focussed on the incidents of the fight.

Though Scottish balladry had its golden age between 1450 and 1600, there is no doubt that a significant number of English and Scottish ballads were in circulation earlier. The English ballad, "Judas", is found in a manuscript of the late thirteenth century, and the popularity of Robin Hood ballads is mentioned by Andrew of Wyntoun in his *Original Chronicle* (1421). It is probable, too, that ballads dealing with such historical events as the battles of Otterburn (1388) and Harlaw (1411) were already current when "Christ's Kirk" was composed.

Certainly, if we exclude the bob and wheel, there is a resemblance to the ballad stanza in the "Christ's Kirk" stave, with its four- and three-stress lines rhyming alternately. Though the alliteration that is a feature of the poem under examination is normally less evident in the ballads, two ballad quatrains placed together would show a strong similarity to the eight rhyming lines of a verse from "Christ's Kirk", as may be seen from a comparison of stanzas from "Little Geste of Robin Hood"17 and "Chevy

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In "Chevy Chase" provides:

At last the Douglas and the Percy met,
Like to captains of might and main;
They swapt together till they both swat
With swordes of fine Milan.
These worthy freykes for to fight
Thereto they were full fain,
Till the blood out of their basnets spretn
As ever did hail or rain. (113-120)

Since the ballad form flourished in many parts of Europe, those based on folk tales were often variants of common stories. One example, the tale of the noblewoman who left her castle to wander with her gipsy lover, was known to ballad makers in many lands. Another, the Scottish ballad of "Thomas the Rhymer", traced its descent from the romance, *Sir Orfeo*, and thence back to Greek mythology. Yet a third, "Sir Hugh Le Blond", was a

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fragment of Arthurian romance whose source lay beyond the boundaries of Scotland. Nevertheless, the ballad minstrel anchored his story to a definite locality by the use of actual place names. Robin Hood, whose adventures resemble those of the legendary Swiss hero, William Tell, died at Kirkleys Abbey; True Thomas "lay on Huntlie bank" when he saw the queen of elfland "riding down by the Eildon Tree"; the king of Scotland sat "in Dunfermling toun". All these were places which the audience either knew or could visualise, but sometimes the same effect was achieved by the minstrel's naming of geographical locations, familiar to his hearers, with characteristics similar to the setting of his story. So, in the opening stanza of "Christ's Kirk" we have the mention of place names to point up the wild gaiety of the scene:

Was nevir in Scotland heard nor seen
Sic dancing nor deray,
Neither at Falkland on the Green,
Nor Peblis at the Play. (1-4)

In addition to the use of place names, there were other touches that would assure the ballad minstrel's audience that the events had their setting in a familiar locale. Details of dress, ornament, weapons and armour; the names of dances and titles of songs, all serve to set the ballad in the surroundings of home. Of this aspect of ballads it has been written:

The scenes, then, of the ballads, when not laid in the romantic setting of palace or castle or in the world of pure fancy, are utterly faithful to the life their audience knew. They reproduce a known and familiar background as truly as Jan Steen or David Teniers
represents that of a merchant's house or a village inn. The touch of the artist, in the story as in the picture, lies not only in the drawing and in the colour but in the arrangement of these homely materials.  

As in the ballads, so it was in "Christ's Kirk". The lasses dressed for the fair in the height of contemporary rustic fashion:

Their glovis was of the raffel richt,
Their schoon was of the straitis;
Their kirtillis were of the lincome licht,
Weil pressed with mony plaitis. (13-16)

One of the combatants in the fight escaped serious injury because,

...swa his fortoun was and hap
His doublet was of ledder. (107-108)

The weapons mentioned in the poem, like the equipment of the warriors in the Border ballads, were the usual arms of the peasantry, the private soldiers of the national armies of mediaeval states. The arms carried by the men at the fair: bows, pikes, and axes, were those specified by an act of the Scottish Parliament of 1430 as suitable for "yemen" to carry at "wapinschaws": "bow and schefe", or in the case of the "yeman that is nane archer na can nocht deyll with a bow, a doublet of fence . . . and a gude ax or ellis a brogit staff."  

Combatants in the melee at Christ's Kirk of the Green who

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had no offensive weapons with them snatched up and used whatever came to hand, usually farm implements that would be common in any Scottish agricultural community. With "forkis and flailis", "bowgaris of barnis", and "barrow trammis" the contestants laid on one another, while the common bell rang out to give warning of a "tulzie"; another homely touch that would have lent verisimilitude to the scene in the minds of a Scottish audience.

Similarly, the ballads, unless set in the world of fairyland, had, as their protagonists, recognisable characters moving in a familiar setting. Not only were the leaders of forays and outlaw bands mentioned by name, their more important followers too, emerged from anonymity, as passing reference was made to them, usually with some descriptive epithet tacked on to the name to clarify the identification. The ballads of Robin Hood supply such names as Little John, Much the miller's son, Gilbert with the white hand, and Reynold Greenleaf. In "The Battle of Otterburn" and "Chevy Chase", the lieutenants of doughty Douglas and Sir Harry Percy are named, and the same particularity is evident in "Christ's Kirk". The various incidents of the affray that followed the dance are individualised by the poet's use of the names of the combatants. A quarrel between Jock and Robene Roy precipitated the action (61-70). Once general hostilities had broken out, a "hasty hensure" called Harry justified the descriptive tag by shooting...
an arrow at random, thus missing his target (91-98). Heigh Hucheon -- Big Hughie -- used his hazel wand of office to good effect, until the sight of his own blood from a scratch on the thumb made him plead for a truce (141-149). While the fight was going on, Tom Lular, the minstrel, had made discretion the better part of valour and was hiding within a house, whereby he escaped with "unbursed bones" (135-137). The occasional use of a descriptive term, instead of a proper name, likewise adds to the air of veracity, since it implies that in such a crowd there must have been some whose names were unknown to the poet.

In ballads that treated of love, both requited and unrequited, the description of the lady was usually detailed, and relied on the "ballad epithet" that fitted many contexts. Beauty lay in the possession of yellow or golden hair, a rosy complexion, red lips, and a trim waist. The possessor of these attributes, withal, usually had a will of her own in the choice of a husband, and she was quite prepared to defy her family if their choice was not hers. In "Christ's Kirk" the descriptions of Gillie, and of the unwanted suitor, Jock, reveal the same pattern:

    Of all thir maidens mild as mead
      Was nane sae jimp as Gillie;
    As ony rose her rude was Reid,
      Her lyre was like the lily;
    Fu' yellow, yellow was hir heid,
      But scho of luve was silly,
    Thoch all hir kin had sworn hir dede,
      Scho wald haif bot sweet Willie
    Allone,
    At Christis Kirk of the green.
Scho scornit Jock and skraipit at him
    And murionit him with mockis;
He wald haif luvit, scho wald nocht lat him,
    For all his yellow lockis;
He chereist her, scho bade gae chat him,
    Scho compt him nocht twa clockis. (21-37)

Whereupon Jock, who had apparently been favoured by her family, if not by the young lady herself, acted as other disappointed suitors have done, and tried to salve his *amour propre* by choosing Dwiny as his partner in the dance, a choice that precipitated the quarrel with Robene Roy, and led to a premature ending to the dancing and merry-making.

In its diction, "Christ's Kirk", like the ballads, relied almost entirely on the language of the everyday world. A critic has written that "The ballads rise to poetry without the verbal conventions of poetry, and there are few words and phrases in them which could be classed as poetic diction."\(^{21}\) The same holds true for "Christ's Kirk", but there is a difference in the employment of that language. In the ballads language was subordinate to the movement of the story, whereas, in the poem under discussion, the riches of the speech of everyday life were employed to build up a picture by the amassing of details. In this respect the poem stands in a closer relationship with the verse in the popular tradition of Dunbar and Henryson. In its use of alliteration as well as rhyme, in its stanzaic form, and in its relatively formal development, it has associations

\(^{21}\)Fergusson, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
with the alliterative romances rather than with the ballads, which tended to concentrate on the central issue and began, as it were, at the fifth act.

The author of "Christ's Kirk" was not alone in striving to produce, by close observation and cumulation of detail, a quick and perfect image for the reader. G. Gregory Smith has suggested that the phrase which best describes this method is "intimacy of style", and he goes on to state that, "In Scots the zest for handling a multitude of details rather than for seeking broad effects by suggestion is very persistent."\(^{22}\) This characteristic of Scots poetry, which was also the mark of the alliterative romances, has been evident from the first.

"Christ's Kirk" was no exception to the prevailing habit. The scene is set in the opening stanza; the preparations of the rustic maidens are described in detail; their reaction to the admiring glances of the swains is set down in black and white:

They were so nice when men them nicht,
They squealit like ony gaitis. (17-18)

With the same loving attention to details the fight between the miller and his assailants is described:

The miller was of manly mak;
Tae meet him was na mowis;
There durst nocht ten come him to tak,
Sa nowit he their nowis.
The bushment haill about him brak
And bickerit him with bowis,

\(^{22}\) Scottish Literature, Character and Influence, London, 1919, p. 5.
Syne traitorly behind his back  
They hewit him on the howis  
   Behind  
At Christ's Kirk of the green.  

(171-180)

In like meticulous manner other incidents are dealt with. The narrator records each scene with the precision of a camera which roves from point to point and occasionally lingers on a scene of more than ordinary interest. The completed effect of such a piling up of detail is not, however, that of a series of unrelated still pictures, with the actors caught in a moment of arrested movement. The effect on the mind's eye is one of furious activity; bowmen loose off their arrows; combatants are knocked to the ground; irate head-shepherds charge one another head-on -- "like rammis" is the appropriate simile used. Nor are the sounds that accompany the action forgotten. The "hideous yell " of the women, fearful for the safety of their menfolk, is punctuated by the rude clanging of the common bell summoning aid to quell the disturbance.

This wealth of detail in "Christ's Kirk", conveyed to the reader in expressive terms, parallels the usage of alliterative romances such as Sir Tristrem and Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight. A stanza from "Christ's Kirk", describing,

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in general terms, the scene at the fight, gives us:

The wifis kest up ane hideous yell
When all thir younkeris yokit;
As fierce as ony fire-flaucht fell,
Freikis to the field they flockit;
Thae carles with clubbis coud other quell,
Whill blude at breistis out bockit.
So rudely rang the common bell,
Whill all the steeple rockit
For reird,
At Christis Kirk of the green. (191-200)

In Sir Tristrem, the affray in which Morgan and Roland were leaders of the opposing parties, is rendered in these terms:

Morganes folk cam newe
Of rouland riis the gode,
On helmes gun thai hewe,
Thurch brinies brast the blod;
Sone to deth ther drewe
Mani a frely fode.
Of rouland was to rewe,
To grounde when he yode,
That bold:
His sone him after stode,
And dere his deth he sold. (188-198)

Sir Gawayne's blow, with its untoward result, is treated as follows:

Gavan gripped to his ax, . and gaderes it on hight,
The kay fot on the fold . he before sette,
Let hit doun lightly . light on the naked,
That the sharp of the shalk . shindered the bones,
And shrank thrugh the shire grece, . and scade hit in twinne,
That the bit of the broun stel . bot on the grounde.
The fair hede fro the halce . hit to the erthe,
That fele hit foined it with her fete,.there hit forth roled;
The blod brayd fro the body, . that blikked on the grene;
And nawther faltered ne fel . the freke never the helder;
As non unhap had him ailed, . thagh hedles he were in stedde.
He braide his bluk aboute,
That ugli bodi that bledde;
Moni on of him had doute,
Bi that his resouns were redde. (421-430, 438-443)

Comparison of these extracts reveals, besides the wealth of language common to all three, other features that align "Christ's Kirk" with the alliterative tales in verse, whose vogue in the north and north midlands of England, as well as in southern Scotland, extended over nearly two centuries — from the late thirteenth to the fifteenth. The features referred to are the extensive use of alliteration, and the bob -- a line with only one stress -- followed by the wheel, whose lines varied in number from poem to poem. Even where alliteration alone was used within the stock, as in Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight, each verse paragraph ends with a kind of refrain, made up of a two-syllabled bob, and a wheel of four short lines, in which rhyme is employed in addition to alliteration. This periodic contraction, that serves as a kind of rhythmic punctuation, is apparently also employed in Sir Tristrem, the date of whose composition has been set late in the thirteenth century, but, to find earlier examples it is necessary to turn to French, from which the form seems to have been derived.

T.F. Henderson cites an approximate example,\textsuperscript{25} dating from the early thirteenth century, which was quoted in one of Archbishop Langton's sermons. It runs as follows:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Scottish Vernacular Literature, Edinburgh, 1910, p. 30.
\end{flushright}
Bele Aliz matin leva,
Sun cors vesti e para,
Enz un verger s'entra
Cink flurettes y truva,
Un chapelet fet en a
De rose fleurie;
Pur Deu, trahez vus en la
Vus ki ne amez mie.

This, in turn, was a variant rendering of an old French rondet, "Robin et Aeliz", which, in one form, has a bob and wheel closely resembling that of "Christ's Kirk". In this version, one stanza only survives, and it runs:

Main se leva bele Aeliz;
mignotement la voi venir.
bien se para, mieux se vesti
en mai.
'dormez, jalous, et je m'envoiserai.26

The employment, by poets writing in English, of rhyming verses similar to those just quoted, represents a movement northward of the Romance poetic tradition that had established itself in England following the Norman Conquest. As its use became more common in Northern England and Southern Scotland, it gradually merged with, and ultimately supplanted, the older Germanic alliterative verse. For a period of almost two centuries, however, writers north of a line from the Humber to the Severn attempted to use both rhyme and alliteration, and tales such as Sir Tristrem, Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight, The Pistill of Susane, as well as a large number of the Towneley Plays, were the result of their attempts at a synthesis.

It is difficult to see any continuous progression from alliteration, with rhyme as a secondary feature, to rhyme accompanied by weakened alliteration. *Sir Tristrem*, the earliest romance in the bob-wheel stanza, has relatively weak alliteration and the body of each stave consists of eight three-stressed lines rhyming alternately, while the wheel has two lines only, as in this example:

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\begin{align*}
\text{The knightes that were wise} \\
\text{A forward fast thai bond,} \\
\text{That ich aman schul ioien he} \\
\text{And seven yer to stond;} \\
\text{The douk and rouland riis} \\
\text{Ther to thai bed hei bond} \\
\text{To herye and holden priis,} \\
\text{And foren till inglond} \\
\text{To lende} \\
\text{Markes king thai fond} \\
\text{With knightes mani and hende.}
\end{align*}
\]

(45-55)

In the example cited above, alliteration plays a minor part in the metrical form; rhyme and a regular succession of unstressed and stressed syllables show its affinity with Romance rather than with Germanic models. In *The Pistill of Susane*, which, like *Sir Gawayne*, appeared in the fourteenth century when the alliterative revival was at its height, alliteration has assumed importance in the metrical structure. An attempt has been made to imitate the rhythmic pattern of Old English poetry with its on-verse and off-verse, though, in this respect, *The Pistill of Susane* has not gone so far as has *Sir Gawayne*, in which rhyme has been dispensed with in the stock. Nevertheless, both poems have a bob, with a wheel of four lines, at the

end of each stanza or verse paragraph, and in this, the final line rhymes with the bob, while the other three contracted lines form a rhyming triplet. Citation of the first stanza of The Pistill of Susane shows how alliteration and rhyme are employed, and how the contracted lines of the bob and wheel draw it to a conclusion:

Ther was in Babiloine a bern, in that borow riche,  
That was a Ieuz gentil, and Ioachim he hiht,  
He was so lele of his lawe, ther lived none him liche,  
Of alle riche that renke arayes he was riht.  
His innes and his orchardes were with a depe dich,  
Halles and herbergages, heich upon heiht;  
To seche thoru that cite ther nas non sich  
Of erbus and erberi, so avenauntlich i-diht  
That day,  
Within the sercle of sees,  
Of erberi and alees  
Of all maner of trees  
Sothely to say.  

