

German Short Stories of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries
Wilhelm Riehl (1823-1897)

The Mute Counsellor

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Chapter One

Taking dogs with one to a council meeting in an Imperial City was not exactly the custom in the Middle Ages. And yet it did once happen that a dog received a seat – albeit no voice – in the Council of an Imperial City for almost seven years.

This came about as follows:

Gerhard Richwin, citizen and wool-weaver in Wetzlar, was a rich man, because his father had worked and saved. The son, on the other hand, partied and squandered, and if he had carried on in the same way for ten more years, then rich Richwin would, one may presume, have become poor Richwin by the end of that time.

In Lahn Street, tightly packed between other high-gabled houses, stood Richwin's house, a superior wooden building, constructed anew from the very foundations only ten years before, as the year – 1358 – over the great door bore witness. One walked through these doors into the sales hall; for Richwin did not deal only in self-woven wares, but to a greater extent in materials from other people, and he would have had a place in the merchant's guild had there been one in Wetzlar. But as things stood, he belonged to the noblest guild, the wool-weavers, and to a small, exalted circle within this, the so-called "members of the guild of Flemings," thus

named from the sale of precious Flemish cloth. And among the exalted “Flemings,” Richwin was, for his part, the richest and most exalted, and it seemed to him that he had actually outgrown all of the guilds by almost a head to stand exactly as tall as a patrician.

One walked through the great doors, as beforesaid, into the sales hall, that is to say, if one did not stumble over two naughty boys on the threshold, who were in the habit of playing and tussling there. They were Richwin’s elder children. The younger ones, two girls, made their mother’s life a misery on the upper floor, for the father finding it too tedious to enforce discipline in the case of the wild scapegraces, the brothers learned every bad habit by themselves, and the little sisters learned these habits from their brothers, and the mother was not able to keep a tight rein over the refractory troop on her own.

When Eva, the poor wife, told her husband her grievances against the children, he did not listen at all with his right ear and half-listened with his left one, and gave no reply, or, if he were especially attentive, a wrong one. This was the way in other points also. Gerhard did not notice how badly he neglected his wife; if he had noticed, he would have made it better, for he had a good heart and loved his wife. But Eva noticed all the more that he often did not pass a word with her all day long, and when he did, his words were cold and absent-minded – worse than nothing.

She bore her cross with patience and yet knew only too well that this cross would soon be a double one; for she saw the loss of their goods and chattels creeping closer, slowly but surely, without being able to check it in any way.

Gerhard Richwin did not do much wrong; it was just that he did not do much right either. He gave himself up to every fancy, to every momentary whim; however, these fancies never, strangely enough, fell upon the work which urgently needed to be done at that moment. When things wanted looking after in the weaving-rooms, he took great delight in going for a ride; and when he was supposed to mount his horse to ride to the neighbouring counts' castles in Weilburg, Dillenburg or Braunfels, where there was often important business to be transacted, then he thought it wonderfully fine to be among the looms. When buyers were in the shop, Master Richwin might well look through the window at his naughty boys and turn over in his mind how he really should check their naughtiness; but in so doing, he forgot his customers for a good while, before finally addressing them with fierce paternal severity and making a dash at the cloth with his yardstick, as if he would beat the buyers instead of his boys.

The most loyal customers came at last to feel that they were treated really too tardily and rudely, for the servants and apprentices of the house laid the master's example to heart and became even a degree tardier and ruder than he himself; so it was no wonder that all became, little by little, somewhat quieter in Richwin's famous warehouse.

Wicked tongues opined that, if things continued in this way, then Richwin would soon be the only customer of his shop; he was the best one as it was. You see, in that fashion-obsessed age, he was a shining light for all other citizens through his rich apparel and constant change of garb, and when one saw him in his gala coat with long sleeves, whose broad striped

cloth reached down to his feet, in his colourfully-striped hose and shoes with pointed peaks, a ball-cap on his head turned up at both front and back, his hair cut straight across the brow leaving only two curls over the right and left ear – then one might have supposed him to be no guild member or merchant, but a nobleman.

But if anyone had called Master Richwin a fop for his finery, he would have taken it in bad part, for he was as sensitive as a shelled egg, and although in truth he did enough that was inwardly improper, he was nevertheless horribly afraid of offending against outward propriety. This trait did not exactly proclaim the earthy, upstanding burgher. And in fact, his companions, the guild members, suspected him of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds and of secretly, from haughty pride, being on the side of the Patricians.

