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ALLAN H. MACLAINE

The Christis Kirk Tradition:
Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns

Part II

The Sixteenth Century

During the fifteenth century, as we have seen, the Christis Kirk tradition had become firmly established as a distinctive Scottish genre and had already begun to extend its influence into other kinds of poetry. Beginning as a burlesque poem describing the antics of country folk on holiday, the genre had, in Symmie and his Bruder, been adapted as a vehicle for a metrical tale satirizing the corruption of the friars. Moreover, by the end of the century the tradition, in Dunbar's Tournament, had exerted its influence upon a mock tournament poem ridiculing common tradesmen of the town. During the sixteenth century, the declining period of ancient Scots poetry, this Christis Kirk influence was to become steadily broader and deeper, especially in combination with the mock tournament genre.

Sir David Lindsay's entertaining piece written for the amusement of King James V and his court in 1538 and entitled The Justing Betuix James Watsoun and Jbone Barbour is the next surviving poem to show clear signs of Christis Kirk influence. Watsoun and Barbour were real people, minor functionaries in the King's household; and Lindsay's poem may well be a burlesque of an actual encounter between the two. At any rate, the Justing is a lively performance in pentameter couplets, and, in its portrayal of the two contestants, is strongly reminiscent both of Dunbar's Tournament and of Christis Kirk on the Green. For example, Lindsay

2 See The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, 1499-1555, ed. Douglas Hamer, Scottish Text Soc., 3rd Ser. 1 (Edinburgh, 1925), i, 113-116. Publications of the Scottish Text Soc. are hereafter referred to as STS. As in Part I of this essay, I have slightly modernized the texts of passages quoted as follows: the "thorn" letter has been replaced by "th"; the letter "z," when it has the sound of "y" (as in "ze"="ye"), is rendered as "y"; "ff" where it simply indicates capitalization is given as "F"; all abbreviations are spelled out; and modern punctuation and capitalization are supplied throughout. Otherwise the original spelling is retained.
depicts Watsoun and Barbour as being ridiculously inept and bungling in the handling of their weapons, as in this couplet:

I am rycht sure gade James had been vndone,
War not that lohne his mark take be the mone.

The greater part of the poem is, in fact, taken up with this kind of satire on the clumsiness of the "campiouns," a satiric method which was almost certainly suggested to Lindsay by the absurdities of the archery contest in Christis Kirk, where precisely the same kind of effect is achieved. Lindsay's emphasis upon the essential cowardice of his mock heroes, together with the detail introduced briefly at the end to the effect that both Watsoun and Barbour have befouled themselves during the course of the battle, recalls both The Tournament and Christis Kirk. Finally, Lindsay's indebtedness to Christis Kirk is made indisputable by the fact that one of his couplets contains direct echoes in its phrasedology and rime of the earlier poem:

Twa that wes holdmen of the heird
Ran vpoun wreris lyk rammis;
Than followit seymen rycht on affeit,
Bet on with barrow trammis.

("Yit, thocht thy braunis be lyk twa barrow trammis,
Defend thee, man!" Than ran thay to, lyk rammis.

(Justing, ll. 33-34)

Lindsay's Justing, like Dunbar's Tournament, is a mock tournament poem influenced by the Christis Kirk tradition. But whereas in The Tournament that influence was only partial, in the Justing it became important and decisive; for, as we have seen, Lindsay owed to Christis Kirk not merely the incidental rime and one or two other details noted above, but also (to Christis Kirk and The Tournament) the suggestion for the basic satiric method of his poem.