(1-14)

With the fifteenth century, the strength of the alliterative school of poetry weakened, and the plays attributed to the Wakefield Master, though they retain the bob and wheel, have relatively little alliteration. The same is true of the "Flagellacio", also one of the Towneley Plays, 28 whose stave of thirteen lines resembles that of The Pistill of Susane, though it lacks the alliteration of that poem. A stanza from this play shows how the substitution of alternate unstressed and stressed syllables for the alliterative line, in which stressed syllables only were counted, gives an effect different

from that of the verse already quoted. In this stanza Pilate is speaking to the captive Christ:

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Thou man that suffers all this ill
Why wyll Thu us no mercy cry?
Slake thi hast and Thi greatt wyll
While on The we have mastery.
Of Thy greatt warkes shew us som skyll
Men call The kyng, Thou tell us why;
Wherfor the Iues seke The to spyll
The cause I wold know wytterly,
Perdee
Say what is Thy name?
Thou lett for no shame
Thay put on The greatt blame
Else myght Thou skap for me.         (261-273)
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The disappearance of alliteration as a feature of English poetry is accounted for on two grounds. Its use, in addition to rhyme, imposed restraints that poets found irksome. Possibly of greater importance was the lack of response of writers in the London area, where the concentration of population gave the largest audience. The reaction of the Southern poets may be summed up in the words of Chaucer's Parson, when he said:

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But trusteth well, I am a Southren man,
I can not geste - rum, ram, ruf - be lettre. (42-43).
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In Scotland alliterative verse showed greater vitality, and it was still being produced at the end of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the return of James I, the first of the Scottish Chaucerians, foreshadowed its eventual disappearance among the courtly poets, though Dunbar employed it in some of his popular verse. Dunbar, indeed tried his hand at the writing of a poem

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in the tail-rhyme stanza, and, in "The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo", showed a high degree of capability in alliterative verse.

It was, however, in popular poetry, as exemplified by "Christ's Kirk", that the tradition of alliterative verse tales in the bobwheel stanza was continued, and, since it is not unlikely that some of these were composed in Scotland, the existence of a native tradition for the employment of such verse forms is indicated. Of this tradition "Christ's Kirk" represents the last stage, for rhyme and a regular succession of stressed and unstressed syllables is used in addition to alliteration. Thus, the first eight lines of each stanza rhyme alternately, and have by turns four stresses and three. Line nine, the bob, completes the sense of the preceding sentence, and the final line, "At Christis Kirk of the green", serves as a refrain in the manner of the wheel.

In form, and in treatment of its subject, then, "Christ's Kirk" has links both with the ballads and with the alliterative verse tales that preceded it. Its author employs the "ballad epithet", sets his scene in a recognisable locality, and deals with one episode, as in the ballad. He uses the riches of language in a detailed treatment of individual incidents, and employs a form of stanza reminiscent of the alliterative verse tale. The tone, humorous and lightly satirical, derives, however, from neither the ballad nor the alliterative verse tale. Two poems, "Peblis to the Play" and "Sym and his brudir", have much
the same quality, and, though they can be dated with no more exactitude than "Christ's Kirk", it may be that they preceded their better-known analogue.

Whether they did so, or not, they, as well as "Christ's Kirk", fall into the category of mirthful or humorous tales which, according to T.F. Henderson, "Began in the fifteenth century to obtain that special place in Scottish vernacular poetry which they have never ceased to hold."30 One of these humorous tales, Rauf Coilzear,31 introduces, as its hero, a charcoal merchant, and, in the tail-rhyme stanza of the serious romances, describes his reception of Charlemagne when that king asked for shelter in his hut. Here the humour lies in the reversal of the usual romance values, and in Rauf's unceremonious treatment of his guest, to whom he gives a lesson in etiquette:

Schir, thow art unskillfull, and that sall I warrand,
Thow byrd to have nurtour aneuch, and thow hes nane;
Thow hes walkit, I wis, in mony wyld land,
The mair vertew thou suld have, to keip the fra blame
Thow suld be courtes of kynd, and ane cunnand courtier.
Thocht that I simpill be,
Do as I bid thee:
The house is mine pardie
And all that is heir."

Besides "Christ's Kirk" and "Sym and his brudir", the Bannatyne MS. furnishes a number of tales, probably of the fifteenth century, in which the humour inclines to fantasy so wild, as to

30 Scottish Vernacular Literature, p. 77.
31 Amours, op. cit. vol. 2, pp. 82-114.
make the two that I have mentioned seem comparatively restrained. There are the tales of the Gyre-Carling, the protean witch; of King Berdok of Babylon, who resided in a cabbage; of Lord Fergus Ghaist, a merry creature who steals God's knife, Abraham's whim-wham, and a pair of old shoes from the man in the moon. Yet another extravaganza, Cockelbie's Sow, was praised by Dunbar as a well-known Scottish classic, and must therefore have been in existence well before the end of the fifteenth century. From this evidence, it seems certain that a large number of popular poems, whose aim was amusement, was being produced about the time when "Christ's Kirk" was composed. To the ballads and to the alliterative verse tales as antecedents of "Christ's Kirk", there may be added the humorous tale in verse, which, like the subject of our study, frequently assumed a stanzaic form usually associated with serious romances, and derived some of its comic effect therefrom.

What distinguishes "Christ's Kirk" from the other poems cited is the persistence with which the genre it initiated has continued to appear in Scottish literature. For the depiction of crowd scenes, its stanza has been used, and its humorous tone has been imitated, in each age of vernacular literary activity. Nevertheless, without the influences that shaped it, and without the demand for humorous tales that provided a suitable climate of opinion for its composition, it might not have appeared at all, or might have been conceived in a form differing radically from that which it assumed.
Chapter III

A Critical and Textual Examination of "Christ's Kirk"

Having considered the possible sources from which the author of "Christ's Kirk" drew his material, it is now my purpose to subject to detailed examination a work whose "influence on the after vernacular poetry," according to T.F. Henderson, "can scarce be over-estimated."\(^{32}\)

The two earliest versions of the poem still extant are those contained in the Bannatyne MS. and the Maitland Folio MS., both of which date from the second half of the sixteenth century. These repositories of early Scottish verse owe their preservation, apparently, to the fact that they remained for a lengthy period in the families of their respective compilers, thus escaping the fate of so many Scottish documents that suffered destruction in the course of the civil and religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Bannatyne MS. was written at Newtyle in the county of Angus about 1568. Its sub-heading, "Written in time of pest," suggests that George Bannatyne had retired to his native place to escape the plague that ravaged Edinburgh in that year, and, finding time lying heavy on his hands, had proceeded to compile an anthology of Scottish verse. After his death the manuscript

\(^{32}\text{Op. cit., p. 112.}\)
passed to the Foulis family into which one of Bannatyne's daughters married, and in the hands of this family it remained until 1712. In that year it was given, by William Foulis of Woodhall, to an Edinburgh advocate, William Carmichael. By its new owner the Bannatyne MS. was made available to Allan Ramsay, who selected from it the poems that appeared in his Ever Green. Finally it became public property on its presentation to the Advocates' Library of Edinburgh in 1772, a bequest made by Carmichael's eldest son.

The history of the Maitland Folio MS. paralleled that of the Bannatyne MS. The descendants of Maitland of Lethington, who had compiled the MS. between 1570 and 1585, kept it in the possession of the family until the Duke of Lauderdale, a great-grandson of the compiler, presented it to Samuel Pepys. When Pepys died in 1703, the Maitland Folio MS. was bequeathed, along with his other papers and books, to Magdalene College in Cambridge, and in 1724 it was placed in the Pepysian Library of that college. Here it lay, virtually neglected, until mention of its existence by Bishop Percy, led to an examination of the contents by James Pinkerton. Pinkerton perceived the importance of the manuscript and, in 1786, published the first printed edition of its contents.

Both manuscripts, therefore, remained in private libraries during the seventeenth century, and, though their existence was undoubtedly known to a fairly wide circle of friends of the respective families, there is no evidence that the contents of
either had a wide public circulation. So far as is known the Bannatyne MS. remained untouched by editorial hands until the early years of the eighteenth century; in the case of the Maitland Folio MS. mention is made of a certain John Reidpath's receiving permission to copy from it all the poems by William Dunbar that he found therein. This, however, is the only record of a study of either manuscript during the seventeenth century.

Nevertheless broadsheet editions of "Christ's Kirk" appeared at intervals between 1600 and 1700, and it is almost certain that the version contained therein derived from neither of the manuscripts already mentioned. In it the bob and wheel have disappeared, being replaced by a single line of two stresses which gives a simple refrain, "That day," at the end of each stanza. In it stanzas have been added, much to the disgust of Pinkerton, who, in his notes to "Christ's Kirk" as it was in the Maitland Folio MS., wrote as follows: "This copy consists of twenty-three stanzas only; wanting two of the common edition, both of which are palpable interpolations. The last in particular is quite foreign to the piece in every respect, and must have been written by one quite ignorant of what he was reading."\(^{33}\)

The stanza that drew Pinkerton's fire was one in which mention of a bride and bridegroom turned the occasion into a country

\(^{33}\)Cited in Craigie, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 95.
wedding, a suggestion that Allan Ramsay was to employ as the foundation for the two cantos he added to the original poem. The offending stanza must have been appearing in broadsheet versions, since only its inclusion gives sense to the heading, "A Ballad of a Country Wedding," on the broadsheet edition that appeared about 1660. James Watson included this stanza in the version of "Christ's Kirk" which he published in 1706 as one of the *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*, and as he based his text on Edmund Gibson's edition of 1691, its inclusion seems to have become a matter of course, until Ramsay's printing of the Bannatyne version in 1724 led to its exclusion by later editors of the poem.

Collation of the two MSS. versions of the poem reveals, in general, a fairly close correspondence between them, when allowance is made for the probability that Bannatyne and Maitland were using different sources, and for the dialectal differences that existed, and still exist, between the speech of Angus in the North-East of Scotland and that of Lanarkshire in the South-West. From the evidence supplied by the use of "a" or "ane" before consonants, it would appear that Bannatyne's source was the earlier of the two, since Maitland's version has "ane" throughout. The order of stanzas in the *Bannatyne MS.*, also, gives a more unified reading, and for those reasons I have considered it as the standard text, which I have reproduced on pp. 1-5 of this paper, with the stanzas numbered for cross-reference.
with the text of the Maitland Folio MS.34

Textual variations, with one exception, are not significant, and differences in the spelling of some words may be accounted for by the dialectal backgrounds of the two compilers, or by slight discrepancies in their sources. Thus "thir", meaning "these", does not appear in the Maitland Folio MS., and here "war" replaces "wes" as the imperfect singular of the verb "to be". In Maitland's version, also, there seems to have been a conscious attempt to improve the rhythm of certain lines by substituting terms, synonymous with those used by Bannatyne, which give a smoother flow to the verse. Thus, in line 7 of stanza 8, where Bannatyne has "Bot be ane acrebraid it come nocht near him;", Maitland gives "myle" in place of "acrebraid". For the third line of stanza 19, Bannatyne's version runs, "Than followit feymen richt onafeard", while Maitland supplies, "Thai forsy freikis richt unaffeird". A more important textual variant is found in stanza 1, where the Bannatyne MS. has "kitteis" as a general term for flighty girls, while Maitland keeps to the singular, "kittie", and seems to refer to a particular person of that name who comes to the fair in her new kirtill of gray. The use of the term in a general sense provides a smoother transition to the second stanza, since "kitteis" may

34 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 149-155.
be equated with the "damosellis", whereas Maitland has to draw a distinction between the "damosellis" and the "lassis", and it is not made clear with which group "kittie" is to be associated.

There are differences also in the order of stanzas, and, in this regard, Bannatyne's order is superior to that of Maitland. In the *Maitland Folio MS*, the third and fourth stanzas of the *Bannatyne MS* are transposed, and the positions of the fifth and sixth stanzas are similarly reversed. Thereafter no variation occurs until the end of stanza 11, at which point Maitland inserts a stanza that is wholly lacking in Bannatyne's version. Since the interpolated stanza is, in tone and in its alliteration, similar to the rest of the poem, and since it depicts an incident that follows logically from what has just occurred, a case can be made for its inclusion in a definitive edition of "Christ's Kirk". Lowrie has struck his blow, the full force of which has been lessened by his victim's wearing a leather doublet (101-110). Nevertheless, so powerful is the stroke that:

The baff so boustuousle abasit him
To the erd he duschit doun;
The tother for dreid he preissit him,
And fled out of the toun.
The wyffis came forth and up they paisit him
And fand lyff in the loun;
And with thre routis they raisit him
And coverit him of swoune
Agane,
At Christis Kirk of the Grene. (111-120)

From this point on, variant readings are minor and dialectal; the order of the stanzas is the same in both manuscripts, though...
the inclusion of the stanza quoted above gives twenty-three for the Maitland Folio version of the poem, instead of Bannatyne's twenty-two.

In the form published by James Watson,35 "Christ's Kirk" differs widely from the version contained in the two manuscripts. The substitution of a simple refrain for the bob and wheel has already been mentioned. There is extensive transposition among the stanzas that describe the fight, and stanza eight is omitted entirely. Maitland's extra stanza is included, as are the two whose inclusion roused the wrath of Pinkerton. The first of these follows the description of the noise made by the women and the ringing of the common bell. It seems to poke fun at the village constable, who, as a tailor, was a follower of a craft noted for timidity. Certainly Tom Tailor is no heroic figure as the stanza relates:

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\begin{align*}
\text{By this Tom Tailor was in his gear,} \\
\text{when he heard the common bell,} \\
\text{He said, he should make all a stear} \\
\text{when he came there himself.} \\
\text{He went to fight with such a fear} \\
\text{while to the ground he fell.} \\
\text{A wife that hit him in the ear} \\
\text{with a great knocking mell} \\
\text{Fell'd him that day.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(181-189)

The final stanza is alike in all three versions, but Watson, following Gibson, has printed, as stanza twenty-three, the

\[35\text{Op cit., part 1, pp. 1-7.}\]
account of the bride and bridegroom that so annoyed Pinkerton. Study of the stave in question tends to confirm that editor's opinion that it does not fit in the context of the poem, and has been added to the original at some later date. It runs as follows:

The Bridegroom bought a pint of ale
and bade the piper drink it,
Drink it quothe he, and it so stale
ashrew me if I think it.
The bride her maidens stood nearby
and said it was not blinked
And Bartagesie the bride so gay,
upon him fast she winked
Full soon that day. (190-198)

Here, quite apart from the fact that it reads strangely in the midst of a description of a fight, the difference in tone is evident.

Even Allan Ramsay disowned the offending stanza, though he had already based his additional cantos upon the idea contained therein. His advertisement to the edition of his poems that appeared in 1718 makes clear his realisation that the stanza was an accretion, though, by its omission, he deprived his two cantos of any connection with the original poem. The advertisement, which casts an interesting light on Ramsay's editorial methods, is in these terms:

This edition of the First Canto is copied from an old Manuscript Collection of Scots Poems wrot an hundred and fifty years ago; where it is found to be done by King James I. Besides its being more correct the VIIIth stanza was not in print before, the last but one of the late edition being none of the King's gives place
to this.\textsuperscript{36}

The statement is less than exact. Ramsay has included two stanzas that do not appear in the \textit{Bannatyne MS}.; one is the stanza found in Maitland's version; the other which describes the conduct of the Tailor, is found in neither manuscript.

Setting aside all reference to the bride and the bridegroom, what we have is a poem describing the events at an annual fair in pre-Reformation Scotland. In a rural community, the centre of a sheep-farming district, the parish church with its grounds served as the natural meeting place for such gatherings. The employment of ground close to the church would not strike the minds of medieval people as incongruous, however strange it might be to us who live in an age when the church has ceased to be a focal point of community life. A social historian has described a similar scene at a medieval fair in an English town in these words:

\begin{quote}
In fair time the throng of traders expected to be able to overflow from the High Street into the Cathedral precincts, and were ever wont and used ... to lay open, buy and sell merchandise in the said church and cemetery. Edward I had indeed forbidden such fairs in his Statutes of Merchants, but such an order was little in harmony with the habits and customs of the age ...\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

In Scotland the field by the church served not only as a fair-

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Allan Ramsay, Poems, 1718, p. 37}, cited in Geddie, \textit{Bibliography}, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Mrs. J.R. Green, Town Life in the Fifteenth Century, London, 1894, vol. 1, p. 186.}
ground, but also as the scene of archery practice. A number of laws of the Parliament of Scotland are explicit on the point, and the Act of 1458 may serve as an illustration for all. "... and at the bowe merkis be maide at ilk parroch kirk a pair of buttis and schuting be usyt ilk sunday."  

