

The Story of Gelert

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Welsh

Intermediate
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It was somewhere about 1200, Prince Llewellyn had a castle at Aber, just abreast of us here; indeed, parts of the towers remain to this day. His consort was the Princess Joan; she was King John's daughter. Her coffin remains with us to this day. Llewellyn was a great hunter of wolves and foxes, for the hills of Carnarvonshire were infested with wolves in those days, after the young lambs.

Now the prince had several hunting-houses—sorts of farm houses, one of them was at the place now called Beth-Gelert, for the wolves were very thick there at this time. Now the prince used to travel from farm-house to farm-house with his family and friends, when going on these hunting parties.

One season they went hunting from Aber, and stopped at the house where Beth-Gelert is now—it's about fourteen miles away. The prince had all his hounds with him, but his favourite was Gelert, a hound who had never let off a wolf for six years.

The prince loved the dog like a child, and at the sound of his horn Gelert was always the first to come bounding up. There was company at the house, and one day they went hunting, leaving his wife and the child, in a big wooden cradle, behind him at the farm-house.

The hunting party killed three or four wolves, and about two hours before the word passed for returning home, Llewellyn missed Gelert, and he asked his huntsmen:

“Where’s Gelert? I don’t see him.”

“Well, indeed, master, I’ve missed him this half-hour.”

And Llewellyn blew his horn, but no Gelert came at the sound.

Indeed, Gelert had got on to a wolves’ track which led to the house.

The prince sounded the return, and they went home, the prince lamenting Gelert. “He’s sure to have been slain—he’s sure to have been slain! since he did not answer the horn. Oh, my Gelert!” And they approached the house, and the prince went into the house, and saw Gelert lying by the overturned cradle, and blood all about the room.

“What! hast thou slain my child?” said the prince, and ran his sword through the dog.

After that he lifted up the cradle to look for his child, and found the body of a big wolf underneath that Gelert had slain, and his child was safe. Gelert had capsized the cradle in the scuffle.

“Oh, Gelert! Oh, Gelert!” said the prince, “my favourite hound, my favourite hound! Thou hast been slain by thy master’s hand, and in death thou hast licked thy master’s hand!” He patted the dog, but it was too late, and poor Gelert died licking his master’s hand.

Next day they made a coffin, and had a regular funeral, the same as if it were a human being; all the servants in deep mourning, and everybody. They made him a grave, and the village was called after the dog, Beth-Gelert—Gelert’s Grave; and the prince planted a tree, and put a gravestone of slate, though it was before the days of quarries. And they are to be seen to this day.

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