

from
Extraordinary Beasts
Richard Marsh

Dogs in Heaven
India and widespread

An incident from the epic Mahabharata of India has been freely adapted by many storytellers. This is my version.

A man and his dog were out walking in the countryside on a warm sunny day. The man took pleasure in watching the dog running and sniffing through the fields, when he suddenly had a thought.

“Wait a minute. My dog died ten years ago. Why is he here now?”

Then he remembered being seriously ill in hospital.

“Oh, maybe I’m dead, too.”

As he continued walking, that suspicion was confirmed when he saw a large colourful sign above an ornate gate that read “Heaven”. He approached the sentinel at the gate and identified himself and said, “I think I’m dead. Can I come in?”

“Certainly,” said the guard, and he opened the gate. The man called his dog to join him.

“Ah, no,” said the guard. “You can come in, but we don’t allow dogs in Heaven.”

“Well,” said the man. “If my dog isn’t allowed in, then I don’t want to go to Heaven.”

He and his dog continued walking along the road. He was getting thirsty, and he noticed that his dog’s tongue was lolling out. They arrived at a dirt lane with a wooden pole across it as a gate. A man leaning casually on the pole greeted the man and smiled at the dog.

“It’s getting a bit hot,” said the dog’s companion. “Any chance of a drink of water for the dog and myself?”

“Come on in and welcome. There’s a pump with a cup for you and a bowl for the dog. Help yourself.”

“What is this place?” said the man after refreshing himself.

“This is Heaven.”

“But we just passed a place down the road that has a sign saying it was Heaven.”

“No, that’s Hell. They probably told you the dog couldn’t come in with you.”

“That’s right. Why don’t you have a sign saying this is Heaven so people won’t be confused?”

“Well, the way it is, anyone who would go to Heaven and leave their dog behind doesn’t deserve Heaven. That sign over the gateway to Hell saves us a lot of trouble sorting out who gets in here.”

Rescuer Dogs

A farmer who lives near the Garry Bog at Ballymoney [Ireland] told me that one dark night when he was crossing the bog, he missed his way in the dark, and might have stepped into a bog-hole had not a large brown collie appeared and walked before him. The dog led him out of the bog, then disappeared. He believed it to be the ghost of a dog he had been very fond of years before.

(Verbatim from Foster)

A farmer was caught on top of a hill in Somerset by a sudden mist, and he was aware of the dangers of trying to descend under the conditions. He worried that he might not survive the cold, when he felt damp fur. Assuming it was his sheep dog that had come to look for him, he followed the dog to his front door, “where he heard his own dog barking inside. He turned to look at the dog who had guided him, which grew gradually larger and then faded away.”

(Briggs)

The Wolfhound of Antrim Castle

Northern Ireland

Mary Langford married Sir Hugh Clotworthy, who built Antrim Castle on the shore of Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland in 1613. One day, Lady Mary was walking along the lakeshore, when she heard a growl. She looked around and saw a wolf about to pounce. She fainted, and when she revived, she saw the dead wolf and a wounded wolfhound, which was licking her hand.

She tended her saviour's wounds, but when he recovered, he disappeared. Some years later, the castle guards heard the baying of a wolfhound during the night. They raised the alarm and lit torches, by the light of which they could see a group of rebels approaching the castle. Because of the wolfhound's warning, the surprise attack was thwarted.

One version of the story says that a trail of blood led to a dead wolfhound that had been hit by a stray bullet. Alternatively, after the battle a stone wolfhound miraculously appeared near the gateway. More realistically, Sir Hugh ordered a stone replica to be sculpted and raised to one of the castle's turrets as a token of gratitude. The sculpture has been moved several times and at last report was in the garden.

A Prescient Dog

Scotland

A fisherman in Crovie had a collie dog. He was always at hand when the boats were putting to sea. One morning when the men were on the beach making ready to go to the fishing, the dog got into a great state of excitement, rushed about, and laid hold of the men when putting the lines into the boats. His conduct was such that the men did not go to sea. Scarcely had they got their lines back to their houses, than a great storm suddenly burst over the Firth. Several boats were lost from the other villages.

On another occasion, the owner of the dog was going with his boat to the south to sell his dried cod and ling. The dog was to be taken along with him. The boat was to sail from Gardenstone, another village about a mile distant. It was with the utmost difficulty the dog could be induced to follow his master. But no sooner did he reach the boat, than he bolted, and ran back, rushed into the house, and hid under one of the beds. He was taken by force from his hiding-place and carried to the boat.

The voyage was performed, and the boat was returning, and had come as far north as Stonehaven, when a heavy storm came down, the boat was driven ashore in the early morning, and two of the crew perished. The third one escaped through the intervention of the dog. He had become entangled about the wreck and could not free himself. The dog ran to the town, went up to the first man he met, began barking and pulling at him in such a way as to arouse his attention. Off the dog went. The man followed, and soon saw what had happened. The fisherman was rescued. This took place many years ago, but the dog still lives in the memory of the fisher folks.

(Verbatim, Gregor, 1886)

Gelert's Grave

Beddgelert, Wales

This is the inscription on the plaque at the grave.

In the 13th century Llewelyn, prince of North Wales, had a palace at Beddgelert. One day he went hunting without Gelert, "The Faithful Hound", who was unaccountably absent.

On Llewelyn's return the truant, stained and smeared with blood, joyfully sprang to meet his master. The prince alarmed hastened to find his son, and saw the infant's cot empty, the bedclothes and floor covered with blood.

The frantic father plunged his sword into the hound's side, thinking it had killed his heir. The dog's dying yell was answered by a child's cry.

Llewelyn searched and discovered his boy unharmed, but nearby lay the body of a mighty wolf which Gelert had slain. The prince filled with remorse is said never to have smiled again. He buried Gelert here.

The story has been popularised by several poets, of whom the prolific Anon is the most succinct and least maudlin.

A pious monument I'll rear
In memory of the brave,
And passers-by will drop a tear
On faithful Gelert's grave.
Anonymous

David Pritchard (d. 1821) was the landlord of the Beddgelert (now Royal Goat) Hotel. He localised an ancient legend and borrowed the names of a local saint, Celert, and a famous 13th-century prince, Llewelyn, to concoct this story to boost tourism. A document from 1269 records the name of the village as Bedkelerd, the Grave of (Saint) Celert.

See "King Sindbad and his Falcon" in the Birds section and "The Saviour Gnat" in Other Beasts for similar tales.

Clever Nart Dog North Caucasus

The Narts wanted to test Bataraz's cleverness in battle, so they arranged an ambush with a hundred attackers. Bataraz sped away from them until they were well strung out, and then he turned and brought them down one by one as they arrived. Asked later where he had learned that trick, he said, "From my dog."

He explained, "One day my dog was following me through a village when he was attacked by a pack of the village dogs. He ran off immediately. Some of the dogs were faster than the others, and when he saw that he turned and took them on one by one as they caught up."

(Colarusso, *Tales*)

A Psychic Dog Italy

There was a dog in Rome in the time of the Emperor Justinian of such a notable instinct that at a demonstration of his tricks, many of the onlookers would throw their rings into a heap, and at the command of his master the dog could give each ring to its owner without any errors. Also, when his master asked which of the people were married, single or widowed, he would pick them out by grasping their clothes, again with no errors.

(Fuentelapeña §767)

From *Extraordinary Beasts*

Other books by Richard Marsh

Hellhounds and Hero Horses: Beasts of Myth and Legend, Legendary Books, 2020

A World of Tricksters, Legendary Books, 2020

Meath Folk Tales, The History Press Ireland, 2013

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The Legends and Lands of Ireland, Sterling, 2004