

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 456. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 152 corresponds to Litir 456.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh an t-seachdain sa chaidh mun Chaillich – seann earrann dhen Earrach tràth sa Ghiblean. Tha an Sgitheanach, Alasdair MacNeacail, ag innse dhuinn anns an leabhar aige *Gaelic Proverbs* gun robh *A’ Chailleach* ann eadar an dàrna latha deug agus an t-ochdamh latha deug dhen Ghiblean. Roimhe sin, bha *An Gearran*; roimhe sin bha *An Fheadag*; agus ron Fheadaig bha *Am Faoilleach*. Cha chreid mi nach robh na h-ainmean a’ buntainn ris mar a bha a’ ghaoth aig na h-amannan sin dhen bhliadhna. Cha robh an Fheadag no an Gearran math airson sprèidh, mar a tha seann rann ag innse dhuinn:

Is mis’ an Fheadag lom, luirgneach, luath,

Marbham caora, **marbham** uan.

Is mis’ an Gearran bacach bàn

Is cha mhi aon bhonn nas fheàrr.

Cuiream a’ bho anns an toll

Gus an tig an tonn thar a ceann.

Ach chan e sin an dealbh gu lèir. San t-seann aimsir bha earrann eile dhen Earrach ann eadar an Fheadag agus an Gearran. B’ e sin *A’ Ghobag* – no *dogfish*. Seo na chanas Dwelly mun Ghobaig: *Period of the year, lasting according to some, three days, according to others a week, coming in, apparently, between the Fheadag and the Gearran and so ending on 14th March.* Agus tha Dwelly a’ toirt (mar a tha MacNeacail) an t-seanfhaicail: **Feadagan is Gobagan e, tuilleadh gu Fèill Pàdraig** – a th’ air eadar-theangachadh mar *whistling and biting winds on to St Patrick’s Day.*

Às dèidh a’ Ghearrain thàinig a’ Chailleach. Feumaidh gun robh sin a’ riochdachadh gaoth fhuar a thig nuair a tha am feur a’ feuchainn ri fàs. Tha MacNeacail ag ràdh gum bi a’ Chailleach a’ ceannsachadh an fheadh le a slacan-draoidheachd. Ach, nuair a tha e a’ fàilneachadh oirre, tha i a’ tilgeil a slacan air falbh, ag èigheachd,

Dh’fhàg e shìos mi, dh’fhàg e shuas mi,

Dh’fhàg e eadar mo dhà chluais mi,

Dh’fhàg e thall mi, dh’fhàg e bhos mi,

Dh’fhàg e eadar mo dhà chois mi,

Tilgeam seo am bun preas cuilinn

Far nach fàs feur no duilleach!

An t-seachdain sa chaidh thuir mi gun innsinn dhuibh mu *Na h-Othaisgean* – the ewes – earrann ainmhidheach eile dhen Earrach a thig às dèidh na Caillich. Mhair *Na h-Othaisgean* trì latha, a rèir aithris – trì latha, mar a tha mis’ a’ tuigsinn, de dheagh aimsir, freagarrach airson breith uan.

Cha tuirt mi guth air na h-earrannan beaga eile air a bheilear a' dèanamh iomradh – *Neòil Dhubha na Càisge (the dark clouds of Easter)* anns an treas seachdain dhen Mhàrt, a bh' air a leantainn le *Glasadh na Cuthaig (the cuckoo's greening or preparation time)*. Tha *An Sguabag* ann cuideachd – *the little blast*. Tha Dwelly ga comharrachadh mar *Gusty wind*. *Trì latha Sguabaig, three days, the 7th, 8th and 9th of April*. A h-uile bliadhna air na h-aon làithean sin?! Agus tha *Sneachd na Cuthaig* ann cuideachd – *the cuckoo snow – no lambing snow* mar a theirear am Beurla – aimsir fhuar le sneachd a nì cron air uain a th' air an ùr-bhreith.

Tha e nas fhasa dhuinn an-diugh a bhith a' cuimhneachadh Am Faoilleach, An Gearran, Am Màrt, An Giblean 's An Cèitean – seach a bhith a' cuimhneachadh Am Faoilleach, An Fheadag, A' Ghobag, An Gearran, Neòil Dhubha na Càisge, Glasadh na Cuthaig, A' Chailleach, An Sguabag, Na h-Othaisgean, Sneachd na Cuthaig agus – Latha Buidhe Bealltainn a chuireas crìoch air an Earrach!

Is cha tuirt mi guth air Latha na Gogaireachd – nach eil fad às a-nise! Thoiribh an aire!

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Faclan na Litreach: Sgitheanach: *Skyeman*; Alasdair MacNeacail: *Alexander Nicolson*; sprèidh: *livestock*; Na h-Othaisgean: *lit. the ewes (but also another old subdivision of the Spring)*.

Abairtean na Litreach: mun Chaillich – seann earrann dhen Earrach tràth sa Ghiblean: *about the Cailleach – an old part of the Spring early in April*; eadar an dàrna latha deug agus an t-ochdamh latha deug: *between the 12th and 18th (days)*; cha chreid mi nach robh na h-ainmean a' buntainn ris mar a bha a' ghaoth: *I think the names concerned how the wind was*: lom, luirgneach, luath: *bare, leggy and fast*; bacach bàn: *fair and lame*; cha mhi aon bhonn nas fheàrr: *I'm not one bit better*; gus an tig an tonn thar a ceann: *until the wave comes over her head [were cows buried on a sandy beach because of their size?]*; nuair a tha am feur a' feuchainn ri fàs: *when the grass is trying to grow*; a' ceannsachadh an fheòir le a slacandraoidheachd: *subduing the grass with her magic wand*; nuair a tha e a' fàilneachadh oirre: *when she fails*; dh'fhàg e shìos mi, dh'fhàg e shuas mi: *it left me down, it left me up*; eadar mo dhà chluais: *between my two ears*; dh'fhàg e thall mi, dh'fhàg e bhos mi: *it left me there, it left me here*; eadar mo dhà chois: *between my two feet*; far nach fàs feur no duilleach: *where no grass or leaves grow*; airson breith uan: *for lambs' birth*; a nì cron air uain a th' air an ùr-bhreith: *which will harm newly born lambs*; Latha Buidhe Bealltainn: *the day commencing Beltane (old summer festival of the Gaels)*; Latha na Gogaireachd: *April Fools' Day*; thoiribh an aire!: *Look out!*

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *Marbham caora, marbham uan*: *let me kill a sheep, let me kill a lamb*. Did you recognise *marbham* as being the first person imperative of *marbh*? The –(e)am ending is diagnostic of this. *Cuiream in Cuiream* a' bhò anns an toll *has the same grammatical status*. It means “Let me put (the cow in the hole)” *Tilgeam seo am bun preas cuilinn means “let me throw this [the magic wand] at the base of a holly bush.”*

Seanfhacal na Litreach: *Feadagan is Gobagan e, tuilleadh gu Fèill Pàdraig*: *whistling and biting winds on to St Patrick's Day*. The old subdivisions of spring, bearing animal names such as *An Fheadag (the plover)*, *A' Ghobag (the dogfish)* and *An Gearran (the gelding)* seemed to be connected to winds blowing at that time of year. The three named above were all cold winds, damaging to livestock. *An Gearran has survived into modern times as the Gaelic for February*.

** Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.*