

The Value & Security of Wives, Sisters, Serfs, and of Women in general; and, the Wisdom of Men so Compromised

From: Goeffrey Keating's "History of Ireland," we find these helpful admonitions, particularly concerning the Value & Security of Wives, and of Women in general, among others; and an example on how real men of higher Sensibilities & forbearing Wisdom resolve matters of conflict betwixt them, deriving therefrom, in his Chapter XLVI.

It was in the time of Cormac that Fitheal lived; and he was his chief brehon; and as Fitheal was about to die, he sent for his son namd Flaithri; and this Flaithri was a wise and learned man. Fitheal left him his blessing, and advised him to observe four things most carefully, and that it would be to his advantage to do so, namely,

- [1.] not to nurse or take in fosterage a king's son,
- [2.] not to impart a dangerous secret to his wife,
- [3.] not to raise the state of a serf's son,
- [4.] not to commit his purse or his treasure to his sister's keeping.

And after Fitheal's death, Flaithri resolved to test each of these points. And to make trial of them he took in fosterage the son of Cormac son of Art; and some time after he took the child with him into a wood, and gave him to one of his people, a swineherd, who lived in the recesses of the wood; and he asked him to conceal the child well until himself should send him a certain token, and then he returned to the town to his own house, and feigned much trouble and distress; and his wife inquired of him the cause of his trouble and distress. He said it was nothing. But when she saw his distress continue, she began to importune him to find out from him the cause of his trouble. He said that, if she would keep it a secret, he would tell her the cause of his distress.

She swore that whatever he should tell her as a secret she would not reveal it. Then, said he, I have committed a dreadful act of treachery, that is, the slaying of my fosterson, the king's son. Upon hearing this, the wife screamed and called the house-folk, and told them to bind the barricide because he had killed the king's son. And they did accordingly, and they took him bound to the king. Flaithri also had raised the state of the son of one of his own stewards so that he became a rich

man. Similarly very soon after his father's death he committed some of his wealth to his sister's keeping, so that none of the four counsels his father had given him should go untested by him. Now, when, the steward's son found that he was a prisoner, and the king about to put him to death, none of them was more bitter and severe against him than he, as he hoped to acquire Flaithri's inheritance for himself.

Flaithri, finding himself in this difficulty, sent a message to his sister, asking her to send him the treasure he had give her to keep, that he might make friends for himself around the king's person. But when the messenger reached her, she denied that she had ever received any such thing from him. And when that reply reached Flaithri, as he was about to be put to death, he asked to be permitted to go before the king, in order to speak to him on a secret matter; and when he had come into Cormac's presence, he told him that the child was safe, and asked to be kept in his bonds till his foster-son should be brought in. The son was sent for; and when the child had come in from the swineherd who had been keeping him in safety, as he beheld Flaithri in bonds, he wept without ceasing until he was set free. And when Flaithri had been set free, Cormac asked him privately why he had permitted himself to be placed in this predicament. It was to test the four counsels my father gave me I did so, said Flaithri; and I found on testing them that my father's four counsels to me were wise. In the first place, it is not wise for anyone to take upon him the bringing up of a king's son lest he may be guilty of neglect resulting in the injury or loss of the fosterchild, while the life or death of the foster-father who had been negligent was in the power of the king. As to the second counsel my father gave me, the keeping of a dangerous secret is not by nature in the power of women in general; hence it is not prudent to commit such a secret to them. The third counsel my father gave me was not to raise or make wealthy the son of a serf or of a lowly person; for such persons are usually unmindful of the benefit conferred on them; and moreover, they are hurt that the party who raised them should be aware of the meanness and lowly state whence they rose. Good, said he, is the fourth counsel my father gave me: not to give my treasure to my sister; for it belongs to the nature of women to regard as spoil whatever valuables their friends give them to keep in safety.

AUTHOR: Goeffrey Keating, i.e., Seathrúm Cétinn (A.D.c.1569 c.1644), 17th Century Irish priest, poet, and historian, from County Tipperary, who ministered to his 'flock' in spite of the English Penal Laws regarding "religion." His History was written c.A.D. 1632.

SOURCE: The Online Resource for Irish history, literature and politics; A Project of the History Department, University College Cork, CELT, the Corpus of Electronic Texts, <<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/T1000054.shtml>>, among many sources available, in English and Gaelic.