Now such a suspicion was a dreadful thing in those days, for the minds of the guild members in the Imperial City were in violent commotion. The noble families sat alone on the council and governed the city; they had recently overburdened the Town Treasury with debt and entangled the city in pernicious alliances and feuds; they were thoroughly hated by the people, and their authority seemed to be reaching the end of its road. A conspiracy of the guilds against the families sprang up, hidden but widespread. For so many other Imperial Cities had turned their patrician Council out of doors in the last few years: why should the people of Wetzlar not be able to drive their patricians to the Devil also?

And with respect to this quiet agitating, making of plans and preparations by his guild brothers, Gerhard Richwin maintained a cool and

equivocal attitude! Yet he was still the principal man of the principal guild, holding great authority in the drinking-parlours, and though the number of his customers declined, that of his boon companions increased. He was a touchy man, capricious, sensible when he wished to be, a man whose means were going downhill: was such a man not tailor-made to be a demagogue? It was surely worthwhile to win him over to the new cause. People beckoned and whispered to him, flattered, cajoled, urged him. None of this availed. He had friends among the families, and their haughty, arbitrary conduct seemed to him to be perfectly noble and gentlemanly. Besides, that man was not comfortable with factional discipline, who disliked every kind of discipline; he did not stir himself when he might gain handfuls of money: why should he stir himself when perhaps all he stood to gain was the gallows?

Chapter Two

In those days, Richwin had received a splendid young dog as a present, who was at least twice as tempestuous as the citizens of Wetzlar and thrice as capricious as his master, a large black wolfhound of Spanish stock, barely three-quarters of a year old, still quite untrained, clumsy, and full of mischief.

The dog was called "Thasso" and did honour to his name, which means "Fighter" or "Combatant." For fighting and scrapping without end was his delight, and although, being extremely good-tempered, he fought almost exclusively in play, playing with Thasso was not to everybody's taste. When a respectable citizen walked down the street with strikingly

quick steps, Thasso would instantly bound after him and teasingly tug at his jerkin, tearing down a shred of cloth the size of a hand at the same time. Or he would see a child, run playfully up to him, and knock him into the gutter with his broad paws at first contact. But Thasso's greatest delight was whenever a horseman trotted past at a quick pace. The dog would then pursue the horse in giant bounds like a beast of prey, circle it, jump up towards its head, then back towards its tail, snap at the horseman's hand, or slip through under the stomach of the rearing horse without ever coming off with a kick. He did not bite, he only played; but the horses shied, retreated, reared up high, or ran away at full speed in spite of reins and shanks.

When Master Richwin called the dog back, he would stop for a moment, look at his master, as though he would say, "I can do much better than that," and follow the horse with double the delight. But if Richwin went so far as to threaten or scold, the dog's play changed into anger, he barked and bit and then ran away for fear of punishment, roamed through half the city, perpetrating all kinds of fresh mischief on the way, and it was not until late that he crept, very secretly, back home. Now of course, he received his blows. But the dog misunderstood this; for having long forgotten the first cause of his punishment, he believed he had been beaten for coming home, and the next time he stayed away all the longer.

Accordingly, Master Richwin determined to punish Thasso in the very act. So the dog ran along behind the horseman and Richwin behind the dog. Finally, the dog came to a halt and, deeply contrite, his tail between his legs, he let his master approach. But as soon as the latter had

come within ten paces, Thasso bolted again. Master Richwin walked slowly, enticing, flattering, and feigning a friendly face, and the dog came over – but only to within ten paces, then he ran away again. The master might hurry, slink, stand still – the animal stayed always by him, but always ten paces from him. The street-urchins cheered, and the whole street ran to their doors and windows to see who would win in the end, Master Richwin or Master Thasso? The proud burgher trembled with fury and even threw stones at the sinner. But Thasso avoided every cast with wonderful dexterity, and bounding after the stone, he fetched it, as if in mockery, in flying haste and was already twenty paces ahead before his punisher could fairly make ready for a blow.

Every day brought new scenes of a similar kind. The dog revealed an astonishing spirit of invention in ever new mischievous tricks and in the art of escaping from a timely blow.