The holding of a fair on sanctified ground becomes quite understandable, if we assume that the annual event had been an old pagan festival that had been taken over by the ecclesiastical authorities after the conversion of Scotland to Christianity. Though no explicit reference is made to any specific festival, internal evidence suggests that, like "Peblis to the Play," the poem has to do with Beltane, whose celebration on May 2 had become identified with the Christian feast of the Invention of the Cross. One of the rites of propitiation to the pagan gods of darkness at the beginning of summer was the burning of bonfires, and the line "branewood burnt in baalis" would suggest such a ceremony, dating from an earlier time when baalfires were the scenes of human sacrifices to appease the deities of winter. 

The gathering of the folks of the village and countryside was, therefore, no accidental occurrence, but was part of a long established pattern of communal behaviour. The significance of the occasion had been increased by the setting aside of Beltane as a term day when rents were due, and when farm servants

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38 Dickinson, loc. cit.
might seek new employers. Nor were these the sole reasons for the congregation of the inhabitants of the parish. The Scottish Parliament, mindful of the need for a national militia ready for instant mobilisation, had ordained, "That wapinschawingis be haldin be the lordis and barony's spirituale and temporale four tymis in the yere." These periodic musters also coincided with the quarter days, of which Beltane was one, and, as a result every able-bodied man would be present, armed as for war.

Some commentators have seen, in the large number of stanzas dealing with the misadventures of bowmen, propaganda for more intensive archery practice. It may well be that this is one reason for their inclusion, for the lack of skill of Scottish archers was sufficiently notorious to be matter for mirth on the part of English commentators, and was the cause of repeated exhortations by successive Scottish Parliaments, that the commons should devote their spare time to bowmanship, and eschew the playing of golf and football. Certainly, if the standard of archery exhibited in course of the melee at Christ's Kirk of the green is any criterion, the concern expressed by Scottish legislators was well-founded, but, though the poem contains satire at the expense of the archers, and its purpose may

39 Loc. cit.
have been partly didactic, the exaggerated account of their lack of skill is, quite certainly, an integral part of a poem whose tone is predominantly humorous. Even one successful shot would have led to fatal consequences, with a corresponding change from mirth to tragedy, and in avoiding this danger, the poet has made the possessors of lethal weapons into figures of fun.

Hard blows are given and taken, but they are inflicted by cudgels, staves, and fists, so that heads are broken, teeth are knocked out, combatants are knocked down and stunned -- but no one is killed or suffers permanent disablement. Depiction of the actions of bowmen as ludicrous, then, serves several purposes. There is comedy in the lack of success of the archers; there is a satiric implication that would not be lost on contemporary readers, mindful of criticism of Scottish bowmanship; there is maintenance of the humorous tone.

It is a measure of the poet's skill that he manages to vary the descriptions of the five unsuccessful attempts by bowmen to kill neighbours with whom they have temporarily fallen out. One, who had a high reputation as a marksman, was prevented from shooting at all by the breaking of his bow, which he had drawn back too hard in the heat of his anger. Of the three who missed their intended victims, it is implied that one had second thoughts and deliberately shot wide. The two others were blinded with rage, and of these, the possessor of a crossbow was prevented from shooting again, after his first bolt
"flew owre the byre," by the shout that his random shot had killed a priest. The rumoured accident was sufficient to cool the marksman's ardour, and in his perturbation he threw down his bow and took to his heels. Even Lowrie's well-directed shot to the stomach had no lasting ill-effects, since his victim, though stunned, was saved from serious injury by his leather doublet.

To account for the large number of stanzas on the subject of archery, it is surely enough to point out that the occasion of a "wapenschaw" would supply a valid reason for the presence of men armed with bows. It is not surprising that their part in the fight should be given prominence in view of its impact on a contemporary audience, but in a poem which is humorous in tone there would be no place for a fatal shooting affray. In this respect it is to be noted that Dick, who was likewise armed with a deadly weapon, was turned aside from his fell purpose by the ill-timed gibes of his wife and his mother, so that he slaked his anger by giving them a drubbing with his fists, instead of using his axe on some of his temporary foes.

Having disposed of those who might have caused fatal injuries, the poet allows the other actors to attack each other with plenty of fury. The suggestion of certain critics therefore that some noble, possibly royal, poet was satirising the cowardice of the commons, seems hardly tenable. Though a few individuals might behave in a fashion that was less than heroic,
there is no indication that the "heidmen of the heird" were engaged in anything but an all-in combat, or that the miller thought of ignoble retreat though faced by no fewer than ten assailants. In like manner, the mention of the young men flocking to the field, "as fierce as ony fire-flaucht fell," scarcely suggests that they showed any unwillingness to exchange blows.

Where satire is employed at the expense of those who acquitted themselves in a fashion less than heroic it is humorous rather than denunciatory. Two who acted in such a fashion, the cobbler and the minstrel, followed callings that were peaceful by tradition, and the practitioners of such crafts were, by analogy, peace-loving also. There is high humour in the suggestion that the cobbler's flight resulted from the entreaties of his wife, entreaties of sufficient strength, apparently, to keep him running for at least seven miles. The minstrel's taking shelter "within twa wanis" is treated in like manner, and the forethought that preserves him from harm receives ironical commendation. The poet, however, saves his most comic touches for the description of Hucheon's deeds. Hucheon has an affinity with Falstaff in his braggadocio, and in his dislike for the sight of his own blood. Here we have the recognisable type of butt in the petty officer of the law, of portly build, who takes to flight when he finds himself in danger. In this case Hucheon, once he has found that his "hazel ryss" --
which is possibly his staff of office — provides insufficient protection, asks for a parley as soon as he sees the blood flowing from a cut on his thumb. Even worse, he notices in the crowd some who have old scores to settle with him, and so, "He gart his feet defend his heid," a mock-heroic description of a flight that outstripped all pursuit.

In his description of the sights and sounds of the free-for-all, the narrator remains sufficiently close to the action to note the actions of the crowd, and to record the shouts and remarks of the bystanders. The "hideous yells" of the women are punctuated by the clanging of the common bell. The intimacy of the effect is heightened by the mention of individuals by their Christian names — Robene Roy, Heigh Hucheon, Jock, Dick — and by the poet's evident knowledge of the locality and of country customs. The lack of any apparent motive for the outbreak of general hostilities, following the initial quarrel between Jock and Robene Roy, shows the accuracy of the author's observation of the behaviour of crowds, for once a wrestling bout has got out of hand, particularly where there are many young men, full of holiday spirits, and possibly elevated by liquor as well, a free-for-all can break out with little or no further provocation.

Before the start of the fight, however, we have had a short but adequate description of the country dancing for which the services of Tom Lular had been engaged. Here again there is
a strong impression of the poet's first hand knowledge. Even as early as the fifteenth century the popularity of native dances was being challenged by that of foreign measures. The younger members of the crowd want French dances, and for these the piper plays, as well as giving the dancers music for the Morris dance, imported from England, but originally coming from the Moors of Spain. The scene might be contrasted with the dance of witches, described by Burns in "Tam o' Shanter". These wanted "nae cotillon brent new frae France," but capered to Auld Nick's playing of "hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels," though, of course, as "wither'd beldames old and droll," they probably had little patience with the latest fashions in the dance, such as youth of all ages have demanded in despite of their elders.

Mention of the crowd of wooers and of the damosels and lasses indicates that the participants in the dance were, in general, youthful. Certainly the girls display their adolescence by their reactions to the attentions of the young men whose whistles of appreciation cause them to neigh like goats. In his description of the attire of the lasses, the poet reveals his knowledge of the fashions of the day. He mentions the skirts, of grey or Lincoln green, well pressed into pleats; he notes their doeskin gloves, and their shoes of Morocco leather from the Straits of Gibraltar. Gillie's "flyting" at Jock is likewise recorded, as though from first hand knowledge. Thus
her opinion of her suitor as not worth two beetles, and her outspoken criticism of his pipe-stem legs as resembling two distaffs, have all the marks of authenticity, as if the poet had been eavesdropping on the quarrel between the pair, and noting some of the pithier remarks.

The author of "Christ's Kirk" has given us, then, more than a painstaking description, by an outsider, of events at a village fair. The omnipresent and omniscient narrator knows the place and the people he is dealing with; knows them well; is sympathetic towards them; and yet manages to be sufficiently objective to note the ludicrous, as well as the serious happenings at the fair. Whatever his rank in society, the poet shows a deep knowledge of the common folk, and it is hard to justify the suggestion made by one scholar that "Christ's Kirk" was intended as a satire, by a noble poet, on the pretensions of the commons. If that were so, it would rank with "Metzi's Wedding", "The Peasants of St. Polten", and other poems dealing with the German peasant brawl, poems in which the peasant characters ape the manners of the nobility, until the thin veneer of sophistication wears off under the influence of liquor. In "Christ's Kirk" there is no suggestion that the villagers are attempting to imitate the gentry, and, where there are

\[^{40}\text{G. F. Jones, "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis to the Play" and the German peasant brawl, "PMLA, vol. 68, 1955, pp.1101-25.}\]
satirical touches, they are directed at the conduct of individuals rather than at the values of the folk in general. It is true that, in "Peblis to the Play", which the same critic also cites, the townspeople do laugh at the quaint dress and manners of their country neighbours, but this, too, is realistic rather than satirical, for such a reaction was not confined to Scotland of the fifteenth century; it still exists in those parts of the world where the distinction between town and countryside survives.

C.S. Lewis, in his account of popular poetry in Middle Scots, has suggested that "Christ's Kirk" gains its effect from the poet's perfect command of his material and his stanzas. After he has indicated that "Peblis to the Play" and "Christ's Kirk" were, in his opinion, composed by different poets, he goes on to write that, "They let us see pretty clearly that they had poetry of a very different sort at their disposal if they had wished to use it." By this he meant that the presence of occasional lyric touches shows a bent towards lyrical verse on the part of the poets concerned. Certainly "Christ's Kirk" has numerous evocative phrases; the descriptions of Gillie, the slipping away of the minstrel who "won within twa wanis", the soutar's wife with her "Glitterand hair that was full golden", suggest an ability to use the descriptive epithet with a full

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sense of the value of words. The same quality appears in the narrative of the fight where the wealth of alliteration is employed to present a scene of furious action. Thus one would-be archer handled his tackle so roughly that, "The bow in flinders flew," the young men rushed to the field, "As fierce as ony fire-flaucht fell," "Whill all the steeple rockit," from the rude ringing of the common bell.

In going on to compare "Christ's Kirk" with some of the poetry of Skelton, Lewis sums up his impressions as to their respective merits in these words. "The difference lies in the art. These "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis to the Play" are poems about confusion and vulgarity, not confused and vulgar poems." Later, in dealing with "The Tunning of Eleanor Rumming," he once again draws a parallel with "Christ's Kirk" when he writes of Skelton's poem:

The merit of the thing lies in its speed ... We get a vivid impression of riotous bustle, chatter, and crazy disorder. All is ugly but all is alive. The poem thus has a good deal in common with "Peblis to the Play" and "Christ's Kirk"; what it lacks is their melody and gaiety. The poet and we may laugh, but we hardly enter into the enjoyment of his sort of foul drabs.

In addition to the melody and gaiety of the poem, the main impression that a modern reader obtains is the timelessness of the scene that is depicted. The weapons may be old-

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42 Loc. cit.
43 Ibid., p. 138.
fashioned, the fashions of dress may have changed, but the people behave in ways that have altered little over a period of five centuries. It was certainly recognition of this fact that inspired Scottish poets of the eighteenth century to use the same form and tone in their poems on popular amusements, and in their depiction of the humour -- and occasionally the ill-humour -- of crowds, whether seeking pleasure at a race-meeting, an election gathering, an open-air preaching festival, or a Hallowe'en party. It is this aspect of the poem that appeals to the reader of "Christ's Kirk" in our own day, for though the scene is archaic, the conduct of members of the gathering is not, and it is interesting to surmise what the writer would do, if, by a process of reincarnation, he could be present at a similar festivity of the present day, and then feel inspired to record his impressions in stanzas similar to those of "Christ's Kirk of the green."
Chapter IV

The "Christ's Kirk" stave in late Middle Scots poetry

Though our attention has been focussed, hitherto, on "Christ's Kirk" itself, both for its intrinsic merit, and as a forerunner of later examples of genre painting, that is only because it alone, of poems of this type, was available to editors of the early eighteenth century. In fact three other poems, "Sym and his Brudir" and "The Jousting and Debait at the Drum" from the Bannatyne MS., and "Peblis to the Play" from the Maitland Folio MS., are written in the same ten-line stanza with its distinctive bob and wheel. Of the three poems "Sym and his Brudir" and "Peblis to the Play" may date from the same period as "Christ's Kirk", and a case may be made for the common authorship of the last two of these. "The Jousting and Debait" was ascribed by Bannatyne to Alexander Scott, whose poetical works appeared between 1545 and 1568; so that we can say with more certainty than usual that it was the last of the poems in this group to be composed.

In some ways it is unfortunate that "Peblis to the Play" was not readily available as a model for vernacular poets of the eighteenth century for it complements "Christ's Kirk"; it accompanies the latter as a companion piece in modern anthologies, and is linked with it in critical estimates of value, but, in 1786, when Pinkerton's edition of the Maitland Folio MS. brought
the poem to public attention once more, Ramsay and Fergusson were both dead, and Burns, though the Kilmarnock edition of his poems appeared in the same year, had only ten more years to live. Expressions of regret may, however, be tempered by the knowledge that both Fergusson and Burns rounded out the theme of "Christ's Kirk" to include the end of the day's merrymaking, just as was done in "Peblis to the Play" which, though it also deals with quarrelling and fighting, devotes space to the description of the country dance that followed the restoration of peace, and ends on a note that is almost lyrical, with the tearful farewells of the young couples.

Like "Christ's Kirk," "Peblis to the Play" opens with the description of preparations for the fair, which in this case is explicitly a Beltane occasion. This time, however, the poet lingers over his depiction of the bustle in a typical farm steading where:

All the wenches of the west
War up or the cock crew. (11-12)

They busy themselves with last minute details of dress; some bemoan their lack of well-ironed kerchiefs, while Meg, whose woes are singled out for special attention, bewails the fact that her face and neck have been so "evil sone-brint" that she will have to disguise them with "ane hude" and a tippet. So intense are her feelings of mingled disappointment and expectancy that

she is quite unable to eat or drink anything, despite the advice of her companions that she should keep calm.

No less than four stanzas are devoted to the journey to town along the highroad that becomes progressively more crowded as each farm lane adds men, women, and children to the throng. To speed them on their way are pipers playing popular tunes; young men sing and play the fool to hide their discomfort in the presence of the country maidens with whom, however, they soon pair off for their journey to Peebles. When the throng of countryfolk, dressed in their best, arrive at the town gates, their appearance is matter for mirth on the part of their more sophisticated urban neighbours who "Leuch at thair array" and ask if the gypsies or the "Quene of May" and her retinue are coming to the sports.

The first stop is, naturally, the ale-house. Here arises the apparently inevitable quarrel, a quarrel that soon turns into a fight. Apparently the forces of law and order are stronger in Peebles than they were at Christ's Kirk, for the fight ends with seven of the combatants "gruffling in the stokkis" and thirty-three more "thrumland in a middin." The incidents at the inn, as well as those of the fight, are rendered with the same attention to detail that was a feature of "Christ's Kirk" also. Dialogue is used freely in narrating the stages of the quarrel, and, once again, the actions of individuals, especially those of a comic nature, are selected for special
notice. The attempts of the cadger to save his goods, and incidentally himself, from harm are rendered in terms of broad farce. First his baskets of merchandise fall to the ground; then he tumbles into a puddle when the girding strap of the harness breaks; finally, in answer to his cries for help, his wife drags him "al bedirten" from a particularly muddy spot.