In yet a third poem combining the mock tournament and Christis Kirk genres, the Christis Kirk influence becomes finally dominant. The work in question is Alexander Scott's Justing and Debait vp at the Drum betuix William Adamsone and Johane Sym, written about 1560 and preserved in the Bannatyne Manuscript. The story concerns a quarrel between two lads of Dalkeith, near Edinburgh, over a girl. Judging from the "Envoy" at the end, the girl had been seduced by William Adamson while

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THE CHRISTIS KIRK TRADITION

engaged to John Sym. Discovering this, Sym challenged his rival to a
tournament to decide the issue at "the Drum," a house located between
Dalkeith and Edinburgh. The poem opens with an elaborate and amusing
mock-heroic build-up, exaggerating the importance of the occasion and
the prowess of the two champions. But after all the preparations have
been taken care of, the tournament turns out to be a complete fiasco
when it is discovered that one of the onlooking villagers has mischievously
stolen the spears. It now being impossible to hold the tournament, Adam-
son and Sym return to Dalkeith with their retinues of villagers, and every-
one gets thoroughly drunk. At this point, Sym, the smaller of the two
men, begins vehemently to renew his challenges; but Adamson refuses to
be drawn into a fight, thus incurring the jeers of the crowd at his coward-
lice. Some ludicrous horseplay ensues, until nightfall puts a stop to their
activities and everyone goes home leaving the issue unsettled. Subse-
quently, according to the "Envoy," the cowardly Adamson slips out of
town and goes into hiding, leaving the girl in the lurch.

It will readily be seen from this summary that whereas the opening
stanzas of Scott's poem describing the preparations for the battle are
clearly modeled on the mock tournament genre as developed by Dunbar
and Lindsay, the greater part of the poem, with its scenes of drunkenness,
horseplay, and general riot, is very similar in subject matter to Peblis and
Christis Kirk. The themes and tone of Scott's satire, too, are obviously in
the Christis Kirk tradition. His characters, though not rustics, are com-
mon folk of the little town of Dalkeith whose behavior is subjected to
tolerant and good-natured ridicule—once again, for the amusement of a
cultured reading public. As in Dunbar's Tournament and Lindsay's
Justing, satire of boastfulness and cowardice, likewise a prominent theme
in Christis Kirk on the Green, is present here also.

If Scott's Justing and Debatt is akin to the Christis Kirk tradition in
its subject matter, it is even more strikingly imitative in its form, being
written in the strictly defined Christis Kirk stanza. Here is one of its
most ingenious stanzas, wherein Scott sets up his whimsically expressed
physical contrast between William Adamson and John Sym:

Thair wes ane bettie and ane worse,
I wald that it wer witten;
For William wichttar wes of course
Nor Sym, and bettie knitten.
Sym said he sett nocht by his fues,
Bot hecht he sowld be hittin,
And he might counter Will on hors;
For Sym wes bettie sittin / Nor Will,
Vp at the Drum that day.

[113]
Here we have once again the exacting two-rime pattern in the octave, together with a consistent though moderate degree of alliteration throughout. In the metrical form of his poem, Scott clearly followed *Christis Kirk* with scrupulous fidelity. That *Christis Kirk* itself was his model is further proved by the fact that his refrains ("Up at the Drum that day" and "Up at Dalkeith that day") remind one both of the extended refrains in the second and last stanzas of *Christis Kirk* (Bannatyne text)—"At Chryst Kirk of the grene that day"—and of the "that day" 'bob' lines in stanzas 6 and 9, and were certainly suggested by them. It is worth noting also that in his second to last stanza Scott changes his refrain to "Within the toun that nght." All three refrains are significant because they were to give the hint for later modifications of the stanza.

Alexander Scott was chiefly a courtly love poet, a polished and versatile artist; and it is, therefore, not surprising that his *Justing and Debat* exhibits the sharp wit, technical competence, and easy mastery of form which characterize the work of this gifted maker. His *Justing* is a skillful and entertaining work. In spite of its obvious merits, however, one feels that Scott's poem does not quite succeed in equaling the power and charm of either *Christis Kirk* or *Peblis*. The great effectiveness of the two earlier pieces is achieved mainly through an overpoweringly realistic and lively treatment. In Scott's *Justing* this effect of simple and vivid realism is blurred by the mock-heroic treatment of the first few stanzas, so that although his poem is very similar in content its scenes lack the imaginative boldness, the feeling of truth and actuality so strikingly conveyed in *Christis Kirk* and *Peblis*. We must say then that the influence of the mock tournament genre upon the *Justing and Debat* tends to weaken its effectiveness, and that the added sophistication of Scott's style detracts from the power of his poem, making it fall short of the superb vitality of *Christis Kirk* and *Peblis*. Nevertheless, the *Justing and Debat* remains a highly creditable and amusing performance.

Although Scott's *Justing and Debat* is the latest surviving sixteenth-century poem which belongs unmistakably within the *Christis Kirk* tradition, there remains a small and varied group of other pieces which in one way or another show evidence of the pervasive influence of the genre. Foremost among these is Sir David Lindsay's massive morality play, *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (ca. 1640), which contains many scattered reminiscences of rhymes and phrasing from *Christis Kirk*. For example, the rime pattern of the final stanza of *Christis Kirk* ("aix—

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8For a full discussion of these parallels, see my article "Christis Kirk on the Grene and Sir David Lindsay's Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis," *JEGP*, LV1 (1917), 596-601.
fiddler—smaix—bruder—glaikis—muder—paikis—vdir”) is echoed in the following passage from the first part of Lindsay’s play:

Sowtere Wyfe: Cummer this is my counsellor, lo:
  woman
Ding ze the tane, and I the vther.

Taylores Wyfe: I am content be Godis mother,
  beast
  I think for mee thay huirson smaiks,
  whortone fellous
  whortone fellous
Thay serve richt weil to get their paiks.
  deserv; drubbings

(ll. 1317-21)" 

And further echoes of this same rime pattern from Christis Kirk crop up in different combinations in no fewer than six other places in Lindsay’s Satyre (lines 166-168; 181, 189; 671-673; 1868, 1870-71; 4178-79; and 4586-87). Similarly, the “stendis-endis” rhyme in the sixth stanza of Christis Kirk recurs twice in Lindsay (lines 4353-54, 4359-60) in an almost identical context, and there is a striking reminiscence of the opening lines of Christis Kirk in Lindsay’s

For quby sic reformation as I weyne
Into Scotland was never hard nor seine.

(ll. 3721-22)

It is worth noting further that nearly all of Lindsay’s borrowing from Christis Kirk appear in the Satyre in scenes where the subject matter, tone, and characters most nearly approximate those of Christis Kirk—that is, in scenes of slapstick comedy and horseplay, or in comic scenes involving the clownish “vice” characters. Lindsay’s debt to Christis Kirk in his great morality play is a further and most convincing illustration of the extent to which this poem had seeped into the consciousness of cultured Scots at least, and had become by the mid-sixteenth century a part of the national mind and memory.

Among anonymous pieces of the sixteenth century showing Christis Kirk influence may be mentioned a poem preserved in the Maitland Folio Manuscript (and therefore written about 1580) called Of Ladies Bewilies, beginning “Our Lordis ar so degenerat.” This is a satiric attack on noble Scottish ladies for their extravagance in dress, and as such is foreign in theme and tone to the Christis Kirk genre. It is, however, written in the distinctive stanza, without the bobwheel. Similarly, in the Maitland Quarto Manuscript there is a song entitled Ane ballat to be sone with the tune of “laifer come to luifeirs dore &c.” beginning “O blessed bird

* All quotations and line references from Lindsay’s play are taken from James Kinley’s excellent edition, Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis (London, 1914.).

* The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, ed. Wm. A. Craigie, STS, 2nd Ser. 7 (Edinburgh, 1919), 1, 66-68.
brightest of all. This piece, a conventional medieval love lyric, is also written in a modified form of the Christis Kirk stanza. The author uses a stanza of six instead of eight lines of alternating tetrameter and trimeter, followed by a trimeter tag line which acts as a unifying refrain ("Have pitie I yow pray") and is similar in effect to the bobwheel. Judging from the language and style of the song, it probably dates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. These two specimens suggest that the influence of the Christis Kirk stanzaic form extended in the sixteenth century to types of poetry utterly unlike the genre for which it was originally invented.

