

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 862 (which corresponds to Litir 1,166). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Fearchar Lighiche. On the way home, Fearchar went to the door of the King's castle. He shouted, 'The black creature on the white bone.' That phrase is strange. But John Francis Campbell has another form of it in Popular Tales of the West Highlands. There, Fearchar says, 'The black beetle on the white bone' – 'the black beetle on the white bone'. Fearchar was understanding that the King's physicians were putting beetles on the wound on the King's foot. The beetles were eating the flesh. It was terribly painful for the King.

If you are familiar with the stories of the Fianna, you will compare [this story] with how Fionn mac Cumhail gained his knowledge. In place of a white snake, it's a salmon that was in the pot. It appears that the two stories are related to each other.

And a white snake appears in other Gaelic oral tradition. John Francis Campbell tells us about three brothers from Islay called Beaton [or Bethune]. They were famous for being skilful as physicians.

One of them, John, went to live on Mull. He was called the Islay

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Fearchar Lighiche. Air an rathad dhachaigh, chaidh Fearchar gu doras caisteal an Rìgh. Dh'èigh e, 'A' bhias-dubh air a' chnàmh gheal.' Tha an abairt sin annasach. Ach tha dreach eile aig Iain Òg Ìle ann am *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. An sin, tha Fearchar ag ràdh, 'An daol dubh ris a' chnàmh gheal' – 'the black beetle on the white bone'. Bha Fearchar a' tuigsinn gun robh lighichean an Rìgh a' cur daolan no daolagan air an lot ann an cas an Rìgh. Bha na daolagan ag ithe na feòla. Bha e uabhasach piantail don Rìgh.

Ma tha sibh eòlach air sgeulachdan na Fèinne, bidh sibh a' dèanamh coimeas leis mar a fhuair Fionn mac Cumhail a chuid eòlais. An àite nathair gheal, 's e bradan a bha sa phoit. Tha e coltach gu bheil an dà sgeul ceangailte ri chèile.

Agus tha nathair gheal a' nochdadh ann am beul-aithris eile aig na Gàidheil. Tha Iain Òg Ìle ag innse dhuinn mu thriùir bhràithrean às Ìle air an robh MacBheatha no Peutan mar ainm. Bha iad ainmeil airson a bhith sgileil mar lighichean.

Chaidh fear dhiubh, Iain, a dh'fhuireach ann am Muile. 'S e an t-

Doctor. The second one, Fergus, remained on Islay. He was the Islay Doctor. The third one – Gilleadha – was the most famous one. He was an expert on herbs, and he would collect wild plants for Fergus.

Here's how the third brother gained his knowledge on plants. One particular day, he had a cauldron on a fire. He was boiling plants. But a white snake was put in the pot. Gilleadha was stirring the broth. A drop of it went on his hand. It was hot. The man licked his hand.

Immediately, he had a special knowledge of every medical cure in the universe. He was asked to cure the King of Scotland. But other physicians were jealous. He was poisoned and he never returned to Islay.

Olladh Muileach a chanadh daoine ris. Dh'fhuirich an dàrna fear, Fearghas, ann an Ìle. B' esan an t-Olladh Ìleach. B' e an treas fear – Gilleadha – am fear a b' ainmeile. Bha e na shàr-eòlaiche air luibhean, agus bhiodh e a' cruinneachadh lusain fiadhain airson Fhearghais.

Seo mar a fhuair an treas bràthair a chuid eòlais air luibhean. Latha a bha seo, bha coire aige air teine. Bha e a' goil luibhean. Ach chaidh nathair gheal a chur don phoit. Bha Gilleadha a' cur a' bhrota mun chuairt. Chaidh balgam dheth air a làimh. Bha e teth. Dh'imlich an duine a làmh.

Sa mhionaid, bha eòlas sònraichte aige air a h-uile leigheas fon ghrèin. Chaidh iarraidh air leigheas a dhèanamh air Rìgh na h-Alba. Ach bha farmad aig lighichean eile air. Chaidh a phuinnseanachadh agus cha do thill e a dh'Ìle a-chaidh.