

A Possible Source for a Passage in Keating's History

In the introduction (*díonbhrollach*) to his *Foras Feasa* Keating likens the foreign historians to the beetle. Just as the beetle passes by the fairest of flowers only to wallow in dung, so the foreign historians, Giraldus Cambrensis, Spenser, Stanihurst, etc., overlook the edifying aspects of Irish history in order to concentrate on the most unpleasant elements:

Bíodh a fhiadhnaise sin ar an dteist dobheir Cambrens, Spenser, Stanihurst, Hanmer, Camden, Barclaí, Morison, Dauis, Campion, agus gach Nua-Ghall eile d'á scríobhann uirre ó shoin amach, ionnus gur b'é nós, beagnach, an phroimpiolláin doghníd, ag scríobhadh ar Éireannchaibh. Is eadh, iomorro, is nós do'n phroimpiollán, an tan thógbhas a cheann i san samhradh, bheith ar foluamhain ag imtheacht, agus gan cromadh ar mhion-scoth d'á mbí 'san machaire, nó ar bhláth d'á mbí i lubhghort, gémadh rós nó lile uile iad, acht bheith ar fuaidreadh go dteagmhann bualtrach bó nó otrach capaill, go dtéid d'á unfairt féin ionnta. Mar sin do'n droing thuas; ní cromadh ar shubhailcibh nó ar shoibheusaibh na n-uasal do Shean-Ghallaibh agus do Ghaedhealaibh do bhí ag áitiughadh Éireann re n-a linn do rinneadar ... acht is eadh doghníd cromadh ar bheusaibh fodhaoine agus cailleach mbeag n-uiríseal, ar dtabhairt maithghníomh na n-uasal i ndearmad¹.

Keating's criticism was probably not entirely justification. Certainly the simile he uses is both telling and memorable. What has not been noted previously, as far as I know, is that the simile is not original. Among the *fabulae* of Odo of Cheriton there is one with the title *de Scarabone* 'of the Beetle'; it reads as follows:

Scrabo semel uolauit per amigdalinas arbores florentes, per pomeria, per rosas, per lilia et alios flores. Tandem proiecit se in sterquillinium ubi

¹ *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, vol. i, edited by David Comyn, Irish Text Society, 1902, 2-6.