But it was as if misfortune, in bodily shape, had now moved into Richwin's house with the dog. The four naughty children played and scrapped with the animal from dawn to dusk, and Thasso's spirit came over them to such an extent that one could hardly decide whether it was the dog or the children who got up to worse mischief. Poor Mrs. Eva could not abide the dog; Master Richwin took this in extremely bad part, and while he had previously hurt her feelings only through his coldness, he now scolded and chided besides. If Thasso had run away from his whip, he vented his anger on his wife, and if she spoke some inconvenient words, he immediately rubbed her nose in her hatred of the noble dog. Since the dog had been in the house, she regarded her husband, herself, and her

family as utterly doomed to ruin. If the master had previously cared but little about his house and his profession, he now cared far less. Above all else, he was bent upon training his dog, and this important task occupied him all day long. But as he went about it capriciously and without any kind of plan, winking at every vice today and punishing with excessive severity tomorrow, Thasso simply ended up completely losing the little discipline he had possessed.

Complaints about the mischief-maker came incessantly. The master had to compensate injuries, pay smart-money, give fair words and pocket angry ones. The injured parties threatened to poison the animal or strike it dead, and the master's friends urged him to get rid of the undisciplined dog or put it on a chain. However, Richwin stuck to his pronouncement: he would train the dog himself, he would make him gentle as a lamb and then strut around with the noble, feared animal like Sir Kurt¹ with his large stag hound.

Now it happened that the burghers of Wetzlar celebrated a traditional, and singular, procession on Ash Wednesday. They went bearing arms to the ecclesiastical establishments, from that of the Teutonic Knights to Altenberg Nunnery, to receive a live white hen from the Knights, a ham from the nuns, and a florin from the Dean of the Chapter, as tokens of the City's rights in the ecclesiastical establishments. But the live white hen always shone resplendent as the principal offering, and that is why Ash Wednesday has been called "Little Chicken's Day" in Wetzlar for as far

¹ A Wetzlar patrician.

back as one can remember. Immaculately white, decorated with coloured ribbons, the hen was borne through the streets at the head of the procession by a boy.

This year, Master Richwin walked in the procession at the head of his guild and had given the strictest order at home that the dog be closely confined until the hubbub was over. Nevertheless, Thasso broke out, followed his master's trail, and sprang into the midst of the ceremonial ranks just as the steward of the Order's estates was handing the hen over to the boy. He descried the squawking, fluttering bird with its flapping ribbons in a twinkling, and flying at it, he snatched the hen out of the child's hand and tore at it so that feathers and ribbons flew around in the air. The steward, trying to ward the dog off, was strongly bitten in the calf, and when Master Richwin at last succeeded in bringing Thasso to heel, the hen fluttered one more time and then closed its beak for ever.

Now there was no longer a live white hen! But no live hen meant no procession, and no procession meant no rights in the ecclesiastical establishments. The matter was very serious. In those days, the law itself depended on the scrupulous observance of symbols of justice.

With a thousand pleas and entreaties, Master Richwin finally managed to persuade everyone to consider the whole affair as not having happened if he furnished another immaculately white live hen within two hours. The ceremonial handing over would then begin anew, yet with the fixed legal reservation that one should not in future lay the burden of supplying two hens, a dead one and a living one, on the Teutonic Knights. Gerhard Richwin was also to give the steward ten ells of the finest Flemish

cloth on this occasion as compensation and smart-money.

Whipped on by anger, chagrin and anxiety, the Master ran to every chicken-coop in the city, but he could not find an immaculately white hen. Finally, almost at the last appointed minute, he came, dripping with sweat, into the grounds of the Teutonic Knights with a lean old hen, which had originally been white and was now somewhat speckled with grey; but by plucking out several handfuls of feathers, he had transformed it into an immaculately white hen. This new symbol of rights was accepted, and so everyone involved happily got off, as the saying goes, with no more than a black eye, excepting of course the slain first hen.

Thasso's punishment that evening was one for the ages.

Master Richwin swore a solemn oath to henceforth train the dog in a completely new, systematic, and thorough way. He would not have got rid of the dog just now for all the world; he wanted to prove his point and show the people of Wetzlar that, this last scene notwithstanding, he could make the intractable half-wolf as gentle as a lamb.

He pondered – for the first time in his life – over training plans throughout the sleepless night.

Chapter Three

On the next morning, Master Richwin rose with the first light of dawn, as he had not at all been in the habit of doing, for he was a late-riser. He wanted to gradually accustom Thasso to a quiet walk through the streets before they began to swarm with people and horses. His dog on a leash, he passed through the whole town. As soon as the animal tensed at sight of a

horseman or walker, it instantly got a well-aimed lash of the whip. Formerly, Thasso had always felt visible regret at his misdeeds, but shown no desire at all for atonement. Now, regret, atonement and reconciliation came all at once. Richwin found this early hour to be tailor-made for unobserved training. With the lengthening days of February and March, he rose ever earlier and was always up and about with Thasso even before the sun.