Additionally, several of the themes, artistic purposes and methods inherent in the Christis Kirk tradition crop up in other poems and ballads of the sixteenth century. Perhaps the best of these is the vigorous and irresistible farce called The Wife of Auchtermuchty. Here an age-old folk theme of marital disagreement is treated in the Christis Kirk style, with precisely the same kind of sharply realistic detail, robust humor, and good-natured satire presented from the point of view of an amused and superior onlooker. Similar but less effective treatments of discord between husband and wife—a theme, by the way, which appears in both Pebbly and Christis Kirk—may be found in such pieces as The Dumb Wife, Wa Worth Margsge, and God gif I were wedy now, all of which are in the Maitland Folio Manuscript. The Weaning of Jok and Jenny in the Banffatyne Manuscript is a highly successful aristocratic satire on rustic marriage diplomacy, and is a very early specimen, probably the prototype, of a genre which became increasingly popular in Scotland through the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth.

The five poems noted above are merely representative of a fairly large body of such work surviving from the sixteenth century. The themes of these pieces are, of course, universal, going far beyond the Christis Kirk tradition and belonging rather to a common fund of folk ideas. Not the themes themselves, but rather the treatments of them are significant here. At a time when the Christis Kirk poems were evidently enjoying wide popularity among the reading classes of Scotland, we find

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9 Bann. MS., II, 320-324.
10 Ed. Craigie, I, 69-70, 243-244, 244-245.
12 For later specimens of this type, see, e.g., Maggie's Tochter, Jocky said to Jenny, and The Caer be came o'er the Croft in The Tea-Table Miscellany, ed. Allan Ramsay, 14th ed. (Edinburgh, 1768), I, 26-28, 70-71; II, 117-118.
THE CHRISTIS KIRK TRADITION

a considerable number of these other poems appearing, poems which are not strictly within the tradition, but which treat a variety of folk themes in the Christis Kirk way. It would seem, then, highly probable that the composition of these new art poems depicting the folk ways of the Scottish peasantry from a humorous and satiric point of view was stimulated by the broad popularity and influence of the older Christis Kirk tradition in sixteenth-century Scotland.

The Seventeenth Century

During the latter part of the sixteenth century Scots poetry on the literary level died a slow and lingering death. With the triumph of Knoxian Calvinism there came a general stifling of poetic composition on a large scale, since poetry, along with dancing and other “lewd” entertainments, was proscribed as conducive to idleness and sin. This powerful Calvinist prohibition, together with the removal of the court (the center of poetic patronage) from Edinburgh to London in 1603, and the overwhelming influence of the great English poets of the Renaissance upon the few Scottish gentlemen who continued to cultivate the art, brought about an almost complete extinction of the old national tradition in art poetry, until the vernacular revival which took place in the early years of the eighteenth century. The seventeenth century thus represents an enormous and almost fatal gap in the natural development of native Scottish poetry, a gap which was only partially bridged in three different ways. In the first place, the purely folk literature, chiefly in the form of popular ballads and songs, continued to thrive in oral transmission in spite of Calvinist suppression. Secondly, a number of Scottish gentlemen who were genuinely interested in poetry continued to honor the names and (more important) to preserve in manuscript the works of the old makers, thus saving them from complete oblivion. And finally, the Christis Kirk tradition actually continued to develop through the long winter of the seventeenth century.

The persistence of the Christis Kirk tradition through the seventeenth century is indeed a remarkable fact, and one not easily explained except in terms of the innate vitality of the genre. Its survival during these dark years is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of its enduring and inextinguishable popularity among the Scottish people. Rigid Calvinist censorship during this century permitted the printing of only five major works of the old national poetry, four of them being of a didactic or moralistic nature. These latter were the verse chronicles of Barbour and Blind Harry, Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, and the works of Sir David Lindsay, the unofficial poet laureate of the Reformation in Scot-
land. Apart from these, the only poem of the old tradition to be consistently reprinted in the seventeenth century was *Christis Kirk on the Green*, which saw at least five separate editions, in 1643, 1660, 1663, 1684, and 1691. Why this poem, rather than Henryson’s *Fables*, or, for example, countless other quite respectable poems of the old makers, should have escaped the Kirk’s disapproval of secular poetry in general remains a mystery. One can only conclude that an insistent popular demand kept the poem alive and in print despite the official opposition to such works.

