

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Beth Gelert; or, the Grave of the Greyhound

Beth Gelert; or, the Grave of the Greyhound
(William Robert Spencer 1769-1834)

The spearmen heard the bugle sound,
And cheerly smiled the morn;
And many a brach, and many a hound,
Obeyed Llewelyn's horn.

And still he blew a louder blast,
And gave a lustier cheer:
'Come, Gelert come, wer't never last
Llewelyn's horn to hear.

'Oh where does faithful Gelert roam,
The flower of all his race;
So true, so brave, a lamb at home,
A lion in the chase?'

'Twas only at Llewelyn's board
The faithful Gelert fed;
He watched, he served, he cheered his lord,
And sentinelled his bed.

In sooth he was a peerless hound,
The gift of royal John;
But now no Gelert could be found,
And all the chase rode on.

And now, as o'er the rocks and dells
The gallant chidings rise,
All Snowdon's craggy chaos yells
The many-mingled cries.

That day Llewelyn little loved
The chase of hart and hare;
And scant and small the booty proved,
For Gelert was not there.

Unpleas'd Llewelyn homeward hied,
When near the portal seat
His truant Gelert he espied,
Bounding his lord to greet.

But when he gained his castle door

Aghast the chieftain stood;
The hound all o'er was smeared with gore,
His lips, his fangs, ran blood.

Llewelyn gazed with fierce surprise;
Unused such looks to meet,
His favourite checked his joyful guise,
And crouched, and licked his feet.

Onward in haste Llewelyn passed,
And on went Gelert too;
And still, where'er his eyes he cast,
Fresh blood-gouts shocked his view.

O'erturned his infants bed he found,
With blood-stained covert rent;
And all around the walls and ground
With recent blood besprent.

He called his child--no voice replied--
He searched with terror wild;
Blood, blood he found on every side,
But nowhere found his child.

'Hell hound! my child's by thee devoured,'
The frantic father cried;
And to the hilt his vengeful sword
He plunged in Gelert's side.

His suppliant looks, as prone he fell,
No pity could impart;
But still his Gelert's dying yell
Passed heavy o'er his heart.

Aroused by Gelert's dying yell,
Some slumberer wakened nigh:
What words the parent's joy could tell
To hear his infant's cry!

Concealed beneath a tumbled heap
His hurried search had missed,
All glowing from his rosy sleep,
The cherub boy he kissed.

Nor scathe had he, nor harm, nor dread,
But, the same couch beneath,
Lay a gaunt wolf, all torn and dead,
Tremendous still in death.

Ah, what was then Llewelyn's pain!
For now the truth was clear;
His gallant hound the wolf had slain,
To save Llewelyn's heir.

Vain, vain was all Llewelyn's woe:
'Best of thy kind, adieu!
The frantic blow, which laid thee low,
This heart shall ever rue.'

And now a gallant tomb they raise,
With costly sculpture decked;
And marbles storied with his praise
Poor Gelert's bones protect.

There never could the spearman pass,
Or forester, unmoved;
There, oft the tear-besprinkled grass
Llewelyn's sorrow proved.

And there he hung his horn and spear,
And there, as evening fell,
In fancy's ear he oft would hear
Poor Gelert's dying yell.

And till great Snowdon's rocks grow old,
And cease the storm to brave,
The consecrated spot shall hold
The name of 'Gelert's grave'.

Note that the accent is on the first syllable of Gelert and Beddgelert
is pronounced Beth Gelert as in the title of Spencer's poem.

We've sung the song (see WLFHUND1) at a number of venues now and each time
someone adds a bit to our knowledge of the story. The latest is
from a bloke from Birmingham England who is familiar with the
village of Beddgelert. His father used to tell the tale and he
(the son) knew it was true. Then he heard the same story from
Russia and again from India. An ancient urban myth.
After singing the song at a poet's night one of
the poets mailed a photocopy of this which I scanned: AF

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