

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Tòmas Garnett agus Labhairt na Gàidhlig

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 rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 668. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 364 corresponds to Litir 668.

“I was informed by an eminent medical gentleman at Inverness that cancers are very common in this country, particularly among the labouring class of people, which he attributes to their manner of living...” Nochd na faclan sin ann an clò anns a’ bhliadhna ochd ceud deug (1800) anns an leabhar le Tòmas Garnett *Observations on a Tour Through the Highlands and Part of the Western Isles of Scotland*. Chaidh Garnett air chuairt air a’ Ghàidhealtachd as t-samhradh dà bhliadhna roimhe sin. Mar lighiche agus neach-saidheans, bha ùidh mhòr aige ann an ceistean slàinte.

Air an rathad gu deas, ràinig iad bruchlag ghrànda, air an robh *Freeburn Inn*. Bha na h-uinneagan briste ann agus cha robh an t-àite a’ coimhead math idir. Ach tha Garnett ag ràdh gun robh am biadh mòran na b’ fheàrr na bha iad an dùil. Bha iad faisg air Tom Aitinn, far a bheil Allt na Frìthe a’ coinneachadh ri Uisge Èireann. ’S e *Free Burn* an dreach Beurla air Allt na Frìthe. ’S ann às an allt sin a gheibhear an t-uisge an-diugh airson an taigh-staile.

An ath latha, chaidh iad eadar Tom Aitinn agus an Aghaidh Mhòr. Tha Garnett a’ dèanamh tuairisgeul èibhinn **mun mhì-thuigse a dh’èirich eadar** e fhèin ’s a chompanach, Mr Watts, agus muinntir na sgìre. Seo na sgrìobh e, air eadar-theangachadh gu Gàidhlig:

Bha a’ chuid mhòr dhen latha seo, feumar aideachadh, rudeigin sgìtheil, ach bha i air a beothachadh leis na clachan-mìle air an rathad ... a thug fiosrachadh na bu dòigheile dhuinn na tuaireaman an luchd-dùthcha ris an do thachair sinn gu tric. Thachair e gu minig, nuair a dh’fhaighnich sinn de chuideigin dè cho fada ’s a bha e don ath [àite]; nan robh Beurla sam bith aca, às dèidh dhaibh meòrachadh air a’ chùis, chanadh iad rinn ’s dòcha sia mìle. Às dèidh dhuinn mìle no dhà a bharrachd a mharcahadh, nan cuireamaid an aon cheist air neach eile, chanadh esan sia no ’s dòcha seachd mìle. Mar sin, grunn tursan, mar a bu mhotha a dhlùthaich sinn ri ar ceann-uidhe, ’s ann a b’ fhaide a bha sinn, a rèir nan cunntasan sin, bhuaithe.

Leis a’ bheachd gun dèanadh e cùisean na b’ fhasa ann a bhith a’ conaltradh leis na Gàidheil, bha Mgr Watts, mus do thòisich ar turas, air beagan Gàidhlig ionnsachadh; ach, an àite a bhith feumail, chuir am beagan dhen chànan a bh’ aig mo charaid troimh-a-chèile sinn, oir ged a b’ urrainn dha ceistean riatanach a chur, cha mhòr gum b’ urrainn dha am freagairtean a thuigsinn; agus cho luath ’s a chuala iad e a’ bruidhinn ann an Gàidhlig, cha mhòr gum b’ urrainn dhuinn toirt air gin de na daoine ris an do thachair sinn Beurla sam bith a labhairt rinn.

Agus an co-dhùnadh aig Garnett? – ...we literally experienced the truth of the adage, “a little learning is a dangerous thing”!

Ach cha robh Garnett gu tur an aghaidh na Gàidhlig. Sgrìobh e “[that Gaelic has] a particularly expressive energy.” Sin thu, a bhalaich.

Mu dheireadh, seo ceist dhuibh. Còrr is dà cheud bliadhna mus deach ìomhaigh de Dhòmhnall Mac an Deòir a thogail aig ceann shuas Sràid Bhochanain ann an Glaschu, cha mhòr nach deach carragh-cuimhne a chur suas do chuideigin eile anns an dearbh àite. Cò bh’ ann? Innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: Tom Aitinn: *Tomatin*; Uisge Èireann: *Findhorn River*; taigh-staile: *distillery*; An Aghaidh Mhòr: *Aviemore*; meòrachadh: *contemplating*; marcachd: *riding*; carragh-cuimhne: *memorial*.

Abairtean na Litreach: air chuairt air a’ Ghàidhealtachd: *on a journey in the Highlands*; mar lighiche agus neach-saidheans: *as a physician and scientist*; bha ùidh mhòr aige ann an ceistean slàinte: *he had a great interest in health issues*; bruchlag ghrànda: *a mean hovel*; mòran na b’ fheàrr na bha iad an dùil: *much better than they had expected*; a gheibhear an t-uisge: *that water is obtained*; feumar aideachadh: *it must be confessed*; air a beothachadh leis na clachan-mìle: *enlivened by the milestones*; na tuaireaman an luchd-dùthcha ris an do thachair sinn: *than the conjectures of the peasants whom we met*; nan cuireamaid an aon cheist air neach eile: *if we asked [the same question of] another person*; mar a bu mhotha a dhlùthaich sinn ri ar ceann-uidhe: *the nearer we approached to the end of [our] journey*; ’s ann a b’ fhaide a bha sinn bhuaithe: *the further we were from it*; chuir am beagan dhen chànan a bh’ aig mo charaid troimh-a-chèile sinn: *the little my friend had of the language perplexed us*; cha mhòr gum b’ urrainn dha am freagairtean a thuigsinn: *he could scarcely comprehend their answers*; gum b’ urrainn dhuinn toirt air gin de na daoine ris an do thachair sinn Beurla sam bith a labhairt rinn: *that we could prevail on any of the persons whom we met to speak any English*; mus deach ìomhaigh de Dhòmhnall Mac an Deòir a thogail: *before a likeness of Donald Dewar was raised*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *It’s interesting how Allt na Frìthe (still a recognised name) at Tomatin has become Free Burn to many English speakers, giving the name a different sense. Perhaps surprisingly, frìth, seemingly an archetypal Highland Gaelic environmental term, is thought to have an English origin. MacBain derived it from Middle English frið “deer park, sparse woodland” which is the origin of many English “frith” names eg Fritham, Frithville, and which still exists in Scots (as “frith”) for a “wood” or “clearing in a wood”. A cognate occurs in Welsh – ffridd or ffrith – thought also to originate in English frið. But, in both Welsh and Gaelic, the meaning has come to include largely treeless places where deer (Scotland) or sheep/cattle (Wales) graze in rough mountainous country – thus a “heath, moor” in Scotland (often referred to as a “deer forest”) and “rough mountain pasture” in Wales.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: mun mhì-thuigse a dh’èirich eadar: *about the misunderstanding that arose between.*

Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA