

Life-Saving Dogs

BY HUGH B. PHILPOTT

EVERY visitor to the delightful little village of Beddgelert, in North Wales, makes a point of seeing the tomb—or perhaps we should say the alleged tomb—of Gelert, the faithful hound from which the place is said to derive its name. Poor Gelert's story, having been enshrined in a pathetic ballad by William Robert Spencer, is probably the best known record of canine devotion to be found in our literature. It tells how the Welsh chieftain Llewelyn, returning from his chase one day, found his child's cot overturned and his dog Gelert by the side of it covered with blood. Jumping to the conclusion that the hound had attacked the child, he at once drew his sword and killed it. But on looking further, he found the child alive and uninjured.

"Nor scath 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."

Of course, the "higher critics," who will never let us enjoy a good story in peace, tell us that the whole thing is a myth,



A LIFE-SAVING DOG IN PARIS

which has its counterpart in the folklore of many nations, the child's assailant being sometimes a wolf, sometimes a boar, and sometimes a snake. But we may at least claim that the story, even though it rest on the flimsiest historical foundations, is poetically true. The canine fidelity and courage it celebrates are not imaginary qualities. Gelert is a true type of the faithful dog, and there are many authentic records of later times showing that dogs are capable not only of being the faithful friends and companions of man, but on occasion of rescuing him from deadly peril.

If we had to choose from among the various breeds of dogs that which has the finest record for life-saving, we should probably have to award the palm to the Newfoundland. His great strength and courage, combined with sagacity and devotion, and his remarkable powers as a swimmer, make him peculiarly qualified to render aid in cases of danger from drowning. Two examples may be given in which these qualities have been exerted to the actual saving of human life.

A German gentleman walking one evening in the Dyke country in Holland slipped from a high bank, which formed one side of a dyke, into the water. Being unable to swim, he soon lost consciousness. Fortunately, he was accompanied by

a fine Newfoundland dog, which, seeming to realize its master's peril, plunged into the water and pushed or dragged the apparently lifeless body right across the dyke to a creek on the opposite side, where it was possible to land. A laborer returning from his work saw from a distance the dog in the water supporting a burden, the nature of which he could not at first distinguish. When the animal reached the shore it was seen that its burden was the body of a man, whose hands and face it was now industriously licking. The man hastened to the spot, and having obtained assistance, conveyed the hapless traveller to a neighboring house, where artificial respiration was successfully resorted to. The dog had swam nearly a quarter of a mile before finding an accessible landing place.

Another well-authenticated story tells how the courage and sagacity of a Newfoundland dog was the means of saving a whole ship's crew—eight in number. The vessel was wrecked on the beach at Lydd, Kent; but the sea was so rough that no boat could put off to its assistance. At length a gentleman attracted the attention of his Newfoundland dog to the vessel and put a short stick in its mouth. The animal seemed to understand what was wanted, and plunging into the boiling sea, fought its way towards the vessel. Although it failed to reach the distressed ship, it came near enough to enable the crew to throw it a rope with a bit of wood attached. Dropping its own burden and seizing the new one, the noble animal struggled back to the shore and laid the wood at its master's feet. A line of communication between the ship and the shore was thus formed, and every man on board was saved.

Within the last few years the fine qualities of the Newfoundland dog have been utilized by the police of Paris in a very remarkable way. They have organized a regular brigade of diving dogs, whose duties are to assist the police in tracking and arresting riverside thieves, and in rescuing would-be suicides and persons who have fallen into the river. In order that they may perform this latter duty effectively, should occasion require, the dogs are most carefully trained. Various objects, including sometimes a dummy the weight and size of a man, are thrown into the river, and the dogs are urged—always with the same words of command—to fetch them out. To teach a dog to dive after a drowning person, one of the men swims beside it, holding a piece of meat well beneath the surface of the water. To get the toothsome morsel the animal would have to dive and keep its eyes open under the water.

Of course, it is not every day that people fall into the Seine and have to be assisted out by dogs or men, and the unhappy creatures who aim at self-destruction generally choose a time and place where they are least likely to be frustrated. One occasion has, however, been recorded in which the careful training of the dogs has been rewarded by the saving of a human life. It was at three o'clock on the afternoon of June 5th, 1902, that a black and white Newfoundland dog named Diane plunged into the river without any word of command from its master and seized a man who had thrown himself into the water. The dog, which at the time of the rescue was only twenty months old, held the would-be suicide by his coat until a policeman reached the spot, and the man was saved.

Of all the organized efforts which have been made to utilize for the saving of human life, the courage and sagacity of dogs, the oldest and most successful, as well as the best known, is undoubtedly that of the monks of St. Bernard. For nearly a thousand years the hospice at the top of the Simplon Pass, 3,000 feet above the sea level, has been the resting-place and refuge of all sorts and conditions of travellers, and it has owed very much of its serviceableness, as well as of its fame, to the successive generations of magnificent dogs which assist the monks in their humane work. Stories of the St. Bernard dogs and their doings have long been among the most familiar of travellers' tales, and no doubt many of them have lost nothing of their original wonder with repeated telling. There is for instance, the story of Barry, a splendid animal who "flourished" in the early days of the nineteenth century. Barry is said to have saved no fewer than forty