When he walked past an open church door, he pulled the leash especially tight and let fall an admonitory blow on Thasso's back. For up to that time, the dog had taken a particular delight in running into open churches and barking at the congregation, and the louder his master called him back, all the more wildly did he raise a hue and cry. He now unlearned that completely. When Master Richwin came before the open door and heard that early Mass was being said inside, he reverently stood there at the portal for a while – for he did not dare to go in on account of the dog – and took a piece of morning prayer away with him. Up to then, he had been a rare guest in the House of God; but he soon came to believe that the day had not properly begun without early Mass at the church-door, and the dog always walked much more calmly afterwards.

When the master came home from his morning walk for the first time, the day seemed really very long to him, which he had previously, when he slept much longer, thought so short. To pass the time, he went with Thasso to the workshop, where work ought to have been going on industriously by that time. However, it still looked very quiet, for the journeymen and apprentices relied on the master sleeping soundly and

came as late as they wished. How the master gaped and stormed at the disorder, and how cross the journeymen grew when he walked into the workshop ever earlier day by day! The horsemen and walkers no longer swore death to unruly Thasso, but the journeymen would now have dearly liked to poison tamed Thasso, for they clearly realised that he alone was to blame for the master's early visits.

But Richwin kept the dog by him day and night, following the perfectly correct principle that one can only break a dog in to loyalty and train it well if one has him constantly at one's side.

This living together certainly had a particular hitch in the sales vault. When a buyer entered, Thasso would dash forth barking from under the bench; or if somebody was about to walk away with a purchased pack of wares, the dog was simply not to be restrained, he clearly regarded buying as theft and seized the innocent customer with so firm a grip that only the master himself was able, with some difficulty, to free him. Master Richwin, as trainer, here entered upon the path of mildness. For was he to beat his best virtue, vigilance, out of the dog? No! He only wanted to teach him to differentiate buyers from thieves. So when a buyer came, Richwin would very cordially give him his right hand while stroking the growling beast with his left, and then, in conversation, he summoned up his brightest mood and put on his most cheerful air so the dog would see that he was here dealing with a business friend and no thief. And when the customer left with the purchased wares, Master Richwin would on no account initially allow him to carry his pack to the door – for Thasso stood snarling and ready to spring – but took it from him with the utmost courtesy and carried

it over the threshold, with many a furtive look back at the quadruped. People stared at this miracle in amazement and did not understand how the rudest merchant could become the politest overnight, or the proudest the most obliging.

But then, just at the critical moment, the Furious Host of children stormed through the hall. Now all pains taken were obliterated, Thasso darted like a thing possessed between the children and then between the buyer's legs, as if he wished to enjoy his suppressed delight doubly and without restraint. The children had to suffer for this. They were sent up to their mother with a terrible scolding, and the very next day the two boys were given to the schoolmaster to be kept under stricter discipline. Loafing around and scrapping in the street were also forbidden them in the severest terms. "You have led the dog astray into a thousand bad habits," remarked Master Richwin, "and how on earth can anyone train a young dog with such wild children raging around him?" He resolved to keep a tight rein upon his naughty urchins from that time on, so the dog would be left in peace and not be led astray.

Mrs. Eva could not but express her joy to her husband at all the changes.

"It is a real blessing," she said, "that you are going to Mass again in the mornings."

"Oh yes, Eva! The dog lies still as a statue when I kneel in the doorway."

"Our customers are increasing again, since you have become so friendly."

“Oh yes, Eva! The dog growls very quietly now, he doesn’t bark in the shop anymore and doesn’t have the remotest idea of biting.”

“The children are visibly becoming better, since you have kept them on a shorter leash.”

“Of course, Eva! It was thoroughly corruptive for the dog to always see the bad example of the children.”

“And how pleasant it is to me, Gerhard, that you are now speaking so many kind words to me!”

“Why, of course, dear Eva! With your having now spoken so kindly of the dog” – she had not said a syllable about him – “how should I not thank you for it?”

Mrs. Eva thought to herself: “Master Richwin is teaching the dog, but he does not suspect that the dog is teaching Master Richwin much more,” and for the first time she cast a friendly look at Thasso and stroked him. That sealed the new domestic peace.

But in spite of the great progress Thasso made in his master’s discipline and his mistress’s favour, the old ill-turns sometimes broke out again. On these occasions, a strange instinct of the animal held sway: it seemed to distinguish the guildsmen from the patricians, and if it *did* occasionally give way to sportiveness, this was sure to be directed at a patrician. As there are dogs who cannot let a beggar or vagrant go past without barking, so Thasso could not see a preened, proudly stepping, chivalrously riding patrician without the old Adam stirring in him.