Just as the comic aspects of the turmoil receive most attention, so the humours of the dance that follows the quelling of the riot are given the greatest prominence. The piper is induced to continue playing for the dancers, though he grumbles unceasingly that he has received no payment, and suggests that three-halfpence would be none too small a reward for his pains. Again, as in "Christ's Kirk", the prowess of one of the dancers is singled out for comment. There is an obvious correspondence between the mighty leaping of Steven and the performance of Will Swane, who "hockit about" so heavily that all ran to see him, to the great delight of the performer, who takes their expressions of amusement for those of admiration for his skill.

The three concluding stanzas have a quietness that is totally lacking in "Christ's Kirk," but which is in keeping with the exhaustion of spirits at the end of a long day of merrymaking. The newly-matched pairs of lovers part, with tears and sighs, and with promises of future assignations. The final stanza, indeed, begins with a kind of lyric evensong:

Be that the sone was settand schaftis,
And nere done wes the day.  

(251-252)
The poet, however, is merely having a joke at the expense of the reader, for the stillness he has created is only to make the sound of farewell kisses the more audible "Quhen that thai went thair way."

In general, what has already been said of "Christ's Kirk" applies to "Peblis to the Play". There is the same careful description of many incidents, but in this case the comic, rather than the serious aspects are given greater prominence. Satire, where it exists, is light and is directed at the pretensions of the townsfolk, rather than at the country people who have come to Peebles to enjoy themselves on an uninhibited holiday revel. In this poem, however, the lyric element is stronger with occasional repetition of phrase suggesting the movement of a formal dance in lines such as:

Than thai come to the townis end
Withoutin more delai,
He befoir and scho befoir,
To see quha was maist gay. \(81-84\)

The same device is employed in the lines:

Than he to-ga and scho to-ga
And nevir ane bad abyd you, \(71-72\)

where, once again, the effect is that of a formal procession in a dance figure.

"Peblis to the Play" differs, however, from its companion piece in its relative lack of alliteration and in the omission of rhyme in the first, third, fifth, and seventh lines of many of its stanzas. In fact, only the first four stanzas follow the pattern of alternate rhyme with any consistency. Thereafter
several stanzas maintain the rhyme of line one with line three, but subsequently even this is abandoned, and only lines two, four six, and eight are left rhyming. In his abandonment of alliteration as a prosodic ornament, and in his varying of the rhyming pattern of the "Christ's Kirk" stave, the poet gives a foretaste of the different rhyming patterns that later vernacular poets -- Burns in particular -- were to employ within the framework of this stanzaic form.

If "Peblis to the Play" points forward to the revival of vernacular verse in eighteenth-century Scotland, the same cannot be said of "Sym and his brudir". This poem looks back to the medieval fabliau in its description of the practices of two begging friars of St. Andrews, though its narration of the tumultuous events at the brother's wedding does give it a link with "Christ's Kirk", which likewise depicts a scene of furious activity. The main criticism that can be levelled at "Sym and his Brudir" is its lack of unity. At the opening of the poem we have a satirical account of the somewhat questionable activities of the two brothers, whose mode of life has been determined by their innate laziness. Then, with only the barest mention of the desire of Sym's brother to have a wife, comes the description of the horse-play that accompanies his wedding. This occupies the rest of the poem, which, judging from its abrupt conclusion, is incomplete.

When we first meet the two brothers, we find them acting as professional beggars with considerable success. Like the friar described by Chaucer in his "Summoner's Tale,"\(^{46}\) they went about,

To preche and eek to begge, ... \(^{(1712)}\)

but later they expanded their business to include the sale of forged relics, after the manner of Chaucer's Pardoner. Like him they beguile the countryside with forged relics, silencing doubters with the sight of a parchment that they claim to have brought from Rome, though, in truth, they have never been farther afield than Perth.

The cynical attitude of the Pardoner is matched by that of the brothers, who in this matter think as one. The Pardoner, as described by Chaucer,\(^{47}\)

... had a croys of latoun, ful of stones,  
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.  
But with these relikes, whan that he fond  
A povre person dwelling up-on londe,  
Up-on a day he gat him more moneye  
Than that the person gat in monthes tweye.  
And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,  
He made the person and the peple his apes. \(^{(699-706)}\)

Of the two brothers the unknown poet has written,

quhen meit was went thay flew our fellis  
als bissy as ony beis  
Syne clengit sanct Jameis schellis  
and pecis of palm treis  
To se quha best the pardone spellis.

\(^{46}\) Op. cit., Fragment III (Group D) pp. 94-100.  
\(^{47}\) Ibid., Fragment I (Group A), pp. 17-25.
I schrew thame that ay leifs
but laugher
quod syme to his brudir.    (39-45)

The opening of the poem, with its references to tales in verse of Iohine, Robene hude, and Wallace wicht, resembles the beginning of a typical fabliau, for, having whetted the curiosity of his audience, the narrator goes on to compare these stories with that which he is going to tell. In his satirical account of the deeds of the brothers, the poet uses the bob and wheel effectively to give point to his remarks. For example, though the brothers' occupation takes them frequently to the precincts of churches, we are told that,

...sen thair bairdis grew on thair mow
They saw nevir the kirk
within
Nowthir sym nor his brudir.    (16-18)

Here the force of the single-word bob emphasises the contrast between their conduct and that of devoted servants of the church, with which neither of the brothers has any sympathy. The antithesis between their scale of values and Christian doctrine is brought out in the description of their reaction to the wealth that they obtained in such questionable fashion. In the words of the poem, "Thay puft thame up in pryd," then the brother decides to taste the joys of matrimony, though Sym is not so particular and is content to live in "synning".

From this point one would expect the tale to develop along the lines of a fabliau, with cuckoldry or the outwitting of the two rogues as its theme. Unfortunately it is here that an
abrupt shift of emphasis takes place, and our attention is directed away from the two rascals to a confused description of the horseplay that accompanies the wedding. The poem thereby changes from a satire into a broad farce, and, as a result, the suspense that has been built up is dissipated. Among the activities described is a mock tournament, the reason for which is never made clear, and the last three stanzas concern themselves with the deeds of Job Symmer, the town herdsman, who takes the centre of the stage to the exclusion of the two worthies.

Job, as one of the combatants in the joust, is arrayed in armour made from "twa plaitis of ane awld pan", but the result of his intervention in the quarrel only emphasises his unsuitability for knightly deeds, for,

His mouth wes schent and sa forschorne
Held nowdir wind nor water
Fair weill all blast of blawing horne
He micht not do but blatter
He endis the story with harme forlorne
The nolt begowt to skatter
The ky ran startling to the corne
Wa worth the tyme thow gat hir
now
quod symme till his brudir. (127-135)

On this scene of confusion the curtain descends, for, with this parody of the romance tournament, the manuscript version ends. Such an abrupt ending, with the two main characters off stage, suggests that the poem may be incomplete, or that the poet's fantasy failed him.

Yet another possibility is that one poet was responsible
for the satirical opening stanzas, and that another, and less
gifted, maker added the part of the poem that deals with the
wedding of Sym's brother. The abrupt change of tone, as well as
the weakness in handling the metrical form, would support this
conclusion, for the latter part of "Sym and his brudir" re-
sembles an unsuccessful attempt to emulate the verve and
extravagance of "Christ's Kirk." In any event, whatever the
reason for the sudden shift in focus, the result is an imperfect
fusion of thematic elements. Nevertheless the poem must have had
a sufficiently wide circulation for its two main characters to
have been considered as representative types of begging friars,
since they are mentioned by Sir David Lindsay in "Peder
Coffeis",\(^48\) his satire on clerical abuses. There, the begging
friars are described as going about the countryside,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Peipand peurly with piteous granis} \\
\text{Like fenzeit Symmie and his bruder.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(23-24)}

It is, however, the description of the mock tournament
in "Sym and his brudir" that gives it a link with Alexander
Scott's "Jousting and Debait at the Drum",\(^49\) Tales in verse
on the ludicrous attempts of the commons to ape the chivalric
code had a wide popularity, both in Middle English and in Middle


Scots, and Scott could use as models the English "Turnament of Tottenham", Dunbar's "Turnament of the Tailliour and the Sowttar", and Lindsay's "Justing betuix James Watson and Jhone Barbour". What is surprising is that a poet, whose main claim to be remembered rests on his love lyrics, should have turned his hand to a theme such as this, with its echoes of a medieval outlook on life that had almost passed away. It seems almost as though Scott wrote this poem while he was trying to discover his true métier, and, finding no delight in poetry that succeeds by its sheer force of diction, turned to Elizabethan lyrics, of the type written by Wyatt and Surrey, for his models.

Also lacking in Scott was a zest for the coarser elements of broad farce that is so evident in the three poems already cited. Not for him was the description of the accoutrements of the bachelors who came together to do battle for Tib's hand in marriage in the "Turnament of Tottenham":

When thei had their oaths made; forth cam thei te
With flayles and harnys and trumps made of trie
There were all the bachelors of that contrie;
Thei were dicht in aray as thaim self wolde be:
    Theire baner was ful bricht
Off an olde raton fell
The chefe was of a ploo mell,
And the schadow of a bell
    Quartered with the mone licht. (145-153)

Lacking also was the wild comic fantasy of Dunbar as examplified in his description of the tailor and his retinue:

The tailyeour, baith with speir and scheild,
Convoyit wes unto the field
With mony lymmar loun,
Of seme byttaris and beist knapperis,
Of stomok steillaris and clayth takkaris,
A graceles garisoun.

His baner born wes him befoir,
Quhairin wes clowttis ane hundred scoir,
Ilk ane of divers hew;
And all stowin out of sindry webbis,
For, quhill the Greik sie flowis and ebbis,
Telyouris will nevir be trew. (7-18)

Gilbert Pilkington in his "Turnament of Tottenham," and Dunbar, in his "Turnament of the Tailliour and the Sowttar", describe, with open enjoyment, the failure of the combatants to control their bodily functions. Lindsay, in his "Justing betuix James Watson and Jhone Barbour," written in 1538, manages, in general to catch the broad humour of the Middle Ages, though one has the impression, while reading his smooth flowing couplets, that some of the more unsavoury details are not quite to his more fastidious taste. Scott, writing some twenty years after Lindsay, has pared down the breadth of humour almost to vanishing point in his lightly witty narrative of a joust that did not even take place because of the unwillingness of one of the intended champions.

Nevertheless the poem starts in promising fashion with the naming of the two champions, Will Adamson and Johine Sym, who have met to do battle for "a lusty lady gent." Her honour, in the event, proves to have been as frail as was Johine's pretension to courage, for after the joust has been called-off because of his refusal to fight, it is discovered that he has
already seduced the intended prize and she is about to become a mother.

What we do have is a narrative, consciously witty, told in neatly turned verse in which the "Christ's Kirk" stave ceases to rush like a mountain torrent and becomes a gently flowing stream. The "Jousting and Debait" suffers also from a dichotomy of purpose in that Scott has tried to synthesise his thematic and formal models in a description of a churlish joust and a popular gathering of spectators out for a day's amusement. In so doing, he has fallen between two stools; the members of the group never emerge as individuals; they remain anonymous consumers of "baith syne and vennisoun", or spend their time heckling the combatants for their refusal to come to blows. The two principals, likewise, never become more than straw figures manipulated by their creator to exhibit his own cleverness.

The truth of the matter is that the poem is too consciously contrived, and, as a result, lacks spontaneity. It exemplifies the commonest fault of Scottish poetry composed by those poets who drew their inspiration mainly from England and from English models. In the work of Alexander Scott we see the first signs of that tendency which was to intensify after the Union of the Crowns sent the Scottish Court to London in 1603 -- the conscious toning down of the native idiom of thought and language. Thus, what would have been uproarious farce -- bawdy perhaps, but overflowing with life -- in the hands of Dunbar
becomes an exercise in polite humour, with the restrained smile, rather than the uninhibited laugh, as its object. Compare Dunbar's description of the setting and the rival champions in his poem about a tournament:

\[
\text{Nixt that a turnament was tryid} \\
\text{That lang befoir in hell was cryid} \\
\text{In presens of Mahoun;} \\
\text{Betuix a telyour and ane sowtar,} \\
\text{A pricklous and ane hobbell clowttar,} \\
\text{The barres was maid boun,} \\
\] (1-6)

with Scott's depiction of a similar scene:

\[
\text{Up at the Drum the day wes sett,} \\
\text{And fixit wes the feild} \\
\text{Whair baith thir noble chiftanis mett} \\
\text{Enarmit undir scheild.} \\
\] (21-24)

The sheer audacity of Dunbar's invention helps us to suspend disbelief in a way that Scott's more prosaic account does not, for we cannot see Adamson and Sym as "noble chiftanis" despite the inclusion of allusions comparing them with "Mars the god armipotent", or Hercules who "dang the devill of hell." Even the mention of the "dowsy peirs" -- the twelve paladins who followed Charlemagne -- fails to supply an effective contrast, because of its remoteness to the two rather scared youngsters who are expected to fight to amuse a holiday crowd.

What the "Justing and Debait" lacks most is the presence of an eye-witness to the scenes that are described. The reader is never free from the feeling that here we have a poem conceived and produced in the study, with the models drawn from books rather than from life. For this reason it lacks the
close contact with its subject matter that was a feature of "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis to the Play". As a result, the "Jousting and Debait" falls far below them in value, and the bugle that signifies to the crowd at the Drum that "nycht had thame oun'tane" might be taken as a prophetic signal of the long night that was to descend on Scottish vernacular verse, and was to keep it in shadow for the next hundred and fifty years.

From the point of view of the literary historian, such a period of silence may not have been all loss. When Fergusson and Burns began writing, new customs and new occasions, unthought of at an earlier period, caused the congregation of crowds for events other than those depicted in "Christ's Kirk", and so the old-established form could be employed afresh. Alexander Scott, writing at the end of the earlier period, had invented an occasion, possibly to avoid the necessity for traversing familiar ground, and the comparative failure of his attempt would indicate that a period of fallow was needed before the form could be employed anew.
Chapter V

Eighteenth-Century Vernacular Poetry in the "Christ's Kirk" Tradition

In the middle of the sixteenth century, during the lifetime of Alexander Scott, a movement away from the old Scots literary tradition became discernible, and, throughout the seventeenth century, Scots was rapidly ceasing to be a literary language and was declining to the status of a spoken dialect. Thus, when the eighteenth century witnessed a revival of interest in vernacular poetry, the first task that had to be faced was the rediscovery of a written idiom which had all but vanished. To this task Allan Ramsay, in particular, bent his energies, and at a time when many Scotsmen were mourning the loss of their country's separate identity as a political organism, he set to work to supply the necessary materials for a revival of vernacular literature by his publication of the poetry of an earlier day. He did more; he himself used the traditional metrical forms that he found, and, in some of his verse at least, he clothed his thoughts in the dialect of Central Scotland. To this patriotic impulse of Ramsay we owe the works of Fergusson and Burns, both of whom owned their debt to him, and both of whom built on the foundation that he had laid.

