

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Fèill na Bealltainn (1)

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.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 1,137. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 833 corresponds to Litir 1,137.

Fàilte na Bealltainn oirbh. Ma tha sibh ag èisteachd ris a’ chiad chraoladh dhen Litir seo, b’ e an-dè Latha na Bealltainn – no Latha Buidhe Bealltainn, mar a chanas gu leòr fhathast. Tha mi a’ dèanamh dheth gu bheil *buidhe* an seo a’ ciallachadh ‘fortanach’ no ‘na taingealachd’. ’S e latha taingealachd a bh’ ann bho shean oir bha e a’ comharrachadh toiseach an t-samhraidh.

Tha e duilich ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig mar a leig sinn seachad mòran de na deas-ghnàthan againn a bha uaireigin prìseil dhuinn mar shluagh. Agus cha robh deas-ghnàth na bu chudromaiche do na seann Ghàidheil na a’ Bhealltainn. Bha am faclairiche Eideard Dwelly dhen bheachd gun robh i uabhasach fhèin cudromach. Seo na sgrìobh e mu a deidhinn anns an fhaclair aige:

‘Air a’ chiad latha dhen Chèitean, bhathar a’ cumail fèill mhòr dhraoidheil mar chomharra dhen dia Belus. Air an latha seo, bhathar a’ losgadh theintean air mullaichean nam beann air adhbhar ìobairt agus eadar na teintean seo bhathar ag iomain crodh mar dhòigh gus an dìon bho ghalar gus an tigeadh an ath Bhealltainn.’

Tha Dwelly ag innse dhuinn gum biodh daoine a’ mùchadh nan teintean aca a-staigh agus gun losgadh iad teine ùr le bhith a’ cleachdadh lasair bho theine Bealltainn. Tha e ag ràdh gum biodh feadhainn òg anns gach sgìre a’ coinneachadh anns a’ mhonadh air a’ chiad latha dhen Chèitean. Bhiodh iad a’ cruthachadh nàdar de bhòrd às an talamh le bhith a’ cladhach dig ann an cumadh cruinn, a bhiodh mòr gu leòr airson a h-uile duine dhen òigridh a bha air tighinn còmhla. Seo an ath phìos dhen chunntas aige:

‘Chuir iad teine thuige agus rinn iad biadh le uighean agus bainne a bha car coltach ri ughagan. Rinn iad bonnach coirce a bh’ air a chur an aghaidh clach, agus a bhiodh air a ròstadh le teas nan èibhleagan. An dèidh dhaibh an ughag ithe, roinn iad am bonnach a rèir na bh’ ann de dhaoine, agus a h-uile pìos dheth co-ionann ann am meud.’

A bheil sibh còmhla rium fhathast?! Cha robh càil a bha sin a bha cus ro annasach. Ach, an uair sin, bhiodh iad a’ dèanamh rudeigin fìor annasach. A bheil sibh eòlach air an fhacal *gual-fiodha*? Gual a th’ air a dhèanamh de dh’fhiodh. Sin a’ Ghàidhlig a th’ air *charcoal*. Tha Dwelly ag innse dhuinn gum bite a’ suathadh fear de phìosan a’ bhonnaich le gual-fiodha, gus am biodh e **cho dubh ri tòn poite**. An uair sin chuireadh iad a h-uile pìos dhen bhonnach còmhla ann am bonaid. Seo deireadh a’ chunntais aig Eideard còir:

‘Bhiodh a h-uile duine, le dall-bhrat orra, a’ tarraing a-mach pìos [dhen bhonnach]. ’S e an neach leis an robh a’ bhonaid a bhiodh a’ tarraing a’ phìos mu dheireadh, agus b’ e an duine coisrigte a thaghadh am pìos dubh a bhiodh mar ìobairt don dia Belus, agus iad a’ sireadh fàbhar bhuaithe ann a bhith a’ dèanamh an fhearainn torach anns a’ bhliadhna romhpa.’

Uill! A bheil sin a’ ciallachadh gun robhar a’ marbhadh cuideigin mar ìobairt? Cò aige tha fios dè bha a’ dol ri linn nan draoidhean ach, a rèir Dwelly, cha robh aig an neach a chaidh a thaghadh ri dhèanamh ach leum thairis air na lasairean trì tursan.

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Faclan na Litreach: na taingealachd: *of thanksgiving*; faclairiche: *lexicographer*; ughagan: *custard*; gual-fiodha: *charcoal*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Ma tha sibh ag èisteachd ris a’ chiad chraoladh: *if you’re listening to the first broadcast*; a’ comharrachadh toiseach an t-samhraidh: *marking the start of summer*; mar a leig sinn seachad mòran de na deas-ghnàthan againn a bha uaireigin prìseil dhuinn mar shluagh: *how we abandoned many of our ceremonies that were at one time valued by us as a people*; bhathar a’ cumail fèill mhòr dhraoidheil: *was held a great druidical festival*; bhathar a’ losgadh theintean air mullaichean nam beann air adhbhar ìobairt: *fires were kindled on the mountain tops for the purposes of sacrifice*; eadar na teintean seo bhathar ag iomain crodh mar dhòigh gus an dìon bho ghalar gus an tigeadh an ath Bealltainn: *between these fires the cattle were driven, to preserve them from contagion till next May-day*; a’ mùchadh nan teintean aca a-staigh: *extinguishing their hearth-fires*; gum biodh feadhainn òg anns gach sgìre a’ coinneachadh anns a’ mhonadh: *that young people in every area would meet on the moors*; a’ cladhach dig ann an cumadh cruinn: *digging a ditch in a round shape*; bonnach coirce a bh’ air a chur an aghaidh clach, agus a bhiodh air a ròstadh le teas nan èibhleagan: *a cake of oatmeal, which was toasted at the embers against a stone*; roinn iad am bonnach a rèir na bh’ ann de dhaoine, agus a h-uile pìos dheth co-ionann ann am meud: *they divided the cake into as many portions as there were persons in the company, as much alike as possible in size and shape*; gum bite a’ suathadh fear de phìosan a’ bhonnaich le gual-fiodha: *that one of the pieces of the cake would be daubed with charcoal*; b’ e an duine coisrigte a thaghadh am pìos dubh a bhiodh mar ìobairt don dia Belus: *whoever drew the black bit was the devoted person who was to be sacrificed to Baal*; a’ sireadh fàbhar bhuaithe: *seeking a favour from him*; ri linn nan draoidhean: *at the time of the druids*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Fàilte na Bealltainn oirbh:** *the welcome of Beltane upon you. Bealltainn is a feminine noun and, in common with many feminine nouns, particularly of two or more syllables, the terminal ‘e’ in the genitive singular is no longer applied. The genitive form can thus be na Bealltainne or na Bealltainn.*

Samhladh na Litreach: gus am biodh e **cho dubh ri tòn poite:** *until it would be as black as the bottom of a pot [from the old days when cooking was done over an open fire].*

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