Apart from these reprints of *Christis Kirk*, there is further proof of the continued vitality of the genre during the seventeenth century in the existence of a small group of new poems written during this barren period and undoubtedly under the influence of *Christis Kirk*. The most interesting of these is a boisterous macaronic (half Latin, half Scots) poem entitled *Polemo-Middininia* (“The Midden Fight”). This piece has been attributed to William Drummond of Hawthornden; and, although the attribution is open to some question, the probabilities seem to be that Drummond was indeed its author, as Drummond’s editor, L. E. Kastner, has ably demonstrated. At any rate, *Polemo-Middininia* is a seventeenth-century poem (the first known edition appears to date from the 1640’s); and it is significant that in at least two seventeenth-century printings of the poem, those of 1684 and 1691 (Gibson’s), the text was bound together with the text of *Christis Kirk on the Green*, showing that from the first the close kinship of *Polemo-Middininia* with the older poem was clearly recognized.

In the subject matter, type of humor, and general tone and purpose of *Polemo-Middininia*, the influence of the whole *Christis Kirk* tradition is obvious enough. Drummond takes as his comic situation a violent altercation between the households of two neighboring Fife-shire lairds, Scot of Scotstarvet and Cunningham of Newburns, an altercation which may well have had its counterpart in real life. In the poem, the Scotstarvet people, rallied by their laird, attempt to assert their claim to a right-of-way across Newburns land by arming themselves with pitchforks and defiantly escorting a string of carts laden with dung past the windows of Newburns

11 For bibliographical data on all of these editions, see Wm. Gekkie, *A Bibliography of Middle Scots Poets*, STS, O.S. 61 (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 91-96.
12 For text and notes on this poem, see *The Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. L. E. Kastner (Manchester, 1911), II, 121-126, 418-424.
13 For a full statement of the evidence on this question, see Kastner, II, 418-420.
14 See Kastner, I, xciii; II, 420.
15 See Gekkie, *Bibliography*, p. 96, for data.
THE CHRISTIS KIRK TRADITION

house itself. The whole procession is triumphantly led by a bagpiper, and is composed of a motley crew of rustics and household servants listed in a mock heroic roll call:

Hic aderant Geordie Akinbeldus, & little Johnus . . .
Andrew Aikhinderus, & Jamie Thomsonus, & alter Alexander
(Heu pudet, ignoro nonem) slaveri-beardus homo,
Qui portas digita-tes, & assim jecerat extra. wipped the pots; ashes

Meanwhile, "Nabberna," the mistress of Newberns, observing what is afoot, decides to put up a fight and calls out her own comic crew, who are strongly reinforced by the women of the house. At the approach of the procession, "Nabberna" herself rushes out furiously brandishing a "rousty gully" (large rusty knife):

Nec mora, marchavit foras longo ordine turma,
Ipse prior Nabberna suis stout factura ribauldia,
Routaeam manibus getibus furibus una goulaeam,
Tandem muckrellis vocat ad pell mellis fleidor.
Ite, ait, ugeli folloos, si quis modo posthae
Muckeifer has nostras tentet cressatete fenestras,
Juro ego quad ejus longum extrahabo thyrapillum
Et totam virabo faciem, luggasque gulae hoc
Ex capite cuttabo ferox, totumque videbo
Heart-bloodum fluere in terram. Sic verba finivi.

The Scotstarvet folk are momentarily repulsed by this dire threat, but presently return to the attack and a mad free-for-all ensues:

O qualsis haurile buiri fuit namque alteri nemo
Ne vel foot-breduum yerdse yeildare volebat . . . "yerd" (earth)

In the end the Newberns women, armed with various utensils and led by the heroic "Gylla," succeed in crushing the invaders.