Nonetheless, the ground plan that Ramsay marked out for those who were to follow him was one that was circumscribed.
The tradition that he handed on accepted the conception of Scots verse as being popular, that is, rustic or comic, and excluded the courtly poetry of the makars from consideration. A modern critic, the editor of the Scottish Text Society's volumes of the poems of Fergusson, has pointed out the limitations of his concept as follows:

The consequences of his conservatism were revolutionary: working within an aristocratic tradition of comic verse he had fathered a poetry that was thoroughly popular in both spirit and technique. Yet the revolutionary nature of his creation, particularly in the latter respect, was not apparent to him. He assumed that his Scots poetry was essentially of the same kind as all Scots poetry that had gone before, and differed only in having lost its fashionable status. The only consequence of that social descent that was clear to him was a limitation of subject matter: that the nature of the language itself was affected by the change he did not consider. He was indeed quite unaware of the sophisticated quality of the diction of the older poetry, and he had no conception of a Scots language that was as far removed from popular usage as it was from English.52

The reference to "an aristocratic tradition of comic verse" is not to the poetry of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries but to literary jokes perpetrated by gentlemen poetasters like Robert Sempill and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, who saved their Scots vernacular verse for humorous poems about rustics, and who used English models for poetry of more serious import. By his reprinting of their works in Scots, and by his

own imitations of them, Ramsay allied himself with those whom Sibbald castigated in his remarks on the beginnings of modern Scots poetry:

For the dialect which is now called Scottish, we are indebted to a few writers, of depraved taste about the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries who instead of contributing like Drummond of Hawthornden, to the improvement of the written language of their country, chose to pen elegies to pipers and dying speeches of hounds and horses, in the familiar dialects of the meanest vulgar.53

It might be argued that, in publishing the _Ever Green_, Ramsay was making available to his contemporaries and successors the works of the early makars, but it appeared after his compilations of popular verse, and his own verses in the same manner had charted the course which later Scots poets were to follow. He himself seems to have looked on the selection of poems from the _Bannatyne MS_ as curiosities from an age when, in his opinion, Scottish poetry had been undefiled by foreign influences. That, at least, appears to be the import of the preface to his anthology, in the course of which he wrote:

> When these good old bards wrote, we had not made use of imported trimmings upon our cloaths, nor foreign Embroidery in our writings. Their poetry is the Product of their own country, not pilfered and spoiled in the Transportation from abroad. Their images are native and their Landskips domestick: copied from these fields and Meadows we every day behold.54


54 Ramsay, _Ever Green_, p. vii.
The community of style that medieval Scots poetry shared with other sophisticated literatures of Europe was hidden from him, and he found nothing in it to praise but its Scottishness. Study of the contemporary poems that he tricked out in antique guise for inclusion in his *Ever Green* serves to confirm the idea that he felt that he was dealing with literary curiosities from a bygone age. These poems, "The Eagle and Robin Red-breist" and "The Vision", to name two examples, he turned into language which was made deliberately archaic, and the latter of these he tricked out with a spurious subtitle, "Compylit in Latin be a most lernit Clerk in Tyme of our Hairship and Oppression, anno 1300, and translatit in 1524."

Even the inclusion of such pieces, with their *ex post facto* "prophecies", did not ensure the success of the *Ever Green*. The Scottish reading public, conditioned by Ramsay's earlier compilations to expect something light, showed its disappointment; Ramsay wearied of the task; the projected fourth volume never appeared, and there were no reprints of the incomplete anthology in his lifetime. "Christ's Kirk" may be cited to show the lack of attention given to the *Ever Green*. Here Ramsay printed it in its original form, with the bob and wheel, but it was the amended stanza, with a simple refrain ending in "day", that was used by later poets, who followed the example of his earlier, modernised, version.

Setting aside the *Ever Green*, the tradition that Ramsay cherished and passed on was impoverished. As a result, both
Fergusson and Burns were forced to imitate models written in standard English, a medium in which neither felt at home. Fergusson, indeed, never achieved a synthesis between his poetry in Scots and the verses which he wrote in English. Burns tried, and failed, to unite the two styles in poems such as "The Cottar's Saturday Night", because the grand manner, though genuine, seems forced and out of place in the rustic context. The Ayrshire poet was more successful, however, in his attempt to create a unity between the dialect of his own time and a composite literary tradition of the past. In poems like "Holy Willie's Prayer" the vernacular is reinforced by the satiric boisterousness of Lindsay's "Thrie Estaitis," the starkness of the ballads, the warmth and earthiness of folk-song, and the pious beat of Scottish metrical psalmody.

Ramsay, however, had gone to his grave unaware of the impoverished tradition that he had passed on. For him it was enough that poetry — any poetry — was once more being written in Scots. It is unfortunate that his taste lay, in the direction of comic or sentimental verse, for it was poetry in these veins that he usually collected, often imitated, and occasionally composed. The sense of outraged nationalism that caused him to resurrect what he did from the past led him to save much that was not worth preserving. The critical tests that he applied confined themselves to the Scottishness and the apparent antiquity of the pieces he published. He was acutely conscious,
strangely enough, of the effect of his use of Scots on a genteel audience, and, at least once, he felt it necessary to defend, if not to apologise for, his Scotticisms. Thus, in the preface to the 1721 edition of his poems, we find, "The Scotticisms which perhaps may offend some over-nice ear give new life and grace to the poetry and become their place as well as the Doric dialect of Theocritus, so much admired by the best judges."55

Ramsay's eagerness to appease "the best judges" reminds us that these were admirers of neo-classicism in verse, with its concomitant, among less gifted versifiers, of poetic diction. For the use of such diction Ramsay felt no apology was necessary, and he employed it freely in the poems and folk-songs which he tricked out in a guise of pseudo-elegance. One gets the impression that he preferred to exchange the freshness of old songs and poems for a mass of clichés, deriving from English models. Thus, an old Scots lyric, "The last time I cam ower the muir", becomes, in his version, "The happy lover's reflections", and even more banal is his handling of the seventeenth century ballad, "Bessie Bell and Mary Gray".56 In its original form, this told of "two bonnie lasses" who built themselves a retreat from the plague, but failed to escape it, and were buried


together. Ignoring these pathetic associations, Ramsay turned the poem into a catalogue of their charms, full of inflated epithets. Comparison of the second stanza of the original, with that composed by Ramsay makes clear the contrast. In the ballad we have:

They thought to lie in Methven Kirk,
    Amang their noble kin,
But they maun lie on Lyndoch brae,
    To beak fornet the sun.
O Bessie Bell and Mary Gray,
They were twa bonnie lasses,
They big it a bower on yon burn-brae,
    And theekit it o'er wi' rashes.    (9-16)

Ramsay gives us:

Now Bessy's hair's like a lint-tap;
She smiles like a May morning,
When Phoebus starts from Thetis' lap,
The hills with rays adorning:
White is her neck, soft is her hand,
Her waist and feet's fu' genty;
With every grace she can command;
Her lips, O wow! they're dainty.    (9-16)

Individual words and phrases from other poems could be used as the basis for a handbook of poetic diction. Tears are "briny streams"; "the heaving milky way" is the female breast; sheep are "the pastor's tender care"; yet a poet capable of such phraseology appears to feel that he was condescending in his use of the vernacular in "Christ's Kirk".

Such an attitude of condescension appears all too clearly in his published version of the original poem, with the addition

57 Ibid., pp. 58-59.
of two cantos of his own. To him the characters of the old poem were clowns and buffoons, and his feeling toward them is expressed in the note appended to the second of his cantos, where he writes:

Thus have I pursued these comical characters, having gentlemen's health and pleasure, and the good manners of the vulgar in view: the main design of comedy being to present the follies and mistakes of low life in a just light, making them appear as ridiculous as they really are, that each who is a spectator may avoid being the object of laughter.\(^{58}\)

In pursuing that aim, he turned the characters, young and old, men and women, into boorish drunkards, and stressed the coarseness and vulgarity of their actions. His attitude was, in fact, that of the sophisticated city-dweller, who, having been forced to attend the wedding of a country relative, has resolved to make the best of matters by collecting instances of the rudeness and gaucherie of country folk to regale his city friends on his return. Added thereto, in Ramsay's case, was a rather juvenile sense of humour that accentuated grossness by innuendo, so that the uninhibited merriment that accompanied the bedding of the bride and groom is rendered with a prurient snigger. An unhealthy enjoyment of the salacious, indeed marred a number of his vernacular poems, notably "Lucky Spence's last advice", in which a decayed madam advises the inmates of her

\(^{58}\)Ramsay, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 82.
brothel as to their conduct once her death has deprived them of her counsel. One does not require to be prudish to feel disgust at:

Drive at the Jango till he spew,
Syne he'll sleep soun.

When he's asleep, then dive and catch
His ready cash, his rings and watch;
And gin he likes to light his Match
At your Spunk-box,
Ne'er stand to let the fumbling Wretch
E'en take the pox. (19-30)

The same feeling is aroused by a perusal of the two additional cantos of "Christ's Kirk", for here, too, Ramsay's obsession with filth, both moral and physical, causes him to expatiate on the functioning or mal-functioning of the excretory organs, and to insinuate, in indirect terms, that the groom lacks virility, then explain his allusion with yet another double-entendre. What, for instance, are we to make of:

She fand her lad was not in trim,
And be this same good token
That ilka member, lith and lim,
Was souple like a docken,
'Bout him that day.? (Canto III, 190-193)

Then, in his footnote, he adopts a tone of outraged innocence, by asking rhetorically, "Pray, is there anything vicious or unbecoming in saying -- "Men's liths and limbs are supple when intoxicated?" (sic). 61

The salacity that distorted his vision, and lack of

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60 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 66-82.

61 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 82.
magnanimity are both evident in the second and third cantos of "Christ's Kirk", and it is the presence of the one, and the absence of the other that cause his additions to the poem to fall short of the original. Instead of the candid camera that recorded objectively the events at a country fair, we are given an account in highly subjective terms of the happenings at a country wedding. The participants are held up to scorn; lasses, who, in the original canto were "Licht of laitis", have turned into clumsy country girls, who, in the movements of a reel,

\[
\text{Gar'd a' their hurdies wallop,} \\
\text{And swat like pownies when they speel} \\
\text{Up braes, or when they gallop.} \quad \text{(Canto II, 76-78)}
\]

Lowry, Robin, and Hucheon have likewise degenerated into drunken sots, so that what was intended for humour evokes only disgust when we read:

\[
\text{But Lawrie he took out his nap} \\
\text{Upon a mow of pease;} \\
\text{And Robin spewed in's ain wife's lap} \\
\text{He said it gave him ease.} \\
\text{Hucheon, with a three-lugged cap,} \\
\text{His head bizzen wi' bees} \\
\text{Hit Geordie a mislushios rap,} \\
\text{And brak the brig o's neeze.} \quad \text{(Canto III, 161-168)}
\]

Perhaps a direct comparison of two stanzas best shows how the poem, in its treatment by Ramsay, has deteriorated from the original. Since the last stanza of Ramsay's second canto is parallel with the opening stave of the old poem, it is easy to see how far superior was the model. The first stanza of "Christ's Kirk", it will be recalled, runs as follows:

\[
\text{Was nevir in Scotland heard nor seen} \\
\text{Sic. dancing nor deray,}
\]
Neither at Falkland on the Green,
Nor Peblis at the play,
As wes of wooeris as I ween
At Christ's Kirk on ane day;
There came our kitteis waschen clene
In their new kirtillis of grey,
   Full gay,
At Christ's Kirk of the green.   (1-10)

In contrast, Ramsay's stanza is tawdry and empty:

   Was ne'er in Scotland heard nor seen
   Sic banquetting and drinking, -
   Sic revelling and battles keen, -
   Sic dancing and sic jinking, -
   And unco wark that fell at e'en,
When lasses were haff-winkin,
The lost their feet and baith their e'en,
And maidenheads gaed linken
   Aff a' that day.   (Canto II, 185-192)

One gets the impression that the original poet was enjoying himself and that Ramsay was enjoying the thought of the discomfiting of his characters, whom he patronised in condescending fashion. Fortunately Fergusson and Burns were able to remedy the deficiency in their poems on communal amusements, but it remains matter for regret that they followed Ramsay in his abandonment of the bob and wheel, which, in the words of one writer, "is like a gasp or a sudden proud toss of the head." The substitution of a simple refrain certainly made the verse form easier to handle, but it reduced the capacity of the stanza for expressing surprise or indignation. All in all, therefore, our debt to Ramsay must be partially off-set by regret that he used the "Christ's Kirk" stanza to such small effect.

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His only essays in the form were the two cantos added to "Christ's Kirk" and some eulogistic verses, "Edinburgh's Salutation to the Most Honourable, My Lord Marquess of Carnarvon", a subject for which its brisk jingling movement was quite unsuited. It is indeed hard to imagine the spirit of Edinburgh addressing its visitor in terms like the following:

Lang syne, my Lord, I had a court,
And nobles filled my cawsy;
But since I have been fortune's sport,
I look nae hauff sae gawsy.
Yet here brave gentlemen resort,
And mony a handsome lassy;
Now that you're lodged within my port,
How well I wat they'll a' say,
"Welcome my Lord". (19-27)

Nevertheless, having condemned Allan Ramsay as poet and editor, it is but right that I should give him credit for having mined the raw ore that his successors in the vernacular tradition refined and moulded. His use of dialect, however circumscribed the purpose, and his employment of the six-line stanza in rime couee and of the "Christ's Kirk" stave, however imperfect his handling, revealed to others their possibilities. Perhaps the best summing-up of his positive achievement is that contained in the Cambridge History of Literature, where the contributor, having pointed out his shortcomings, goes on to praise him in these words:

Allan Ramsay, as bookseller and librarian did more perhaps, than any other man to further the intellectual revival of which, towards the close of the

———

63 Ramsay, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 149-151.
century, Edinburgh became the centre. Apart from this, by the publication of his own verse, of the Tea-Table Miscellany and of the Evergreen . . . he disseminated a love of song and verse among the people, both high and low, which, consummated by the advent of Burns, still remains a marked characteristic of Scotland . . . . To have been the first to seek to do justice to those forgotten masters in verse is a sufficient title on Ramsay's part to the permanent gratitude of his countrymen; but, in addition, his work as a literary pioneer in the combined capacity of writer, editor, publisher, and librarian was, largely because of the literary dearth of the preceding century in Scotland, of far greater importance than that of many with whose literary achievements his own can bear no comparison.64

From his followers in the field of Scottish vernacular poetry, Ramsay received his due meed of acknowledgement, even while they were writing verse that far transcended his in quality. To gain acceptance at all, their verse had to be of a higher standard, for it was subjected to more searching criticism than had been levelled at that of the pioneer in vernacular poetry. They had also to overcome the apathy, or even antipathy of some of their countrymen, who, lacking their fathers' prejudices against the use of standard English, were sedulous in their employment of it in preference to their own tongue. Expatriates who had made their homes in London were not alone in eschewing the use of Scots; its propriety was equally suspect

among certain leading figures in Scotland itself. The correspondence columns of Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine* were enlivened throughout the summer of 1772 by a debate on the fate of the Scottish tongue. Those who contributed to the discussion employed pen-names which would suggest that their pretensions to culture were not narrowly Scottish. "Anthropos", for instance, was one who wrote in favour of "giving up a dialect which we all disdain to write in, for a language in point of beauty and energy, the first perhaps in the world."65 His was the common consensus of opinion; almost alone was "Scoto-Britannus" who appealed for the retention of a few Scotticisms.66 Ironically enough, while these gentlemen were performing their obsequies over their native tongue, the adjoining columns of the same periodical were carrying the earliest Scottish poems of Robert Fergusson, poems which might have caused them to consider that their requiem was, to say the least, a little premature. Even earlier, in 1764, James Boswell, desirous of emulating his hero, the great lexicographer, announced that he was considering the compilation of a dictionary of the Scottish tongue, because, in his own words:


The Scottish language is being lost every day, and in a short time will become quite unintelligible. To me, who have the true patriotic soul of an old Scotsman, that would seem a pity. It is for that reason that I have undertaken to make a dictionary of our tongue, through which one will always have the means of learning it like any other dead language.

In retrospect it is easy to smile at Boswell's gloomy prognostication, but he was by no means alone in his assumption in an age when James Beattie, author of "The Minstrel" could sum up prevailing Scottish sentiment in the lines:

... frae the cottar to the Laird,
we a' rin South.

Even those who were unable to make the actual journey to the land of promise admired it from afar, and their admiration of things English was coupled with a corresponding contempt for Scottish institutions.

Fortunately for Scottish vernacular literature, Robert Fergusson, having gone part way to Anglicisation, retraced his footsteps and reverted to the tradition of his forefathers. When his verses began to appear in the Weekly Magazine, however, there was, at first, little indication that a poet greater than Allan Ramsay had appeared on the Scottish scene. The prevailing literary trend was towards sentimentality, represented in poetry


68 "Epistle to Mr. Alexander Ross of Lochleal", Weekly Magazine, 1 September 1768, University Microfilms, E.6, reel 1.

69 For a brief account of Fergusson's life and background, see appendix, pp.
by the mild pastoralism of Gay, Shenstone, and Gray. At a
time when Scots as a means of expression was unfashionable,
these seemed the poets for an apprentice writer to imitate, and
this Fergusson did, in a series of derivative verses that show
their originals all too clearly. In these he scarcely rose above
the mediocrity of other weekly contributors, and on the few
occasions when he did, it was due to the superior quality of the
model rather than to any merit inherent in his imitation of it.
Had he continued in this strain, it is doubtful if his name
would have been remembered beyond the week in which his contri-
bution appeared in the poets' corner of the magazine. Fortunately
for him, however, he found that he could not express himself
freely in standard English, and he discovered also that his true
metier was the reporting of the social scene, with sympathy,
but without sentimentality.

