

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Air an t-seachdamh latha dhen t-Sultain, ochd ceud deug, ceithir fichead 's a deich (1890), chaochail a' bhana-bhàrd, Màiri NicEalair, ann an Dùn Eideann. Cha robh i ach da fhìthead bliadhna 's a còig-deug, ach bha i air a bhith tinn le tinneas-cridhe agus droch chnatan anns a' gheamhradh roimhe sin, agus cha deach i am feabhas.

Chan e “NicEalair” a bh' oirre bho thùs; phòs i fear MacEalair a bha na mharaiche, agus chaidh i cuide ris do dh'iomadh àite anns an Roinn Eòrpa. Rinn iad an dachaigh ann an Dùn Eideann. 'S e Camshronach a bh' innte bho thùs, agus rugadh is thogadh i ann an dùthaich nan Camshronach, Lochabair. Bha a h-athair na fhuineadair anns a' Ghearasdan, ach chuir Màiri seachad mòran ùine na h-òige anns an dùthaich cuide ri a seana-phàrantan. Thog i mòran de dhualchas na sgìre bhuapa.

Bha i math air bàrdachd agus choisinn i cliù dhi fhèin le bhith a' sgrìobhadh dàin, ann an Gàidhlig agus Beurla, airson pàipearan-naidheachd. Sgrìobh i leabhar de dh'abairtean Gàidhlig, agus bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu dheidhinn sin an t-seachdain 's a chaidh. Fhuair i urram ann an ochd ceud deug, trì fichead 's a sia-deug (1876), nuair a chaidh a h-ainmeachadh mar Bhàrd do Chomunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis. Bha an dreuchd sin aice fhathast nuair a chaochail i.

Seo a' chiad rann de dhàn – marbhrann – a sgrìobh Màiri don Urramach Alasdair MacGriogair a bha na mhinistear ann an Inbhir Nis airson deich bliadhna fichead. Bha Mgr MacGriogair air a bhith an sàs gu mòr ann an Comunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis:

*Tha an sneachda gu dùmhail
Air flùran an rèidhleìn;
Tha na neòil dhubha dùnadh
Gu dlùth mu na speuran;
Cha chuirear oirnn aiteas,
Le aiteal na grèine,
Bho nach gluaisear mo charaid
Bho sparradh na dèile,
An tìr nam beò.*

Dh'fhàs Màiri ainmeil nuair a thug a' Bhànrigh Bhictoria cead dhi an leabhar aice, “*Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands*”, eadar-theangachadh gu Gàidhlig. Agus rinn i leabhar Beurla cuideachd mun Ghearasdan. Ach cha robh cùisean buileach rèidh na beatha fhèin. Dhealaich i fhèin is an duine aice, agus dh'fhuirich i na h-aonar airson nan deich bliadhna mu dheireadh de a beatha. Seo am pìos mu dheireadh dhen mharbhrann aice don Urr

MacGriogair.:

*Bho nach gluaisear mo charaid
 Bho sparradh na dèile,
 Cha chuirear orm aiteas
 Le aiteal na grèine;
 Ged bhios eòin a' seinn coireil
 Ann an coire nan geugan,
 Bidh mise ri tuireadh,
 Gu muladach, deurach,
 An tìr nam beò.*

Agus tha fhios gur ann mar sin a bha mòran Ghaidheal nuair a chual' iad mu bhàs Màiri fhèin.

Ach b' fheàrr leam ur fàgail an t-seachdain-sa le smuain nas aighearaiche. Bha mi a' coimhead anns an leabhran de dh'abairtean Gàidhlig a rinn Màiri, anns an earrann air bàtaichean. Tha feadhainn de na h-abairtean gu math feumail – leithid “suas an seòl”, “nuas an seòl”, “tarraing an sgòd”, “gabh an stiùir” agus “iomraibh, 'illean gasda!”

Agus bha abairt mhath ann airson na chanas an darna duine ris an duine eile nuair a tha e ag iarraidh air iomramh air ais airson am bàta a thoirt gu stad – *dèan fodha*. Dèan fodha. Nise, dh'fheumadh tu bhith gu math faiceallach ann a bhith a' cleachdadh abairt mar sin an-diugh, can, le deugaire aig an robh Gàidhlig na sgoile a-mhàin. Bhiodh an t-eagal ormsa, nan canadh sibh “dèan fodha, dèan fodha” gu cabhagach, agus ur soitheach gu bhith a' bualadh ann am bàta eile, gun leumadh an gille bochd thar a' chliathaich!

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Faclan na seachdainne: Màiri NicEalair: *Mary MacKellar*; maraiche: *mariner*; cuide ris: *along with him*; Camshronach: *Cameron*; Comunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis: *The Gaelic Society of Inverness*; rann: *verse*; marbhrann: *elegy*; gu dùmhail: *thick*; rèidhlean: *flat meadow*; coireil: *noise, as that made by sea-birds*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: bha i air a bhith tinn le tinneas-cridhe: *she had been ill with heart disease*; cha deach i am feabhas: *she did not improve*; bha a h-athair na fhuineadair anns a' Ghearasdan: *her father was a baker in Fort William*; thog i mòran de dhualchas na sgìre bhuapa: *she learned much about the area's heritage from them*; choisinn i cliù dhi fhèin le bhith a' sgrìobhadh dàin: *she developed a reputation for herself by writing poems*; tha na neòil dhubha (a') dùnadh gu dlùth mu na speuran: *the black clouds are closing tightly in the heavens*; cha chuirear oirnn aiteas le aiteal na grèine: *we will not be made glad by a gleam of sunlight*; bho nach gluaisear mo charaid bho sparradh na dèile: *as my friend will not be moved from the coffin*; an tìr nam beò: *in the land of the living*; dhealaich i fhèin is an duine aice: *she and her husband divorced*; bidh mise ri tuireadh, gu muladach, deurach (pron. “diarach” in many places): *I will be mourning, sad and tearful*; tarraing an sgòd: *haul on the sheet*; gabh an stiùir: *take the helm*; iomraibh, 'illean gasda: *row, my good lads*; thar a' chliathaich: *over the side*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: Suas an seòl: *up with the sail*; nuas an seòl: *down with the sail*. Are you confused by the adverb nuas (or a-nuas)? It is used when something is brought downwards towards the speaker who is in a lower position. Thoir a-nuas e (bring it down). Thig a-nuas às a sin (come down out of there). Movement must be involved. Once the sail was in a lowered position, you might say, “tha an seòl shìos.” You might also use sìos when you

are not in a low position yourself. If you had climbed to the top of the mast, you would say, “sìos an seòl” or “thoir an seòl sìos.”

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: *Dèan fodha!: backwater! This is the instruction given in a rowing boat to the oarsman to row in a backwards manner in order to slow down or stop a moving vessel. I presume that it refers to the movement of the hands which go downwards or under (fodha) at the furthest point astern of the rowing action. But fodha, which is actually a prepositional pronoun meaning “under him” or “under it” (masc.) is also the word we use when we say something goes underwater. Chaidh am bàta fodha (the boat submerged or sank). So I am cheekily suggesting (and no offence is intended) that the lad in question misunderstands the instruction, and following what he thinks is his skipper’s order, (and with the boat about to hit another vessel) jumps overboard!*

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