The Christis Kirk flavor of Polemos-Middinia is unmistakable. Here we have once again the wild and barbarous brawl between clownish country folk, the swift tempo with frequent transitions, the highlighting of details within the framework of the scene as a whole, the use of dialogue to lend reality, the brief character sketches, the robust style and uninhibited language—all of which we have noted as characteristic of the genre. The pitched battle and the comic exposure of cowardice remind one of both Peblis and Christis Kirk, while the mock-heroic build-up recalls Scott's Justing and Debat. In short, Polemos-Middinia has all the earmarks of the Christis Kirk tradition, except for its verse form. Above all, the general tone and point of view of Polemos-Middinia fit perfectly into the Christis Kirk pattern. The poem is a good-humored satire of Scottish country life and characters as viewed by a detached and intellec-
ual spectator, and is obviously intended to delight the cultured minority with its incongruous combination of homely dunhill subject matter and sophisticated linguistic wit. As such, *Polermo-Middinia* is an ingenious and entertaining piece of work, a distinctive contribution to the *Christis Kirk* tradition.

Apart from the obvious connection with the *Christis Kirk* tradition, *Polermo-Middinia* has several interesting features of its own. If the poem be Drummond’s (as it seems to be), it stands alone among the works of that smooth and courtsly writer as a boisterous and uninhibited aberration from the norm. The conception of the poem doubtless came to Drummond as a result of his knowledge of both macaronic poetry and the *Christis Kirk* tradition. Thus, assuming Drummond’s authorship, *Polermo-Middinia* proves that he was certainly familiar with the poetry of his native land, although he chose to follow the great English poets of the Renaissance in the bulk of his formal work. The poem has, moreover, two or three characteristics which are new to the *Christis Kirk* genre. For one thing, it is a tri-lingual effort—part Latin, part English, part Scots—a fact which creates difficulties for modern readers and which has, no doubt, contributed to the neglect and obscurity in which the poem has lingered. Secondly, it contains a mock epic invocation (to “nymphs” and “skippers” of Fife) and mock epic catalogues of names, devices of classical literature which had appeared in none of the earlier specimens of the *Christis Kirk* tradition.

Another notable seventeenth-century poem in the *Christis Kirk* genre is the rollicking song called *The Blythsome Bridal*, attributed (uncertainly) to Francis Sempill of Beltrees (died 1682).18 *The Blythsome Bridal*, being in “plain braid Scots,” is much better known than *Polermo-Middinia* and has been frequently anthologized. It is, however, significantly related to Drummond’s piece, and not merely by virtue of belonging to the same genre. A recent re-examination of the two poems has led me to believe that *Polermo-Middinia* was, in fact, an important source for *The Blythsome Bridal*. We have already noted in Drummond’s poem the mock epic catalogue of names as a feature not found in earlier *Christis Kirk* poems. There is a similar, but more extensive, comic roll call of the wedding guests in *The Blythsome Bridal*—a roll call which includes not only several of the same names that appear in *Polermo-Middinia*, but also some of the same epithets attached to the same names. Thus, “plouky-fac’d Wattie” (*Polermo-Middinia*, l. 38) becomes “plouckie fac’t Wat”

THE CHRISTIS KIRK TRADITION

(The Blythesome Bridal, l. 23); and “gledamque Ketaem” (l. 85) becomes “gleed Katie” (l. 46). Similarly, the epithet “heavi-arsus” (l. 39) turns us as “happer-ar’d” in The Blythesome Bridal (l. 44). There are also simple repetitions of names such as “Andrew” and “Geordie;” and there is an allusion to “Mons Meg,” the great cannon at Edinburgh Castle, in both poems. Finally, most interestingly and conclusively, the author of The Blythesome Bridal incorporates in his poem what seems to be a misreading of Polemo-Middinia. In the latter poem (ll. 131, 136), Drummond uses two nouns, “Gilliwypum” and “Gilliwarphra,” both meaning “a hard blow,” which he unaccountably capitalizes as though they were proper names.” The author of The Blythesome Bridal, apparently misreading these words as character names, includes a “Gillie-Wimplie” as one of his wedding guests (l. 42). In view of these correspondences, which cannot all be coincidental, it seems impossible not to believe that the author of The Blythesome Bridal was drawing freely on Polemo-Middinia for his comic roll call of names. The fact is significant in showing how firmly established, how closely knit the Christis Kirk tradition had become. These two seventeenth-century pieces are not only clearly related to the older Christis Kirk poems; they are also linked to each other.

