

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 824 (which corresponds to Litir 1,128). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the reanalysis that is being made of the opinions of Hugh Miller of Cromarty on races. Miller is renowned as a scholar and writer. But was he free from the hateful opinions that were common among white people in his day? Unfortunately, he was not.

Miller delivered a lecture in Edinburgh in 1855. He was speaking to the people of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution. The lecture was published in his book Testimony of the Rocks that appeared in 1857. That was a few months after the author's death.

Miller said that humanity came into being near the Caucasus mountains. That was proven by the 'handsomeness' of those people. Then he said really strange things. According to him, Adam and Eve belonged to the Caucasian people. And in the middle of the nineteenth century, where would you go to see exemplary Caucasians? The United Kingdom Parliament! Among the English aristocracy. That's the

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun ath-sgrùdadh a thathar a' dèanamh air na beachdan aig Ùisdean Mac a' Mhuilleir à Cromba air cinnidhean. Tha Mac a' Mhuilleir cliùmhòr mar sgoilear agus sgrìobhadair. Ach an robh e saor bhò na beachdan gràineil a bha bitheanta am measg dhaoine geala ri a linn? Gu mì-fhortanach, cha robh.

Thug Mac a' Mhuilleir òraid seachad ann an Dùn Èideann ann an ochd ceud deug, caogad 's a còig (1855). Bha e a' bruidhinn ri muinntir Institiud Feallsanachail Dhùn Èideann. Chaidh an òraid fhoillseachadh anns an leabhar aige *Testimony of the Rocks* a nochd ann an ochd ceud deug, caogad 's a seachd (1857). Bha sin beagan mhìosan an dèidh bàs an ùghdair.

Thuir Mac a' Mhuilleir gun do dh'èirich an cinne-daonna faisg air na beanntan Cabhcasach. Bha sin air a dhearbhadh leis cho 'eireachdail' 's a bha na daoine an sin. Thuir e an uair sin rudan fìor annasach. Ga rèir, bhuineadh Adhamh agus Eubha don chinneadh Chabhcasach. Agus ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug, càite an rachadh tu airson daoine Cabhcasach gun samhail fhaicinn? Pàrlamaid na Rìoghachd Aonaichte! Am

opinion of a man from the Highlands of Scotland!

It's difficult to report on the remainder of the lecture, I have to admit. It's full of racism. It's ignorant. It's sickening. The author's information is based on accounts by others – white people who opined on the 'degraded races'. How often, however, did Miller himself meet native people from other continents?

In the New World, he wrote, Caucasian people were proving their natural superiority over the 'degraded' races. It's good that the Nazis didn't find this lecture, or they would have promoted Miller as a hero. For 'Caucasian', read 'Aryan'.

Miller wasn't alone. Many people in his day had hateful opinions like this. He was a racist. For me, his reputation is not as glossy as it once was.

measg uaislean Shasainn. Sin beachd aig fear à Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba!

Tha e doirbh aithris a dhèanamh air a' chòrr dhen òraid, feumaidh mi ràdh. Tha i làn gràin-chinnidh. Tha i aineolach. Tha i sgreabhail. Tha am fiosrachadh aig an ùghdar stèidhichte air sgrìobhaidhean aig feadhainn eile – daoine geala a thug beachd air na 'degraded races'. Dè cho tric, ge-tà, 's a choinnich Mac a' Mhuilleir fhèin ri daoine dùthchasach à mòr-thìrean eile?

Anns an t-Saoghal Ùr, sgrìobh e, bha daoine Cabhcasach a' dearbhadh an ceannais nàdarraich aca thairis air na cinnidhean 'suarach'. Tha e math nach do lorg na Nadsaidhean an òraid seo, oir bha iad air Mac a' Mhuilleir a chur air adhart mar ghaisgeach. Airson 'Cabhcasach', smaoinichibh 'Arianach'.

Cha robh Mac a' Mhuilleir leis fhèin. Bha beachdan gràineil mar seo aig gu leòr ri a linn. Ach chan e leisgeul a tha sin. Bha e na ghràin-chinnidheach. Dhòmhsa, chan eil a chliù cho gleansach a-nise 's a b' àbhaist.