

The Instructions of King Cormac

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "what are the dues of a chief and of an ale-house?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac
Good behavior around a good chief,
Lights to lamps
Exerting oneself for the company
A proper settlement of seats
Liberality of dispensers,
A nimble hand at distributing
Attentive service
Music in moderation
Short story-telling
A joyous countenance
Welcome to guests
Silence during recitals
Harmonious choruses.

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "What were your habits when you were a lad?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac.
I was a listener in woods
I was a gazer at stars
I was blind where secrets were concerned
I was silent in a wilderness
I was talkative among many
I was mild in the mead-hall
I was stern in battle
I was gentle towards allies
I was a physician of the sick
I was weak towards the feeble
I was strong towards the powerful
I was not close lest I should be burdensome
I was not arrogant though I was wise
I was not given to promising though I was strong
I was not venturesome though I was swift
I did not deride the old though I was young
I was not boastful though I was a good fighter
I would not speak about any one in his absence
I would not reproach, but I would praise
I would not ask, but I would give
For it is through these habits that the young become old and kingly warriors."

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "What is the worst thing you have seen?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac, "Faces of foes in the rout of battle".
"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "What is the sweetest thing you have heard?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac,
The shout of triumph after victory,
Praise after wages,
A lady's invitation to her pillow.

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "What is worst for the body of man?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac. "Sitting too long, lying too long, exerting oneself beyond one's strength, running too much, leaping too much, frequent falls, sleeping with one's leg over the bed rail, gazing at glowing embers, wax, biestings, new ale, bull-flesh, curdles, dry food, bog-water, rising too early, cold, sun, hunger, drinking too much, eating too much, sleeping too much, sinning too much, grief, running up to a height, shouting against the wind, drying oneself by a fire, summer-dew, winter-dew, beating ashes, swimming on a full stomach, sleeping on one's back, foolish romping."

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "What is the worst pleading and arguing?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac.

Contending against knowledge,
contending without proofs
taking refuge in bad language
a stiff delivery
a muttering speech
hair-splitting
uncertain proofs,
despising books
turning against custom
shifting one's pleading
inciting the mob
blowing one's own trumpet
shouting at the top of one's voice.

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "Who are the worst for whom you have a comparison?"
"Not hard to tell", said Cormac.

A man with the impudence of a satirist,
with the pugnacity of a slave-woman
with the carelessness of a dog
with the conscience of a hound
with a robber's hand
with a bull's strength
with the dignity of a judge
with keen ingenuous wisdom
with the speech of a stately man
with the memory of an historian
with the behavoir of an abbot
with the swearing of a horse-thief
and he wise, lying, grey-haired, violent, swearing, garrulous, when he says 'the matter is
settled, I swear, you shall swear'.

"O Cormac, grandson of Conn", said Carbery, "I desire to know how I shall behave among the wise
and the foolish, among friends and strangers, among the old and the young, among the innocent and
the wicked."

"Not hard to tell", said Cormac.
Be not too wise, be not too foolish
be not too conceited, nor too diffident
be not too haughty, nor too humble
be not too talkative, nor too silent
be not too hard, nor too feeble
If you be too wise, one will expect too much of you
If you be foolish, you will be deceived
If you be too conceited, you will be thought vexatious
If you be too humble, you will be without honour
If you be too talkative, you will not be heeded
If you be too silent, you will not be regarded
If you be too hard, you will be broken
If you be too feeble, you will be crushed.

The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Art

These are the didings of Eogan and Cormac.

Eogan Mor went to the battle of Mag Mucruime. He spent the night at the house of Triath of the
Cre craige. The latter had a beautiful daughter named Monchae. Eogan summoned the girl to his
bed, and she was given to him for he had no children until then. Hence did Monchae bear a fine
son after the fall of Eogan Mor in the battle against Mac Con. Fiachu Muillethan was the son born
of that encounter. He was called Muillethan because the druid said to Monchae when she was in
parturition: "If it be on the morrow that the child is born, your son will surpass the sons of all

and his sons will be kings, and his decendants until doomsday". After that Monchae came and sat upon the stone at Raphae in the lower reaches of the Suir. Hence did the crown of the boy's head spread over the stone so that his name was Fiachu Muillethan son of Eogan Mor. He said to her at first that he would be the chief-Fool of Ireland if he were born on the previous day. That is why she waits until the morrow. "Munlethan", then, that is "broad crown", when the crown of his head spread over the stone. That is why it is wrong for any man of tghe Eoganacht to slay a man of the Crecraige.

Similarly, Art son of Conn, no son was born to him until, on the night before the battle, he had intercourse with Achantan the daughter of Olc Aiche the druid. She is the mother of Cormac son of Art son of Conn. It that Cormac who assumed kingship after Mac Con son of Lugaid. Cormac's age at that time was thirty years.

When Art came to Tara to the battle, he came as one of thrice fifty warriors in advance of the hosts, and came to Aiche. Achantan daughter of Olc Aiche was at a byre... before him. She was the most beautiful woman in Ireland. Now Olc Aiche had fifty byres around the Aiche and thrice fifty, etc. And from him was the country named, and each of the byres (served) to feed him. His drink was the after-milk strippings of a hundred cows. His vessel, which would contain that (much), had to be before him in each of the places (i.e. the byres).