The Blythesome Bridal certainly dates from about the middle of the seventeenth-century, and probably circulated on broadsides before it was included in James Watson’s pioneering anthology, A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems, both Ancient and Modern (Edinburgh, 1706-9-11), the earliest known printing of the poem. It is a shorter and less ambitious work than most of the Christis Kirk poems, containing only nine eight-line stanzas, with the opening four lines acting as a refrain repeated after each octave:

Fy let us all to the Briddel,
    For there will be kilting there,
For Jockie’s to be married to Maggie,
    The lass with the gauden hair.

It will be seen from this sample that the verse form of The Blythesome Bridal is not that of Christis Kirk, but is equally distinctive with a swinging anapaestic rhythm that is well suited to the rousing mood of the song as a whole. This piece also departs from the Christis Kirk pattern in having literally no action and no dialogue. It is merely an extended exhortation, urging people to attend the wedding festivities, the body of the song

See Kastner ed. Poetical Works of Drummond, II, 422-423, on these words. For a fuller treatment of the relationship between these two poems, see my article “Drummond of Hawthornden’s Polemo-Middinia as a Source for The Blythesome Bridal,” Notes and Queries, N.S., I (Sept., 1914), 384-386.

[121]
being a humorous listing of the guests and refreshments one might expect to find there.

In all other respects, however, The Blythesome Bridal falls squarely within the Christis Kirk genre. Here we have the typical scene of rustic conviviality as observed from an aristocratic point of view, the satiric sketches of peasant life and character, the swift cumulative movement of the verse, the rapid shifting from one scene to another, the genial tone, the broad and robust humor. The following lines from the sketches of wedding guests will illustrate the general style of the song:

And Crampie that married Stainie,  
And coft him breeks to his ase,  
And afterwards hanged for stealing,  
Great mercy it hapned no worse;  
And there will be fairtickld New,  
And Bess with the lillie white leg,  
That gat to the south for breeding,  
And bangld up her wamb in Mons-Meg.  
Fy let us all, etc.

(stanza 4)

On the whole, and although the poem is a fairly slight and unpretentious effort, The Blythesome Bridal is a successful piece of work as far as it goes, a spirited and entertaining song which shows a considerable degree of artistic competence and wit. Its brief, graphic sketches of the guests and the refreshments combine to give a remarkably clear and fascinating picture of what an old-fashioned Scottish country wedding must have been like.

Another piece which deserves mention here is the song called Hallow-fair,18 an imitation of The Blythesome Bridal which probably dates from the latter part of the seventeenth century. So confused and contradictory, however, is the evidence on the date and authorship of this poem that it has been attributed by some scholars19 to Francis Sempill of Beltrees (?1616-1682) and by others20 to Robert Fergusson (1750-74), authors separated by more than a hundred years. Both attributions are extremely dubious. The antiquated language and style of the song suggest a seventeenth-century date and seem to rule out Fergusson, whereas there is no really concrete evidence in favor of Sempill. Indeed, if Francis Sempill wrote The Blythesome Bridal, it seems almost incredible that he could also

18Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, ed. David Herd (Edinburgh, 1776) II, 169.
have written Hallowfair, since the latter is a conscious imitation of The Blythesome Bridal, set to the same meter and to the tune of "O fly let us a' to the bridal." On the whole, the probabilities seem to be that Hallowfair is a late seventeenth-century song by an unknown author, a song which may have been touched up and partly rewritten by Robert Ferguson for his friend David Herd who included it in the second volume of his Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs (Edinburgh, 1776).

