

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 **

Chan eil mi buileach cinnteach de chanadh na Gaidheil ris anns a’ chànan aca fhèin, oir tha a h-uile rud a tha mi air fhaicinn mu dheidhinn ann am Beurla. Chanainn gur dòcha gur e “Maighstir Ragnall” a chanadh iad ris, ach chan urrainn dhomh a bhith cinnteach. Ann am Beurla chanadh iad “Father Burn” ris, agus ’s e an t-ainm oifigeil a bh’ air Ronald Graham Burn. ’S e duine àraidh a bh’ ann, agus bu mhath leam rudeigin innse dhuibh mu dheidhinn an-dràsta.

Rugadh Ragnall, no Ronnie, Burn ann an Deir ann an Siorrachd Obair Dheathain anns a’ bhliadhna ochd deug, ochdad ’s a seachd (1887). ’S dòcha gum bi fios agaibh gu bheil seann cheanglaichean eadar an t-àite sin – Deir, no Old Deer – agus a’ Ghàidhlig, oir ’s ann ann an seann mhanachainn ann a sin a chaidh Leabhar Dheir a chur ri chèile – leabhar anns a bheil an làmh-sgrìobhadh as sine a th’ againn ann an Gàidhlig na h-Alba. Chan eil fhios a’ m co-dhiù thug an eachdraidh sin buaidh air Ragnall ach, gu dearbh, dh’fhàs e fhèin cianail measail air a’ chànan.

B’ e athair an t-Urramach Iain Burn agus bha Ragnall a-riamh measail air an Eaglais. Ach, ged a thòisich e anns an Eaglais Easbaigich, no san Eaglais Shasannaich, oir chuir e seachad bliadhnaichean aig sgoil ann an Sasainn, mu dheireadh thall, chaidh e a-null don Eaglais Chaitligich. ’S e Caitligich a bh’ ann an cuid de na Gaidheil air an do dh’fhàs e eòlach cuideachd, gu h-àraidh anns na glinn faisg air Canaich agus ann an Loch Abar.

Agus ciamar a dh’fhàs Ragnall eòlach orra? Uill, bhiodh e a’ sreap nam beann faisg air an dachannan ann an glinn iomallach na Gaidhealtachd. Gu dearbh, shreap e a h-uile beinn ann an Alba a tha nas àirde na trì mìle troigh – “Beanntan an Rothaich” mar a chanas daoine riutha – agus choilean e sin ann an naoi deug, fichead ’s a trì (1923). Aig an àm sin bha còig ceud gu leth mullach air liosta an Rothaich agus b’ e Maighstir Ragnall a’ chiad duine a chuir a chas air a h-uile gin aca.

Ach nuair a bha e na bhalach anns an sgoil, cha robh coltas a’ ghaisgich air. Bha e beag is crotach, le casan goirid, bha e sàmhach is aonaranach, agus ’s iad na cuspairean a b’ fheàrr leis na cànanan clasaigeach – seann Laideann is Greugais. Cha robh e math sam bith air spòrs, co-dhiù spòrs mar rugbaidh is ball-coise.

Ach thigeadh e beò air na beanntan. Nuair a bha e òg, bhiodh e a’ coiseachd nam beann ann an Siorrachd Obair Dheathain cuide ri athair. Agus ann an naoi deug is ceithir-deug (1914), dh’fhalbh e air cuairt mhòr air a’ Ghaidhealtachd, leis fhèin. Thòisich e anns a’ Mhonadh Ruadh, agus chaidh e an uair sin a Ghleann Srath Farair agus Gleann Canaich. Cha robh e a-riamh fìor chomasach air a shlighe a dhèanamh tro na beanntan ann an droch shìde, agus

fhuair e e fhèin air chall ann an ceò air Beinn a' Chlachair. Thairis air na bliadhnaichean, thachair sin dha iomadh turas ach, a dh'aindeoin 's gur ann na aonar a bhiodh e a' coiseachd mar bu trice, cha do dh'èirich càil dha.

Agus a bharrachd air na beanntan, air an do ghabh e gràdh, bha na daoine ann – na ciobairean is geamairean, agus an teaghlaichean. Dh'fhàs Maighstir Ragnall uabhasach measail orra. Agus bu mhath leam rudeigin innse dhuibh mu chuid dhiubh, agus na dh'ionnsaich an sagart bhuapa mu dhualchas na Gaidhealtachd, anns an ath-Litir.

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Faclan na seachdain: Siorrachd Obair Dheathain: *Aberdeenshire*; manachainn: *monastery*; Leabhar Dheir: *The Book of Deer*; na glinn: *the glens*; Canaich: *Cannich (Inverness-shire)*; Beanntan an Rothaich: *The Munros (mountains over 3,000 ft first listed by Sir Hugh Munro)*; choilean e sin: *he completed that*; mullach: *summit*; crotach: *hunch-backed*; aonaranach: *lonely*; Gleann Srath Farair: *Glenstrathfarrar*; gràdh: *love, affection*.

Abairtean na seachdain: tha a h-uile rud a tha mi air fhaicinn mu dheidhinn ann am Beurla: *everything I have seen about him is in English*; 's e duine àraidh a bh' ann: *he was an unusual man*; an làmh-sgrìobhadh as sine a th' againn: *the oldest handwriting we have*; chan eil fhios a'm co-dhiù thug an eachdraidh sin buaidh air Ragnall: *I don't know if that history had an effect on Ronnie*; ged a thòisich e anns an Eaglais Easbaigich: *although he started in the Episcopalian Church*; chaidh e a-null don Eaglais Chaitligich: *he went over to the Catholic Church*; bhiodh e a' sreap nam beann faisg air an dachannan: *he would climb the mountains close to their homes*; cha robh coltas a' ghaisgich air: *he wasn't very robust*; 's iad na cuspairean a b' fheàrr leis na cànanan clasaigeach: *his favourite subjects were the classical languages*; thigeadh e beò air na beanntan: *he would come alive in the mountains*; cuide ri athair: *with his father*; thòisich e anns a' Mhonadh Ruadh: *he started in the Cairngorms*; cha robh e a-riamh fìor chomasach air a shlighe a dhèanamh ann an droch shìde: *he was never particularly capable at finding his route in bad weather*; ciobairean is geamairean agus an teaghlaichean: *shepherds and gamekeepers and their families*; na dh'ionnsaich an sagart bhuapa: *what the priest learned from them*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdain: *I would like to make some comments this week about how to deal linguistically with clergymen, who retain a great deal of respect in Gaelic communities – a respect which must be reflected in language use. Priests are given the honorific Athair Urramach (Reverend Father) and one might refer to Father Calum MacNeil as an t-Athair Urramach Calum MacNeill. But in speaking among themselves, Gaelic-speaking Catholics would refer to him as Maighstir Calum, using his first name and the honorific Maighstir. The famous bàrd, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, had a father who was, as might be expected, a clergyman, although of the Episcopal tradition. With Presbyterian ministers, however, the situation is different. The Reverend Norman MacAulay would be an t-Urramach Tormod MacAmhlaigh, and he would be generally referred to as Maighstir (Mgr) MacAmhlaigh, always using the surname, and never the given name. You would address him as “a Mhaighstir MhicAmhlaigh” and, as with a priest, you would always use the second person plural or formal “sibh” when speaking to him, rather than the informal “thu”, even if he is not an elderly person. This is simply a matter of respect and should be adhered to unless you are a close personal friend of the clergyman.*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdain: cha do dh'èirich càil dha: *nothing (bad) happened to him*.

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