

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 823 (which corresponds to Litir 1,127). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the journey of Frederick Douglass to Scotland in 1846. Three years prior to that, the Free Church was created. The Church was in financial difficulties. They sent messengers over to the United States. They got money from Presbyterian congregations there. However, much of the money came from people that owned slaves.

Frederick Douglass was at the head of a campaign to return the money. The campaign became large and bitter.

Here's where the famous writer, geologist, stonemason and Christian – Hugh Miller – appears. He was from Cromarty but he was living in Edinburgh. He was the editor of the newspaper, The Witness. The Witness was representing evangelical opinions in the Church.

The Moderator of the Free Church was the Reverend Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers was renowned throughout the country. He and Miller got on well with each other. Chalmers would present his opinions in The Witness.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun turas aig Frederick Douglass a dh'Alba ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a sia (1846). Trì bliadhna roimhe sin, bha an Eaglais Shaor air a cruthachadh. Bha an Eaglais ann an staing a thaobh airgead. Chuir iad teachdairean a-null do na Stàitean Aonaichte. Fhuair iad airgead bho choitheanalan Clèireach an sin. Ge-tà, thàinig mòran dhen airgead bho dhaoine a bha a' cumail thràillean.

Bha Frederick Douglass aig ceann iomairt airson an t-airgead a chur air ais. Dh'fhàs an iomairt mòr agus guineach.

Seo far a bheil an sgrìobhadair, creag-eòlaiche, clachair is Crìosdaidh ainmeil – Ùisdean Mac a' Mhuilleir – a' nochdadh. Bha e à Cromba, ach bha e a' fuireach ann an Dùn Èideann. Bha e na dheasaiche air a' phàipear-naidheachd, am *Witness*. Bha am *Witness* a' riochdachadh bheachdan soisgeulach anns an Eaglais.

B' e Modaràtor na h-Eaglaise Saoire an t-Urramach Tòmas Chalmers. Bha Chalmers cliùmhòr air feadh na rìoghachd. Bha e fhèin is Mac a' Mhuilleir mòr aig a chèile. Bhiodh Chalmers a' cur a bheachdan an cèill anns a' *Witness*.

Chalmers wrote that he was against slavery. But he differentiated between slavery and the slave-owners. Some people also differentiated between those who bought slaves and those who bought an estate on which there were already slaves. Frederick Douglass did not accept those opinions. In America, he said – controversially – the man who employs a whip through the week stands in the pulpit on the Sabbath.

Miller wrote opinion columns that defended the Church. He wrote that the campaign ‘Send the Money Back’ was requiring a level of moral purity that was unreasonable. There was a debate about the money within the Church. The Rev. Chalmers and his friends were successful at the General Assembly. The money was not given back.

But what about Hugh Miller’s reputation? People are reanalysing his writings in the context of the campaign ‘Black Lives Matter’. Was he a racist? We’ll look at that question next week.

Sgrìobh Chalmers gun robh e an aghaidh tràilleachd. Ach bha e a’ dèanamh sgaradh eadar tràilleachd agus na daoine leis an robh tràillean. Bha cuid a’ dèanamh sgaradh cuideachd eadar feadhainn a cheannaich tràillean agus feadhainn a cheannaich oighreachd air an robh tràillean mu-thrath. Cha do ghabh Frederick Douglass ris na beachdan sin. Ann an Ameireagaidh, thuir e – gu connspaideach – am fear a chleachdas a’ chuip tron t-seachdain, bidh e na sheasamh sa chùbaid air an t-Sàbaid.

Sgrìobh Mac a’ Mhuilleir colbhan-beachd a bha a’ dìon na h-Eaglaise. Sgrìobh e gun robh an iomairt ‘Send the Money Back’ ag iarraidh ìre de ghlainead mhoralta a bha mì-reusanta. Bha deasbad mun airgead taobh a-staigh na h-Eaglaise. Chaidh an latha leis an Urramach Chalmers agus a chàirdean aig an Àrd-sheanadh. Cha deach an t-airgead a thoirt air ais.

Ach dè mu dheidhinn cliù Ùisdein Mhic a’ Mhuilleir? Tha daoine a’ dèanamh ath-sgrùdadh air na sgrìobhaidhean aige ann an co-theacsa na h-iomairt ‘Black Lives Matter’. An robh e ri gràin-chinnidh? Bheir sinn sùil air a’ cheist sin an-ath-sheachdain.