Now when Art came she had the vessel full. A man who was with Art demanded a drink and the girl. "Who seeks tghe drink?" said she. "Art, son of Conn, king of Ireland" said the man. "Let one of you come", said she, "to carry it". Two of them fail (to carry it). She carries it on her own and distributes it to them. Fortune would be propititious", said the servant, "if you would but give yourself to the king". "I am unable to do that", said the girl. "Wait! My father will..."

Olc Aiche comes. "Where is my drink?" said he. She fills his vessel with new milk. "It is my little vessel, I recognise it, but the first (milk) is not my milk. Where is my drink?" said he. "This is not it".

The girl tells it to him. "What", said he, "did Art say to you?" "He said to me, 'Fortune would be propititious if you would sleep (lit. 'go') with the king". "It were better", said he, "that you went". "I too should like that", said the girl, "if you would approve". "Good will come of it", said Olc Aiche. "Save what you bear he will leave no progeny, and the progeny that you bear will be kings of Ireland until doomesday. Let a feast be prepared for you and the king, to wit, fifty oxen, fifty boars, five thousand loaves and fifty vats of wine. Give him in addition to them fifty horsebridles and fifty cows..."

All of this was brought to Art on the morrow, and the girl went with it with fifty girls, and that food was distributed by Art. And the girl sleeps with him on that day and a tent was made around them and she tells him the words of her father Olc Aiche and asks him for a sign for herself. And Art gave her his sword and his golden thumb-ring and his assembly garment and they both bid farewell with great sorrow. And the girl was pregnant with Cormac the grandson of Conn.

Art goes to the battle. When nine months of the daughter of Olc Aiche with Cormac were up, she gives birth. She bears a son, called Cormac. He was (so) named because he (? Art) had said, "A fuitiful son shall come indeed. 'Cormac', thereafter". When Cormac had been born, the druid-smith Olc Aiche puts five protective bands upon him, against slaying, drowning, fire, sorcery, wolves, against every evil.

Not long after that she was asleep on the green. A she-wolf came and took her son away from her without her knowledge, and the she-wolf gave him suck and she (his mother) did not know where he had gone. There was a hunter in that country, called Luigne Fer Tri. He went to entrap game round about on the pack of wolves and he captures the boy there; as for him, he used to run with her wolves. Luigne Fer Tri took him with him and he (Cormac) was fed by him until the end of a year. His mother found out about that. She went to Luigne Fer Tri and took him from him and she told him how things were with the boy. "Well, be off with you!" said Luigne Fer Tri. "Conceal the boy. YOur lives will be forfeit for it should Mac Conn know (about him)."

That very night Achantan went with her son into the north of Ireland, making for Fiachnae Cassan, foster-father of Art son of Conn. When she crossed the mountain at midnight the wolves of Ireland came to her to take her son from her by force. They raise a cry around her. A wild herd that was

on the mountain set at them and give her protection. Hence (the name) Sliab Conachla in east Luigne.

She reached Art's foster-father in the north. He was washing his hands at a well, and he (was) sorrowing with grief for Art. "Well, well!" said Achantan. "Who is here?" said Fiachnae to her. She told him all her tidings. He embraced her and wept over the boy so that he was wet. And a vessel of yew is made about the boy and a purple cloak (placed) on the vessel, so that the hands of the people welcoming the boy might not reach him, lest he be crushed.

He was fostered for thirty years. And (then) on an auspicious day Cormac went to Tara by means of his grandfather's teaching and druidry. And he was given his father's sword and golden thumb-ring and assembly garment. They all fitted him. The tall stripling went straight to Tara, and he alone.

Cormac saw a man in front of Tara consoling a woman, and the woman moreover weeping. He came up to the man's occiput and he unsheathed a sword to him. The man said to him, "It is the champion of a country who unsheathes a sword to me; but I am Mac Con's steward, Nechtan my name". "My demand for me!" said Cormac. "It shall be given", said the steward. "Food for me, anonymity, safety for me". "You shall have it", said the steward. "Why is the woman weeping?" said Cormac. "She is weeping", said the steward, "for a judgement passed by the king which she does not like, to wit, that her sheep are forfeit for stripping the queen's woad-garden". "More fitting would be one shearing for another", said Cormac. "The man who passed that judgement", said Cormac, "never passed false judgement before. Let me go to him".

The steward made these words known to Mac Con in Tara. "Be off with you!" said he (Mac Con). "He shall succeed me. If there is a man of Art's progeny in Ireland, that man is he. Let him come under my protection and I shall leave Tara to him for it is no longer mine, since I gave the (false) judgement. My time has come to an end. It is thirty years to-day since I assumed kingship".

The warrior comes. Mac Con welcomes him and rises before him (in homage). "Nay!" said Cormac, "I am not king as long as you may be here". Mac Con raises his knee (in salutation). "This place will be mine for a long time, however" (said Cormac). Mac Con's clients and mercenaries are called to him. An order was given them: "Let us return to Munster to our own patrimony: this abode belongs to everyone at his own time". Mac Con sets forth, and his son Lugaid Macnia-- the same name (as Lugaid Mac Con)-- and the latter's four sons, to wit, Dau and Trian, Eochu and Lugith.

"How", said Cormac, "have you left the green on which I was? Give us a judgement". "Nay!" said Mac Con. "You judge, since it is the beginning of your reign." "Provided that you be willing", said Cormac, "I shall judge".

The Cormac judges it. "Give...(? one shearing for another)."