Fergusson felt constraint that the use of a foreign idiom
imposed on his writing, and he was conscious of a growing dis-
taste for the Union of Parliaments, which, he felt, was draining
Scotland of vitality, and was reducing her to the status of an
English province. A couplet\(^70\) which he penned about 1770
(the year when his first venacular poems appeared) expressed
his feeling of anger and frustration:

Black be the day that e'er to England's ground
Scotland was eikit by the Union's bond. (57-58)

For political and poetic reasons, therefore Fergusson began to
employ the vernacular, which despite efforts of the Scottish
intelligentsia, was still the current speech of the country.

For a young poet, writing at the beginning of the eighth
decade of the eighteenth century, the decision to employ the
Scottish vernacular was a bold one, because, as one critic has
written, "In 1770 Edinburgh society was acting on the resolution
no longer to speak, much less to write, in the Scots tongue which
they had learned from their fathers. Nevertheless, despite
the prevailing prejudice, Fergusson, at the end of 1771,
submitted the Weekly Magazine a poem in the Scottish dialect
in which he abandoned his attempt to ape the poetic manner of
English writers, and struck out on his own account.

The course which he was to follow was that which Ramsay
had charted, but he soon showed himself Ramsay's superior in his
depiction of rustic and urban scenes, whether serious or comic.
His experience of rural life gave him a feeling for the sights
and sounds of the countryside, and for the experiences of
countryfolk, as he showed in "The Farmer's Ingle" and the "Ode to
the Gowdspink," but it was as the poet of Edinburgh that he
excell ed. His first published poem in Scots, "The Daft Days," 72

71 A.M. Bell, "Robert Fergusson," Cornhill Magazine, vol. 55,
1923, p. 171.

72 Fergusson, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 32-34.
combined the description of the dead season in the country with
the jollity that marked the passing of the old year in the city.
Though this poem is not written in the "Christ's Kirk" stanza,
it is worth quoting to show how economically he was able to
create a scene with the minimum of fuss. Here is his picture
of December in the dead countryside:

Now mirk December's dowie face,
Glowrs owre the rigs wi' sour grimace,
While thro' his minimum of space,
The bleer-eyed sun,
Wi' blinking light and stealing pace,
His race doth run. (1-6)

In contrast is the warmth of an Edinburgh interior at the same
season:

Auld Reekie! thou'rt the canty hole,
A beild for mony a cauldrie soul,
Wha snugly at thy ingle loll,
Baith warm and couth;
While round they gar the bicker roll
To weet their mouth. (19-24).

Just as Fergusson saw the pleasures of midwinter in terms
of the city, so, in his poems that followed the pattern of
"Christ's Kirk", he found his occasions in the gatherings of the
citizens of Edinburgh. In depicting the humours of holiday
crowds at a race-meeting and at an annual Hallowe'en fair,
Fergusson reverted to the spirit of the original poem, with its
close observation of sights and sounds, and its occasional
touch of light satire. He experimented, however, with the
scheme of alternate rhymes, which, without the alliteration of
the Middle Scots poem, had been bequeathed to him by Ramsay.
The scheme of two alternate rhymes had always tended to produce a jingling effect, and Ramsay accentuated this tendency by using feminine rhymes with some frequency. By his doubling of the number of rhymes, Fergusson turned the jingle into a lilt that produced a finer euphony, a smoother movement, and a stronger potentiality for comedy as opposed to farce.

Nor was this Fergusson's only innovation. He was also responsible for the creation of the allegorical figure, Mirth, who accompanies the poet on his visit to Leith Races, and who, as it were, jogs his elbow to draw his attention to noteworthy incidents. The success of this device led to its adoption by Burns in his "Holy Fair", where the poet has no less than three such figures at his side on his journey to Mauchline. Yet another feature of Fergusson's handling of the form was his rendering of various Scottish dialects. In both "Hallow-Fair" and "Leith Races" he has caught the sing-song intonation of Buchan and Aberdeen, the softness of speech and the tortured syntax of the English-speaking Gael, the clipped accents of the recruiting sergeant, and the everyday accents of the inhabitants of Edinburgh, though it is in his other poem of this type, "The Election", that the last are used most freely.

Detailed study of each of these poems reveals Fergusson's adherence, in broad outline at least, to the principles tacitly established by the original "Christ's Kirk." Two of them, "The Hallow-Fair" and "Leith Races", depict the humours of holiday
crowds, beginning with the early morning preparations, and selecting instances of their behaviour during the day. The other, more openly satiric, casts an eye on the pretensions of those who aspire to office in the City Council, and presents, in the style of Hogarth, a picture of the conviviality at the inaugural meeting of that body.

"The Hallow-Fair", Fergusson's first essay in the form, opens with a scene very similar to that at the beginning of "Christ's Kirk." Sunrise is the signal for the maidens to begin their preparations:

Upo' the tap o' ilka lum,
The sun began to keek,
And bade the trig made maidens come,
A sightly jo to seek. (10-13)

At the fair, country John, who bears a resemblance to his ancestor, Jock, attempts to win the favour of Meg. The lass, dressed in her best, "wi' rokelay new", proves less hard-hearted than Gillie, and relents after he has promised to buy her fairings. Next we meet a selection of hucksters, each anxious to separate the holiday-makers from their money:

Here chapman billies tak their stand,
And shaw their bonnie wallies;
Wow, but they lie fu' gleg aff hand
To trick the silly fallows.
Heh, sirs! what cairds and tinklers come
An' ne'er do weel horse coupers,
An' spae-wives fenzying to be dumb,
Wi' a' sic like landloupers,
To thrive that day. (28-36)

73Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 89-93.
It is noticeable that Fergusson alternates general description of the group with detailed portrayal of individuals. After the introduction of "strappin dames and sturdy lads" comes the close-up of John and Meg, and after the mention of the chapmen follows a stanza devoted to one of their number, Sawny, the vendor of woollen stockings. Here the individualised description gains in verisimilitude, as the poet slips naturally into the Aberdonian dialect which Sawny uses in crying his wares:

Here Sawny cries, frae Aberdeen,
"Come ye to me fa need:
The brawest shanks that ere were seen
"I'll sell ye cheap an' guid,
"I wyt they are as prophy hose
"As come frae weyr or leem;
"Here tak' a rug and shaw's your pose:
"Forsooth, my ain's but teem
"An' licht this day."

(37-45)

Scarcely has he finished when,
The dinlin drums alarm our ears,
(55)
as a prelude to the speech of the recruiting sergeant:

"A' gentlemen and volunteers
"That wish your country gude,
"Come here to me, and I sail gie
"Twa guineas and a crown,
"A bowl o' punch, that like the sea
"Will soum a lang dragoon
"Wi' ease this day."

(57-63)

Having listened to the contrast in tones of Sawny and the sergeant, the narrator enters one of the booths, set up as a temporary ale-house. Here the noise is such that no individual voice can emerge clearly above the confusion of tongues:
Then there's such yallochin and din,
Wi' wives and wee-anes gabblin'
That ane micht trew they were akin
To a' the tongues at Babylon,
Confused that day. (68-72)

By now Fergusson has caught the moods and movements of the crowd by his impressions of groups and individuals, and we are ready to follow him throughout the day. Here, however, what the editor of his poems for the Scottish Text Society has called his "weakness in power of mind" leads him into a lengthy diatribe at the expense of the town guard, and causes him to forget his main theme. The digression is, in itself extremely amusing, but it causes a break in the poem that is never repaired, and it must be a matter for regret that he did not devote a separate piece to the deeds of the guardians of Edinburgh, to which he alludes in "Leith Races" also. They are introduced here, when one of their number apprehends an over-exuberant reveller, but instead of leaving them in their guardhouse, Fergusson proceeds to moralise at their expense:

Good fock, as ye come frae the fair,
Bide yont frae this black squad;
There's nae sic cankered pack elsewhere
Allowed to wear cockade.
Than the strong lion's hungry maw,
Or tusk of Russian bear,
Frae their wanruly fellin' paw
Mair cause ye hae to fear
Your death that day. (100-108)

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74Ibid., vol. 1, p. 196.
Thus, in something of an anti-climax, "Hallow-Fair" ends, and it was left for "Leith Races" to show that Fergusson was capable of a completely integrated poem in the manner of "Christ's Kirk." Even in 'Leith Races" he narrowly evaded the trap into which he had fallen in his initial essay. Chance mention of the town guard's mustering for their march to the race-course leads him, once more, into a digression on their few virtues and many vices, but this time he manages to recall himself before he has strayed too far from the point, and the remainder of the poem follows the pattern set by his model. It is a measure of his increased skill that he succeeds in rounding out his description of the day's activities with sufficient economy to avoid any sense of strain or flagging of interest. The racing ends, and, after some social drinking, most of the holiday makers are quickly disposed of:

Great feck gae hirpling hame like fools,
The cripple leads the blind. (174-175)

Only a few hardened carousers, loath to bring the holiday to an end, are left to continue their tippling and arguing, usually with no clear notion of the subject under discussion, so that they are often:

...ten mile from the question
In hand that night. (170-171)

In this stanza the substitution of "night" for "day" in the refrain does more than simply mark the passage of time, it

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announces the conclusion of the holiday frolic, and points forward to the workaday world of the morrow.

The opening of the poem introduces Mirth, the allegorical figure, who, after complaining that Fergusson has celebrated Hallow-Fair but has neglected other occasions of public revelry, cajoles him to visit the races, where, in addition to enjoying himself, he will find incidents worth recording in his observation of the human comedy. With this suggestion the poet agrees, and straightway we have the description of early morning bustle as womenfolk prepare for the occasion:

Ere servant maids had wont to rise  
To seeth the breakfast kettle, 
Ilk dame her brawest ribbons tries,  
To put her on her mettle. 

(46-49)

The bustle is not confined within doors; outside, on the streets, vendors of programmes are already busy shouting their wares:

"Here is the true an' faithful list 
"0' Noblemen and Horses; 
"Their eild, their weight, their height, their grist, 
"That rin for Plates or Purses 
Fu' fleet this day."

(59-63)

Once more it is noticeable how skilfully Fergusson records the cries of the "scaud and bare-arsed loons" without straining either line or sense. In the same way, he employs a variety of dialects in his observation of the individuals who make up the social scene, with which, rather than with the racing, he is concerned. Sellers of refreshments, pedlars, dicers, card-sharps, and other gentry who live by their wits are the objects of his scrutiny. Spectators, both afoot and in carriages, receive
equally careful attention, and in the case of the latter group, we have the poet's satiric comment that the style of the turnout is no reflection of the honesty of the occupants:

Some chaises honest folk contain,
An' some has many a whore in;
Wi' rose and lily, red and white,
They gie themselves sic fit airs,
Like Dian, they will seem perfite;
But it's nae goud that glitters
Wi' them thir days. (138-144)

"Leith Races" is undoubtedly Fergusson's most effective essay in the manner of "Christ's Kirk", because, as well as demonstrating his ability to select what is significant in the conduct of the crowd, it deals with a scene that is timeless. In "The Election" his satire on men and institutions, though more biting, has not the same impact since the occasion that inspired it requires some explanation to be comprehensible to the modern reader. His satire was, in general, directed at the method of electing representatives to the City Council, and was, in particular, levelled at the burghers, whose votes determined its composition. The names on the burghal roll were those of citizens whose ancestors had been members of the Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh, and since the right to be enrolled was hereditary, the privilege was jealously guarded. No matter how poor they might be, the burghers thought much of themselves, and the annual election dinner, where candidates

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76 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 185-190.
vied with each other in providing meat and drink for the electors, gave them a chance to shine.

One of the burghers, John the cobbler, is chosen by the poet as representative of all. He is in a fever of impatience and self-importance as he prepares for his evening of glory. His newly-awakened pride is evident in his tone of command to younger members of his family as he makes ready:

Haste Epps, quo' John, an' bring my gezz!
Tak tent ye dinna spulzie;
Last night the barber ga't a frizz,
An straikit it wi' ulzie,
Hae done your parritch lassie Lizz,
Gie me my sark and gravat;
I'se be as braw's the Deacon is
When he takes affidavit
O' faith the day.

(10-18)

Gossiping neighbours, at the close-mouth, are less impressed by John's appearance than he is himself, as their comments indicate:

Whar's Johnny gaun, cries neebor Bess,
That he's sae gayly bodin
Wi' new kam'd wig, weel syndit face,
Silk hose for namely hoddin?
"Our Johnny's nae sma' drink you'll guess,
"He's trig as ony muir-cock,
"An' forth to mak a deacon, lass;
"He downa speak to poor fock
"Like us the day."  

(19-27)

These spiteful comments serve two purposes; they show John as he is on this special occasion, and imply that on normal days he is not so particular, either as to the cleanliness of his face, or as to those with whom he speaks.

From this beginning, the action proceeds as one might expect. Burghers and candidates carouse; speeches are cut short in order that the circulation of the bowl may not be impeded;
the revellers return home in less state than they departed. But they have done their civic duty for another year, though it is doubtful if they have any clear notion as to what business has been transacted. The social satire, here, is overt, and, in this respect, "The Election" recalls the opening stanzas of "Sym and his brudir", and looks forward to "The Holy Fair" and "The Ordination" of Burns. Fergusson, however, lacked the intensity of feeling of his successor, and "The Election" peters out in broad farce, involving the return of John and his friends to the arms of their wives.

Where Fergusson is dealing with political morality in general terms, we can recognise the aptness of his strictures on the venality of office seeking. The statement:

... politicians bribe a loon
Against his saul for voting

(111-112)

has implications that we can understand, but such statements are infrequent, and we are left with the impression that Fergusson was more concerned with the farcical aspects of the scene than with the social satire implicit in such a system of election. The young poet, in fact, though he had the discriminatory observation, yet lacked the one necessary attribute of the successful satirist -- a sufficiently strong sense of indignation. Possibly, had he lived longer, such a sense might have developed, but time for the maturing of his gifts was not granted to him; he died, alone, at the age of twenty-four, and was buried in the unmarked grave of a pauper.
Ironically enough, Burns, whose own poetry was to eclipse that of Fergusson in the minds of their countrymen, was responsible for finding and marking his grave as part payment of the poetic debt that he acknowledged to his predecessor. Nor was the debt a small one. We have, in the words of Burns himself, the unequivocal statement that his reading of the works of Fergusson inspired him to creative effort. In the course of an autobiographical letter, he wrote, "Rhyme, except some religious pieces which are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scotch poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour." Fergusson, however, did more than liberate in Burns the creative impulse that resulted in the Kilmarnock volume of his poems. Despite the opposition of those who disapproved of the use of Scots, and the neglect of Fergusson by periodicals such as the Edinburgh Magazine, his employment of the Scottish dialect had accustomed Scotsmen to reading poems in the native idiom, and a substantial proportion of them had enjoyed the experience.

Fergusson had thus prepared the way for the acceptance of the poetry of Burns when the first volume of his verse appeared in 1786. To be sure, there were still criticisms of the use of dialect; "We much regret that these poems are written in some measure in an unknown tongue . . . being composed in the Scottish

dialect, which contains many words altogether unknown to the English reader . . . . this work, therefore, can only be fully relished by the natives of that part of the country where it was produced." So ran the criticism of the *Monthly Review*, but the important point is that poems in Scots were now considered worthy of notice at all. In general, however, the poems were greeted with enthusiasm, though the public, in their adulation of a poet who was also a ploughman, tended to hail his innate genius, and to forget the debt which he owed to those who had given him his verse forms and themes. The six-line stanza in *rië couë*, that he made so much his own, was drawn from his reading of Ramsay and Fergusson, as was the "Christ's Kirk" stave, which he used effectively when he applied it to its traditional purpose.