Hallowfair resembles The Blythesome Bridal in style and is written in the same unusual verse form, as the opening lines will show:

There’s south of brow Jockies and Jennies plenty
Comes well-busied into the fair, snooded knots of hair,
With ribbons on their coquetomies, snooded knots of hair,
And south o’ fine flour on their hair.

In its content, however, this song is even more closely related to the Christis Kirk tradition than The Blythesome Bridal. It is a lively and vigorous piece, describing the antics of a group of rusties who are driving their livestock through Edinburgh on their way to the Hallow Fair held on the Calton Hill. The poem is full of boisterous action, horseplay, drunkenness, and humorous dialogue so typical of the genre. It is especially reminiscent of Peblis to the Play. Unlike the better Christis Kirk poems, however, Hallowfair is unequal in execution and extremely loose in structure, lacking logical arrangement and coherence. Some sections are skillfully written and full of gusto, whereas others are haphazard, careless, and disjointed. But in spite of its glaring weaknesses, Hallowfair remains a valuable and interesting specimen of its type.

Besides the poems already treated, there are several other late seventeenth-century songs which are more or less closely related to the Christis Kirk tradition, though they do not fall strictly within the genre. Among these are the immortal Maggie Lauder, one of the undoubted classics of the Scots song; the irresistible drinking song called Toddlin But and Toddlin Ben; and a song entitled Muirland Willie. This last song shows striking resemblances to Hallowfair and, like it, was written under the influence of The Blythesome Bridal. These songs, and a few others like them, share several Christis Kirk features. They are all art poems dealing with folk themes, treating lower class life and character in a good-natured, semi-satiric way, using swift graphic description and dialogue. In view of

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31 Sometimes attributed to Francis sempill of Beltrees. For text see Herd ed. Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, II, 72-73.
32 Both of these songs appeared for the first time in Ramsay’s Tea-Table Miscellany, II (1725), 114; I (1724), 7-9.
these qualities and in view of the fact that at the time they were written the *Christis Kirk* genre was by far the most vital type of formal poetry being produced in Scotland, songs of this kind may safely be regarded as offshoots of the *Christis Kirk* tradition.

Looking back over the dark years of the seventeenth century, that singularly barren period when very little formal poetry in the Scots tongue was being produced, one is struck by the unique and astonishing persistence of the *Christis Kirk* tradition. At a time when virtually all of the older genres of the native poetic tradition (exclusive of folk poetry, of course) had fallen into neglect and near oblivion under the Calvinist prohibition, the *Christis Kirk* genre alone continued to flourish and develop, nurtured mainly by country gentlemen of the Drummond or Sempill type. As we have seen, the century produced at least three fairly substantial poems of the *Christis Kirk* type except for verse form—*Polemo-Middimia*, *The Blythesome Bridal*, and *Hallowfair*—plus a handful of related songs. In addition, at least five editions of *Christis Kirk on the Green* appeared during these years. In fact, apart from a small group of poems by the Sempills of Baltrees and a few miscellaneous songs, virtually all of the slender body of vernacular art poetry surviving from the seventeenth century is related, more or less, to the *Christis Kirk* tradition. There is further significance in the fact that four of these seventeenth-century poems—*Polemo-Middimia*, *The Blythesome Bridal*, *Hallowfair*, and *Muirland Willie*—are clearly linked to each other as well as to the earlier *Christis Kirk* poems, showing that the authors were aware of both the ancient and recent poems in this style and were consciously writing within a long established tradition. In spite of these tight interrelationships, however, each of these seventeenth-century poems is different. There is no evidence that the tradition had become static or stereotyped; on the contrary, the surviving specimens indicate a fluid and developing genre, although the later poems, after *Polemo-Middimia*, suggest a tendency toward shorter and less ambitious efforts approximating the folk song in length—a tendency which, had it not been checked, might have resulted in a gradual fading out of the genre.

(To be continued)

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[124]