

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 575 (which corresponds to Litir 879). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Michael Newton's book - 'Seanchaidh na Coille The Memory-Keeper of the Forest' - a collection of Canadian literature in Gaelic. He has a narrative about a Presbyterian missionary on Lake Winnipeg. I'm not sure if it's true (or not). But it represents how the new religion was affecting the native people.

One of the messengers of the Gospel was travelling on Lake Winnipeg. Indians were transporting him in a canoe. He was in a hurry. He asked the Indians to go directly from headland to headland. That was dangerous. They only had a boat that was made of birch-bark.

A storm arose. They aimed for a small island. There were already five Indians there. They had no food. The missionary gave them food - the same amount to each person. There were eight people on the island.

The storm continued. On the fourth day, there was no food left. One of the Indians was good at fishing. He bent a pin into the shape of a hook. He got a piece of rope and bit of red clothing as bait. With that fishing tackle, he landed a fish.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun leabhar aig Mìcheal Newton - 'Seanchaidh na Coille The Memory-Keeper of the Forest' - cruinneachadh le litreachas Chanada ann an Gàidhlig. Tha eachdraidh aige mu dheidhinn miseanairidh Clèireach air Loch Winnipeg. Chan eil mi cinnteach a bheil e fìor gus nach eil. Ach tha e a' riochdachadh mar a bha an creideamh ùr a' toirt buaidh air na dùthchasaich.

Bha fear de theachdairean an t-Soisgeil a' siubhal air Loch Winnipeg. Bha Innseanaich ga aiseag ann an canù. Bha e ann an cabhaig. Dh'iarr e air na h-Innseanaich a dhol dìreach bho rubha gu rubha. Bha sin cunnartach. Cha robh aca ach eathar a bha air a dèanamh de bhèilleag.

Dh'èirich stoirm. Dh'amais iad air eilean beag. Bha còignear Innseanach ann mu-thràth. Cha robh grèim bìdh aca. Thug an soisgeulaiche biadh dhaibh - an aon uiread do gach duine. Bha ochdnar anns an eilean.

Lean an stoirm. Air a' cheathramh latha, cha robh biadh air fhàgail. Bha fear de na h-Innseanaich math air iasgach. Lùb e prìne air chumadh dubhain. Fhuair e pìos de ròp agus bideag de dh'aodach dearg mar bhiadh. Leis an uidheam-iasgaich sin, thug e iasg gu tìr.

The people gave a third of the fish to the missionary. 'That's not the best way to divide it,' he said. He took out a knife. He cut the fish into eight equal pieces. 'We'll all have the same amount,' he said.

The next day, the weather improved. The two groups left.

Months after that, five Indians appeared in the village where the missionary was living. They were wanting to build a home there. The missionary didn't recognise them. 'Why do you want that?' he said.

'We are the men for whom you divided the fish on Lake Winnipeg,' said one of them. 'When we saw what you did, we recognised that you were a good man. We want you to teach us the new way.' They were meaning by that – the Christian religion. Goodbye.

Thug na daoine an treas cuid dhen iasg don t-soisgeulaiche. 'Chan e sin an dòigh as fheàrr air a roinn,' ars esan. Thug e sgian a-mach. Gheàrr e an t-iasg na ochd mìrean dhen aon mheudachd. 'Bidh an aon uiread againn uile,' ars esan.

An làrna-mhàireach, dh'fhàs an t-sìde na b' fheàrr. Dh'fhalbh an dà bhuidhinn.

Mìosan an dèidh sin, nochd còignear Innseanach anns a' bhaile bheag far an robh an soisgeulaiche a' fuireach. Bha iad ag iarraidh dachaigh a thogail ann. Cha robh an soisgeulaiche gan aithneachadh. 'Carson a tha sibh ag iarraidh sin?' thuirt e.

'Is sinne na fir air an do roinn sibh an t-iasg air Loch Winnipeg,' arsa fear dhiubh. 'Nuair a chunnaic sinn mar a rinn sibh, dh'aithnich sinn gur e duine math a bha annaibh. Tha sinn ag iarraidh gun ionnsaich sibh dhuinn an dòigh ùr.' Bha iad a' ciallachadh le sin – an creideamh Crìosdail. Beannachd leibh.