It is significant that the poems written in the latter form were all produced between his discovery of Fergusson's poetry -- possibly in 1784 -- and the appearance of the Kilmarnock edition in 1786. In them the influence of Fergusson is strong, for Burns used the rhyme scheme that his predecessor had adopted, and, in "The Holy Fair", he followed, in part, the

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79 For discussion of this point, see Fergusson, *op. cit.*., vol. 1, pp. 177-178
plan of "Leith Races". It is but right, therefore, that due credit should be given to Fergusson, not only for the quality of his own vernacular poetry, but also for his influence on Burns.

Burns included three poems with the "Christ's Kirk" stanza in his Kilmarnock edition; "A Dream", "Hallowe'en", and "The Holy Fair". It is surprising that he heeded the advice of his friends who advised him to omit a fourth poem in this form, "The Ordination", but stubbornly ignored them when they wished him to leave out "A Dream" also. The occasion for this rather heavy-handed piece of satire was King George III's birthday in 1786, and Burns, in attempting to be ironic at the expense of Thomas Warton, the Poet Laureate, and at the same time, to address the Royal Family on terms of easy familiarity, falls between two stools.

The poem, itself, as the couplet at its head makes clear, was intended to shock. Its epigraph;

Thoughts, words and deeds, the status blames with reason;
But surely deeds were ne'er indicted treason,
is a rude gesture in the manner of a small boy's "cheeking" a policeman -- half hoping for, half fearing -- retaliation. In "A Dream", Warton's "Birthday Ode" is glanced at in the lines:

The poets, too, a venal gang,
Wi' rhymes weel-turned and ready,

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Wad gar ye trow ye ne'er do wrang,
But aye unerring steady,
On sic a day.  

(14-18)

Burns then goes on to contrast his own independence of spirit with the servility displayed by Warton and others, but his grounds for feeling free to criticize -- his not holding a government post -- suggest a certain amount of envy for those more fortunate than himself:

For me, before a monarch's face,
Even there I winna flatter;
For neither pension, post, or place,
Am I your humble debtor.  

(19-22)

The main weakness in "A Dream" is the forced tone of familiarity. It is possible that Burns was trying to emulate one of Dunbar's "flytings"; but if so, the attempt failed, probably because of the distance between him and his subjects. Thus, the references to one of the Royal Dukes as "young royal Tarry-Breeks", to the Princesses as "bonny blossoms", and to William Pitt, the Prime Minister, as "a true guid fallow's get" are lacking in taste, when they come from one who has never met the persons concerned, and whose only knowledge of them has been gained from newspapers and country gossip.

The "Christ's Kirk" stave, too, is not a particularly happy choice as a vehicle for personal satire. In the form used in this instance -- that with alternate rhymes -- its jingling movement is too light-hearted for a poem in whose mood there is an underlying bitterness. Nevertheless, though "A Dream" is not representative of Burns at his best, it contains
at least one example of his skill in expressing a generalisation with force enough to make his words proverbial.

Facts are chiels that winna ding
An' darena be disputed; (30-31)
so run the lines, and it may be that they alone make "A Dream" worth recalling.

"Hallowe'en,"\textsuperscript{81} too, though closer to the "Christ's Kirk" tradition, does not quite succeed. The trouble here is that the rites of All Hallow's Eve have to be explained, even to contemporaries of the poet, and the reader is constantly distracted by the necessity of studying footnotes. The poem tends to become merely a string of disconnected episodes, since it was a condition for the success of the various spells that they be cast in secrecy, without witnesses. Before he falters, however, Burns has kept closely to the old tradition. The scene is set in time and space in the opening stanzas; young men and maidens are described:

The lasses feat an' cleanly neat,
Mair braw than when they're fine; (19-20)
and

The ladd'sae trig, wi' wooer-babs double loops
Weel knotted on their garten. (23-24)

So long as communal rites are being observed, all is well, but

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., pp. 24-31.
soon individuals leave the company, and we perforce follow their misadventures through a series of lengthy digressions. At first, Burns has the company re-assemble, but, having run out of plausible pretexts for this, he abandons the attempt at continuity, and single members of the group are left scattered over the countryside, as the misadventures of other individuals are narrated. In the last, and lengthiest, episode, we are at one minute watching the mishaps that befall Lizzie, and in the next, are back in the farm kitchen for the conclusion of the party.

"The Holy Fair," however, more than atones for the other two. It must be considered among the best, if not the best, of the Kilmarnock poems. In it, Burns achieved complete mastery over subject-matter and form; its satire is good-humoured, in contrast to the bitterness of much of his poetry in this vein; it preserves a balance between crowd scenes and the actions of individuals that is reminiscent of the original "Christ's Kirk." If passage of time has confirmed the quality of "The Holy Fair," it is because the actions of individuals and their motives for attending an open-air communion are presented in terms that are completely true to life. The young are more concerned with earthly, than with divine love; their elders are making a picnic of the affair; the clergy -- in their case the satire has an edge to it, for Burns was no friend to them -- preach, not of brotherly love, but of eternal damnation, or more moderately,

\[82\text{Ibid.},\ pp.\ 100-106.\]
plead the cause of good works and morals.

All these elements are perfectly assimilated, and, once again, as in the best poems of this type, we feel the presence of the poet, singling out individuals from the mass, and directing our attention to them. Before this happens, however, we have had an opening which sets the scene in a fashion that is almost lyrical, so that what follows has the advantage of surprise. The first stanza contains not a hint of what is to happen:

Upon a simmer Sunday morn,
When Nature's face is fair,
I walked forth to view the corn,
And sniff the caller air.
The rising sun, owre Galston muirs,
Wi' glorious light was glintin;
The hares were hirplin down the furs,
The lav'rocks they were chantin
Fu' sweet that day. (1-9)

With the appearance of the allegorical figures, Fun, Superstition, and Hypocrisy, the tempo quickens. Fun introduces herself, in the guise of a young girl, and asks the poet to accompany her to Mauchline Holy Fair, "To spend an hour in daffin," and to enjoy the spectacle of the antics of the other two.

The roads leading to the meeting place are as crowded as was the highroad to Peebles:

Here farmers gash, in riding graith,
Gaed hoddin by their cotters;
There swankies young, in braw braid-claith,
Are springin owre the gutters.
The lasses, skelpin barefit, thrang,
In silks an' scarlets glitter; (55-60)
but the real scene of bustle is reserved for the meeting itself, Here, before the start of the preaching, the atmosphere is not one of reverence and devotion, and Burns points out the mixture of religious and secular feeling that pervades the crowd:

Here some are thinkin on their sins,
An' some upon their claes;
Ane curses feet that fyl'd his shins,
Anither sighs an' prays. (82-85)

With a marked slowing of pace, the service begins,

Now a' the congregation o'er
Is silent expectation; (100-101)

but not for long, for what we are treated to is a sermon full of Calvinistic hell-fire, warning of a fate, which, according to the doctrine of predestination, is certain for all except the minority of the elect. This type of sermon pleases the company, for its lurid details provide a thrill; the next preacher, who expounds the moderate viewpoint, however, sends the godly outside for refreshment out of jars and bottles, because,

His English style, an' gesture fine
Are a' clean out o' season. (129-130)

With the first bout of preaching over, the congregation throng to the ale-house, there to discuss the niceties of theology over their drink. So warm becomes the argument that,

They raise a din, that, in the end,
Is like to breed a rupture
O' wrath that day. (160-162)

During the second preaching session, many of the audience, overcome by their potations, take the opportunity to doze, until startled by "Black" Russel's tirade on hell:
A vast, unbottomed, boundless pit,
Fill'd fou o' lowin brunstane,
Wha's ragin flame, an' scorchin heat,
Wad melt the hardest whun-stane!
The half-asleep start up wi' fear,
An' think they hear it roarin,
But presently it does appear,
'Twas but some neebor snorin
Asleep that day. (190-198)

At the end of the service, the crowd breaks up into small picnic parties, and as the audience begins to drift away on the homeward journey, the poem ends with a summing up of the different elements of which the occasion was made up:

How mony hearts this day converts
O' sinners and o' Lasses!
Their hearts o' stane gin night are gane,
As saft as ony flesh is.
There's some are fou o' love divine;
There's some are fou o' brandy;
An' mony jobs that day begun
May end in Houghmagandie
Some ither day. (235-243)

Occasional satire, once the situation that called it into being no longer exists, has to stand on its own poetic merits. "The Holy Fair" does so, because of its perfect blending of the religious and the profane, and because of the wonderful depiction of the behaviour of the crowd. The careful juxtaposition of theological and physical elements is everywhere evident, but it is so carefully controlled, and the poem moves along so effortlessly, that we are scarcely conscious of the incongruity. One stanza, for instance, begins with a line from a Scottish metrical psalm, "O happy is the man and blest," but we discover that the state of happiness and bliss comes, not from divine grace, but because,
... his ain dear lass
Comes clinking down beside him. (93-94)

The "unco guid", sure of their own salvation, and equally certain of the damnation for others, find themselves seated by

... a set of chaps, at watch,
Thrang winkin' at the lasses
To chairs that day. (88-90)

In the same manner, St. Paul's trinity of Christian virtues, as amended by Burns to read, "Wi' faith, an' hope, an' love, an' drink," almost passes by before we notice what the poet has done. The point is that Calvinism had in it little of the first three, since it stressed predestination, and the Church having failed to provide these, it was left to the effects of strong drink to inspire them in the minds of the company.

The integral part played by the description of the audience in the success of "The Holy Fair" may be realised when that poem is contrasted with "The Ordination,"\(^3\) itself a satire on an ecclesiastical occasion. Though fear of reprisals caused Burns to omit "The Ordination" from the Kilmarnock edition, it now has little appeal, because the quarrels between Calvinist extremists and moderates are of interest only to historians, and the poem contains nothing but the description of such a falling-out. Its essential weakness has been ably summed up by David Daiches, when he remarks:

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 81-84.
... it is full of references to specific persons, places, and situations, and it requires for a full understanding a considerable knowledge of Ayrshire church politics of the time, as well as knowledge of the general Scottish ecclesiastical situation.

For its humorous effect, "The Ordination" relies heavily on crude physical images, in which Burns describes the exultant triumph over moderation:

Curst Common Sense, that imp o' hell,
Cam in wi' Maggie Lauder;
But Oliphant aft made her yell,
And Russell sair misca'ed her;
This day Mackinlay taks the flail,
And he's the boy will blaud her;
He'll clap a shangan on her tail,
And set the bairns to daud her
Wi' dirt this day. (10-18)

The reiteration of such terms, and the generation of so much heat over a theological squabble soon become wearisome, and the lack of any light relief, such as might have been supplied by the presence of a crowd, gives few opportunities for good-natured humour.

Since Burns was a native of Ayrshire, and since many of his poems have their setting in Ayrshire, it has been too easily assumed that his language was predominantly that of South-West Scotland. In fact, he borrowed from both Fergusson and Ramsay, and his dialect was thus a synthetic one, containing many words from Eastern Scotland, as well as a large number of older terms

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84 Robert Burns, New York, 1950, p. 198
that he had come across in his reading. His ability lay in welding this language into an instrument suited to his purpose, whether that purpose was satire, lyric, or pure comedy.

In "The Holy Fair," for instance, sibilants announce the presence of satire, and the repetition of the sound giving a strongly alliterative line. Fun introduces her two companions:

An' this is Superstition here
An' that's Hypocrisy ... (39-40)

The "unco guid," these representatives of the two qualities, are likewise hissed at:

On this hand sits a chosen swatch,
Wi' screwed-up, grace-proud faces. (86-87)

At the meeting itself, the main impression is one of turmoil, and this effect Burns achieves by his use of onomatopoeic words, often in pairs to give greater force. Fundamentalist doctrine is expounded to the accompaniment of "rattlin an' thumpin" and "stampin an' jumpin." The scene in the ale-house is rendered in terms of a Babel of tongues, with both alliteration and internal rhyme being used to reinforce the effect in:

Here's cryin out for bakes an' gills,
An' there the pint-stowp clatters;
While thick an' thrang, an' loud an' lang,
Wi' logic, an' wi' Scripture,
They raise a din, that, in the end,
Is like to breed a rupture
O' wrath that day. (155-162)

Only while he is dealing with the guidwives and the guidmen does Burns allow the torrent of noise to abate. Notice how choice of words reflects the quiet entry of one of the matrons:
In comes a gaucie, gash guidwife,
An' sits down by the fire, (208-209)
and how the soft-voiced discussion among the patriarchs as to
which of them shall render grace before meat:

The auld guidmen, about the grace,
Frae side to side they bother. (212-213)

Here, the language reflects the peace of those who have come to
terms with life, and, untroubled alike by youthful desire and
Calvinist ranting, have achieved a state of contentment with
their lot.

It is difficult to understand why Burns stopped writing
poems in the manner of "Christ's Kirk" after 1786. Possibly
he never found a suitable occasion in later years, though that
is doubtful; possibly his lack of complete success in this
genre -- with the exception of "The Holy Fair" -- discouraged
him; possibly the praise heaped on such poems as "The Cotter's
Saturday Night" and "To a Mountain Daisy" made him feel that
satire in Scots was of less value than these. At any rate,
he ceased to use the form, and, after him, it languished, just
as had happened in the sixteenth century. Attempts at imitation
by his contemporaries succeeded in being only pale reflections
of poems by Fergusson and himself, and one only, "Anster Fair,"
still makes an occasional appearance in anthologies. Here, the
application of the form to scenes in an east-coast fishing
village provides some novelty, as does the substitution of an
Alexandrine for the refrain, so that, in the words of William
Tennant, the author, "the close of the stanza may be more full and sounding." But, just as Alexander Scott's burlesque of a tournament did not succeed, neither does Tennant's elaborate description of Maggie Lauder's capitulation to Rab the Ranter. "Anster Fair", like Scott's "Jousting and Debait", may be considered as closing another chapter in the history of poems in the tradition of "Christ's Kirk," and it has been left to contemporary Scottish poets to show that the form had not died during the barren years, for Scottish literature, of the nineteenth century.

To sum up the matter of this chapter, it may be said that interest in "Christ's Kirk" in eighteenth-century Scotland led to the composition of similar poems by Burns and Fergusson. Of these, two were of the highest value — "Leith Races" and "The Holy Fair." These succeeded, because, in addition to reflecting faithfully the manners and customs of their own time, they have picked out the incongruities in human conduct, and these are timeless. In the light of what happened during the eighteenth century, the remark by Alexander Pope:

One likes no language but the Faerie Queene;
A Scot will fight for Christ's Kirk o' the Green, (39-40)

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though intended as a criticism of the taste of his contemporaries, has about it something of the air of a prophecy, for the form survived many vicissitudes before it served as the basis for poems by Fergusson and Burns long after Pope's death.
Chapter VI
The "Christ's Kirk" Tradition in the Scottish Renaissance

To critics in the early years of the twentieth century, the contemporary state of Scottish vernacular literature might well have justified their echoing the words of Commissioner Seafield as he signed the Act of Union abolishing the Scottish Parliament, "There's the end of an auld sang." For more than a century, Scottish literature, prose and verse alike, had been in almost uninterrupted decline. Prose was represented by the "copious distribution of slop and slush" provided by the Kailyard school; as for verse, Ian Gordon, in his article, "Modern Scots Poetry", states:

... no one, even if he has not read it, need be afraid to classify nineteenth century Scottish poetry as downright bad. Not unreasonably, the nineteenth century versifiers turned to Burns .... In Rabbie Burns they found the praise of drink and Bonny Jean and the louse and the mountain daisy .... To them he was an inspired ploughman alternating between drink and sentimentality.

If it be asked why Scots ignored the cultural tradition of their forbears, the answer might be that they neglected it, because many of them were, in large measure, ignorant of its existence. Ties with the past had been weakened by the uprooting of families during the Industrial Revolution, and the coming of a Public School system in 1872 did nothing to remedy matters.

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The Education Act laid down that the language of instruction was to be English, and this policy, followed over a period of some sixty years, weakened the vernacular, though it did not substitute a corresponding mastery of standard English. There arose instead, a kind of macaronic speech, in which dialect predominated. In 1933, a Research Committee, in its report on the speech of Glasgow schoolchildren, remarked, "The Central Scottish Dialect is the medium of expression naturally employed by the Glasgow child, who may interrogate the teacher in a dictation lesson with such a question as, "Whit cums after "after"?" In the playground children who try to speak standard English are generally laughed at . . . ."89 As it was with language, so it was with literature. The average pupil passed his school years without having heard of Barbour, Dunbar, Lindsay, and other Scottish writers, since Scottish literature, with the exception of a very few carefully selected pieces by Burns and Scott, was passed over in complete silence.

Such a policy, coincident with the low ebb of vernacular literature, might well have ensured the disappearance of Scots as a literary tongue, if the tradition, though driven underground, had not been sufficiently vital to survive its lengthy period of obscurity. Reaction came when the economic depression that

followed the First World War stimulated a significant number of Scotsmen into protest at the neglect of their country and its institutions. Politically, this led to the founding of the Scottish Nationalist Party; culturally, to the conscious cultivation of what was best in Scottish literature and the visual arts, and to an attempt to adapt these to express the values of man in the twentieth century.

In vernacular letters, much was due to one man, C.M. Grieve, better known under his pseudonym of Hugh MacDiarmid, who espoused the cause of Lallans, and, by his activity, inspired others. To indicate the magnitude of the debt of Scottish letters to MacDiarmid, it is only necessary to cite the case of R.L. Stevenson, who, fifty years earlier, had the same opportunity, but allowed it to slip, because he thought that Lallans would soon be a dead language. In the note to his poems in Scots appearing in Book II of Underwoods, he says:

"For all that, I own a friendly feeling for the tongue of Fergusson and of Sir Walter, both Edinburgh men . . . .
And indeed I am from the Lothians myself; it is there I heard the language spoken about my childhood; and it is in the drawling Lothian speech that I repeat it to myself. . . . The day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten . . . ."\(^{90}\)

In the first poem of that volume, "The Maker to Posterity",\(^{91}\) he puts the same idea into verse:

\(^{90}\text{Collected Poems, London, 1950, p. 486.}\)

\(^{91}\text{Ibid., pp. 145-146.}\)
"Few spak it than, an' noo there's nane.
My puir auld sangs lie a' their lane,
Their sense, that aince was braw an' plain,
Tint a' thegither,
Like runes upon a standin' stane
Amang the heather." (25-30)

Had Stevenson set out, with energy, to revive Lallans, instead of expressing regret at its imminent death, he might have made his voice heard, but it is futile to recall what might have been, and we must be thankful that MacDiarmid came in time to save it from oblivion. His own fiery enthusiasm rallied some to the cause, but others were attracted by the realisation that MacDiarmid's poetry had restored the quality of thought lacking in vernacular verse of the nineteenth century. Although his poetry is often satirical, MacDiarmid's bitterness with the existing state of society -- a bitterness that has led him to embrace Communism -- has prevented him from writing satire in the lighter vein of "Christ's Kirk"; that task has had to be left to those less involved than he. Apart from one or two satires by Stevenson, Scots poetry since the eighteenth century had shown little capacity for expressing humour without recourse to noisy laughter, and it was not until W.D. Cocker's "Ballad of the Deluge" -- the story of Noah's Flood in Lallans -- appeared in 1931 that there was the first sign of a return to light verse that could amuse without shouting raucously.

In this strain, Cocker has been followed by R.G. Sutherland, who, under the pseudonym of Robert Garioch, has written social satire within the traditional framework of Scottish verse. One
of his poems is "Embroy to the ploy", a modern "Christ's Kirk", in which the established pattern is followed closely. In this, however, there is a cosmopolitan spirit that is almost entirely new, for the *dramatis personae* are no longer drawn from one limited area, but from the world at large. Sutherland, a native of Edinburgh, has used the language of the city of his birth for his observations on the International Festival of the Arts, and on the men and women -- inhabitants and visitors -- whose actions supply the human comedy. With playgoers, we attend dramatic performances; under the tutelage of our guide, we are initiated into the mysteries of a ceilidh; with him, we meet habitues of cafes and clubs, who criticise events and persons.

Fittingly enough, we are first introduced to the former inhabitants of Edinburgh, who, returning as visitors, are struck by the abundance of cultural activities during the Festival, and contrast the present plenty with the famine which they remember:

Furthgangan Embroy folk come hame
for three weeks in the year,
and find Auld Reekie no the same,
fu sturrit in a steer.
The stane-faced biggins whaur they froze
and supped their puirshous leir
o cultural cauld-kail and brose
see caintrips unco queer
thae days
at Embroy to the ploy.  

Next, we meet a sampling of foreign visitors:

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92 Typescript supplied by the author, March 3, 1960. For text see appendix II.
Americans wi routh o dollars, 
wha drink our whisky neat, 
wi Sassenachs and Oxford Scholars 
are eydent for the treat. 

Along with representatives of this heterogeneous group, we visit 
places of entertainment, and Sutherland, within each stanza, 
succeeds in commenting on the location, on the entertainment, 
and on the reaction of the audience.

First, we visit the performance of Allan Ramsay's "Gentle 
Shepherd" in the hall of the Royal High School. Here a touch of 
reminiscence creeps in, for this was Sutherland's old school, 
and his use of "pawmies" for applause suggests the time, when, 
for him, as for his companions, the word had a less pleasant 
connotation, since it meant "blows with a leather strap" in his 
his schooldays. He notes, too, that the seats have become no 
softer with the passing of the years; they are still "gey hard", 
even when it costs twenty shillings to sit on them.

Gently satirical, also, is his depiction of the scene in 
the Assembly Hall, where Lindsay's "Thrie Estaitis" is being 
presented. Here, we are in the headquarters of the Church of 
Scotland, and from this very platform Churchmen had been wont 
to condemn all theatrical performances. On the present occasion, 
the breadth of humour might offend the susceptibilities of the 
tender-minded, but all is well -- the Middle Scots in unintellig­
ible to most of the audience:

The halie kirkis assembly - haa 
now fairly coups the creel
wi Lindsay's Thrie Estaititis, braw
devices o the Deil.
About our heids the satire stots
like hailstanes till we reel;
the bawrs are in auld-farrant Scots,
it's maybe jist as well,
mphm,
at Embro to the ploy.

During the hours of daylight, visitors wander about the
city, and the readiness of many foreigners to claim membership
of a Highland clan leads them to the vendors of tartan, who are
only to eager to satisfy the desire:

The tartan tred wad garr ye lauch;
nae trachle is owre teuch,
your surname needna end in -och,
they'il cleik ye up the cleuch.
A puckle dollar-bills will aye
prieve Hiram Teufelsdröckh
a scion of the Clan Mackay,
it's maybe richt eneuch,
verfluch!
at Embro to the ploy.

Here the satire is heightened by Sutherland's choice of name
for the tartan-fancying tourist. Hiram Teufelsdröckh suggests
an American of German descent, one of whose ancestors may have
been Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, whose philosophical discussion on
clothes was the basis for Carlyle's Sartor Resartus.

Nightfall brings no end to surprises. The lavish em­
ployment of flood-lighting has, in the estimation of the poet,
"transmogrified" the castle into something "mair sib to Wardour
Street" than to an ancient fortress. From this exterior scene,
however, we quickly move indoors to sample refreshments and
entertainment provided by temporary social clubs. The howff
frequented by writers is filled "wi orra folk", and modern "yill-caup commentators" criticise plays, as their forefathers, in the days of Burns, discussed sermons.

In the end, the last reveller makes his way home, and the poet, gazing at the deserted streets, makes one philosophic comment, as he points out that, though there is much that is tawdry, there are also "mony hairtsom braw high-jinks" to be enjoyed,

in simmer whan aa sorts foregaither
at Embro to the ploy. (117-118)

In using such a venerable form, Sutherland faced the danger of producing nothing more than a pale imitation of earlier poems of this genre. He has avoided this peril by expanding his time scheme to several days, and by providing an itinerary that a typical visitor might follow, accompanied by an ever-present narrator. As usual, the body of each stanza is concerned with one scene, then comes the bob with its satirical comment, before the wheel, "at Embro to the ploy", reminds us of the occasion.

In his reversion to the original stanzaic form, Sutherland makes notable use of the suggestive power of the single stress bob. "Verfluch!" not only indicates the ancestry of the "scion of the Clan Mackay", but serves to suggest the poet's feelings about the transaction in tartan cloth. The untranslatable "mphm" has, in the mouth of a Scot, a range of meaning, from simple affirmation to deepest doubt, and its use in connection with Lindsay's humour suggests that it is just as well that the import of the
"bawrs" is beyond most of the audience. Even the omission of the bob in the last stanza serves a purpose, for the lack of a satirical summing-up leave us with the impression that, on the whole, the poet approves of the Festival, and that his comments elsewhere are not to be taken too seriously.

Thus, with "Embros to the ploy", the genre established by "Christ's Kirk" is represented in the modern renaissance of Scottish vernacular literature. From the rural fair of the Middle Ages, through communal occasions of the eighteenth century, to that phenomenon of our own day, the festival of the arts, Scottish poets have found material for a significant body of verse. In each period of literary activity in Scotland, the form made popular by "Christ's Kirk" has been employed for the depiction of communal high-spirits, and such genre pieces have continued to appear because their common denominator, the behaviour of people at social gatherings, is of absorbing interest both to their contemporaries and to those of later ages. In these poems observant narrators record the actions of the protagonists, and the total effect is gained from the verisimilitude provided by the piling up of a multitude of details. A poetic form which has proved adaptable to the depiction of communal merrymaking over a period of five hundred years, has, in my opinion, a strong claim to be considered of importance in any body of literature. Its theme, the "mony hartsom braw high-jinks" that accompany such gatherings, though primarily mirth-provoking,
has yet its serious message in revealing man to himself, and in
granting, at least in part, the wish expressed by Burns:93

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourseals as others see us!

(43-44)

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93 "To a Louse", Poetical Works, p. 81.
Appendix I

Robert Fergusson (1750-1774)

"Not the greatest of eighteenth century Scottish poets but perhaps the most assured in his use of Scots;"¹ so runs the verdict of a modern critic of Fergusson's work. We must take into account, however, that his ill-starred life ended when he was barely on the threshold of his poetic career. The evil fate that pursued him so relentlessly in his lifetime followed his memory even after death, and he has received less than due credit for his achievement; his fame, even amongst his own countrymen, has been overshadowed by that of Burns, for whose appearance on the literary scene Fergusson prepared the way.

Three reasons may be adduced for the unduly low position of Fergusson in the critical estimation of his contemporaries: he wrote in Scots; he portrayed people and events realistically, in an age of sentimentality; he died at the age of twenty-four, when his poetic powers had barely matured.

Fergusson has a claim to be considered the poet of Edinburgh. He portrayed, not the world of fashion, but the teeming life of the closes of the Old Town, where he spent his boyhood, and where he drudged away the few short years of his manhood, toiling at an uncongenial task to support his widowed

mother and his ailing sister, whose sole breadwinner he was. Besides his knowledge of Edinburgh, however, Fergusson was acquainted with the life of the folk in the smaller towns, and in the Scottish countryside. He received part of his education in Dundee, at that time a medium-sized seaport and market town. He spent several extended holidays at Old Meldrum in Aberdeenshire, the native soil of his parents. He attended St. Andrews University, which he had to leave without graduating, as a consequence of his father's death. All his attempts to obtain a position through his uncle's influence having failed, he was forced to seek employment as a copyist in the Commisary Office, where he passed the working hours of the few short years that remained to him.

The constant thwarting of hopes, that might have discouraged a person of mature years, let alone a mere youth, one who was, moreover, never of robust physique, did not sour his temperament, or narrow his sympathies for his fellows. He preferred to laugh with, rather than at people, and, conscious of his own weaknesses -- perhaps too conscious -- he was lenient with the faults of others. With such qualities, he was well adapted to describe the life of common folk, while his years at university had given him a breadth of outlook and a knowledge of literature that helped him to express himself as a poet.

His poems brought him little financial gain. They appeared, as he wrote them, in Ruddiman's Weekly Magazine, and its readers
soon began to take his contributions for granted. Not for him was the thrill of waking one morning to find himself famous; the record of his death, even, was a laconic entry in the Minutebook of the Charity Workhouse, "Mr. Fergusson, died in the cells (sic)." Having succumbed to depressive mania, he had been taken to Edinburgh's Bedlam, where he died, alone, but for his unhappy fellow-sufferers.

Robert Burns, who, all unwittingly, has been at least partly responsible for Fergusson's neglect by later generations of Scots, did his best to keep the latter's memory green, and though his "Lines on Fergusson" are hardly in his best style, being written in standard English, the last word may be left with him:

Ill-fated genius! Heaven-taught Fergusson!
What hert that feels and will not yield a tear,
To think life's sun did set ere well-begun
To shed its influence on thy bright career?


Appendix II

EMBRO TO THE PLOY

In simmer, whan aa sorts foregaither
in Embro to the ploy,
folk seek out friens to hae a blether
or faes they'd fain annoy.
Smorit wi British Railways'reek
frae Glesca or Glen Roy
or Wick, they come to hae a week
o cultivated joy,
at Embro to the ploy. 10

Furthgangan Embro folk come hame
for three weeks in the year,
and find Auld Reekie no the same,
fu sturrit in a steer.
The stane-faced biggins whaur they froz
and supped their puirshous leir
o cultural cauld-kail and brose
see cantraips unco queer
thae days
at Embro to the ploy. 20

Americans wi routh o dollars,
wha drink our whisky neat,
wi Sassenachs and Oxford Scholars
are eydent for the treat
o music sedulously high-tie
at thirty bob a seat:
grand opera performed in Eyetie
to them' a right up their street,
they say,
at Embro to the ploy. 30

The auld High Schule, whaur mony a skelp
o triple-tounguit tawse
has gien a heist-up and a help
towards Doctorates o Laws,
nou hears, for Ramsay's cantie rhyme
loud pawmies o applause
fраe folk wha've peyed a pund a time
to sit on wudden raws,
gey hard,
at Embro to the ploy. 40
The halie kirk's assembly-haa
nou fairly coups the creel
wi Lindsay's Thrie Estaitis, braw
devices o the Deil.
About our heids the satire stots
like hailstanes till we reel;
the bawrs are in auld-farrant Scots,
it's maybe jist as weel, mphm,
at Embro to the ploy.

The Epworth Haa wi wonder did
behold a pipers' bicker;
wi hadarâd and hindarid
the air gat thick and thicker,
Cumha na Cloinne set for strings
inflames a piper quicker
to get his dander up, by jings
than thirty u.p. liquor, swith!
at Embro to the ploy.

The tairtan tred wad garr ye lauch;
nae trauchle is owre teuch,
your surname needna end in -och,
they'll cleik ye up the cleuch.
A puckle dollar-bills will aye
prieve Hiram Teufelsdrockh
a scion o the Clan McKay,
it's maybe richt eneuch, verfluch!
at Embro to the ploy.

The Northern British Embro Whigs
Wha biggit Charlotte Square,
they fairly wad hae tined their wigs
to see the Stuarts there;
the bleedin Earl o Moray an aa
weel pentit and gey bare:
our queen and princess, buskit braw
enjoyed the hale affair;
(see Press)
at Embro to the Ploy.

Whan day's anomalies are cled
in decent shades o nicht,
the Castle is transmogrified
by braw electric licht.
The toure that bields the Bruce's croun
presents an unco sicht
mair sib to Wardour Street nor Scone;
waes me for Scotland's micht,
says I,
at Embro to the ploy.  

The Cafe Royal and Abbotsford
are filled wi orra folk
wha's stock-in-tred's the scrievit word
or twicet-scrievit joke;
brains, weak or strang, in heavy beer,
or ordinary, soak.
Quo Smith, "This yill is awfie dear,
I hae nae clinks in poke,
nor fauldan-money,"
at Embro to the ploy.

The auld Assembly-rooms, whaur Scott
foregaithert wi his fiers
nou sees a gey kenspeckle lot
ablow the chandeliers;
til Embro drouths, the Three-weeks Club
a richt godsend appears;
it's something new to find a pub
that gaes on servin beers
fu late
at Embro to the ploy.

They toddle hame doun mirky streets,
filled wi synthetic joy;
aweel, the year brings few sic treats
and muckle to annoy;
there's monie hartsom braw high-jinks
mixed up in this alloy
in simmer whan aa sorts foregaither
at Embro to the ploy.

Robert Garioch
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