After the end of the working day, Master Richwin was wont to walk through the streets, now swarming with people, so that the dog, free of the

rope, could give proof of what he had learned on a chain in the lonely morning-hour. Thasso padded very decorously in his master's footsteps. Then a youngster from one of the families minced affectedly across the marketplace; instantly Thasso bounds over to him, no calls, no whistles were any use; as in a frenzy, he had forgotten all the teachings of the sober morning and did not creep back to his incandescent master, wagging most humbly and begging forgiveness, until he had torn the patrician's long sleeve, which fell down to his feet, in two.

On the next day, Master Richwin sent his own gala coat with the long sleeves to the injured party as a replacement. "How could I be such a fop," he exclaimed, "to wear so nonsensical a garment? Must not the long, fluttering strips of cloth, must not the hundred ribbons and sequins, provoke every dog to tug at it?"

Master Richwin began to regard the sartorial luxury and other haughty behaviours of the families with silent fury, and from that time on he dressed only in the simplest commoner's clothes.

Besides this, it seemed to him that the patricians had thrown especially scornful glances when he walked through the streets with his pupil on the lead, or when unleashed Thasso stopped up his ears and had to be admonished to his duty by thrown stones. How mockingly that noble maiden had smiled the other day when Master Richwin greeted her with a deep bow, while the dog on the lead had irresistibly headed over the nearest cornerstone, almost intensifying the bow into a prostration? And were the noble gentlemen not invariably the rudest on those occasions when Thasso leapt up at their galloping horses? How tolerantly, in contrast,

the guildsmen took it as they rode around with peaceful paces!

Thus did Thasso, in this also, achieve what nobody else had succeeded in doing: by the dog's leash, he had drawn his master very gently from neutrality to the side of the bitterest guildsmen.

This was fixed and finalised when the merchants of Wetzlar went to Frankfurt Fair in Easter 1368. They formed a stately troop which stuck closely together through the Wetterau district for protection from attacks by robbers. Formerly, the families had also ridden along in their city's travelling company, and Master Richwin on his proud black steed had heretofore preferred to associate himself with the principal people rather than with the guildsmen who formed the rearguard on foot or on slow nags. This year, however, he mostly left his steed with his pack animals and went on foot among the guildsmen. For Thasso ran at his side, and he could have kept the dog only half-disciplined from on horseback. The guildsmen were greatly delighted at the master's new, affable manner, he letting his handsome steed be led in the baggage-train and going on foot with them. Many a flattering word was spoken, and the talk of the people, which had previously produced no impression whatsoever upon Richwin, now found furtherance in his soul. And when the procession stopped at the watchtower on Friedberg and looked down at the towers of Frankfurt, Master Richwin was initiated and sworn into the league of the guilds against the families. Johannes Kodinger, the captain of the Secret League, shook his hand in thanks and cried, "Oh Master, what a better man you have become, indeed, a real man now, and what's more, it's happened in the short time from Ash Wednesday to Easter!"

Gerhard gave a start as from a dream and replied, "Yes indeed! I knew that the dog was of noble kind and all he lacked was proper discipline. Yes, Master Kodinger, nothing can beat uniform, continuous, and firm schooling, it tames even a beast. But Thasso can be discharged from his articles now, and that shall be done the moment we return home to Wetzlar."

Chapter Four

The storm had broken out in Wetzlar: the families had been expelled, the guilds had won the field and, at the same time, the government of the Imperial City. Master Richwin had been a shining light in the struggle with his persistence, his rigour towards himself and others, and through his irreconcilable hatred of the patricians. His fellow burghers were amazed at the transformed man.

When the new council was formed from the guilds in a purely democratic way, Master Richwin was one of those chosen. Only a year before, though he did not then care in the slightest about the common weal, it had been the sweetest dream of his ambition to become a counsellor one day; today, when he had fervently worked and struggled for the city, he refused. Nobody could guess the reason and everyone importuned the master to join the Council or, at least, reveal the reason for his refusal.

After long hesitation and many kinds of evasions, he said at last: "The reason will appear childish to you. But to me it is serious and deep. I cannot sit in the Town Hall every day in these oppressive times because I

may not take my dog with me. But if I leave the animal at home alone, all kinds of misfortune will come upon my house again, as formerly. I say indeed that the dog has finished learning; but who ever finishes learning? No man and no dog! When I give Thasso to the care of the apprentice for a day every now and then, he very soon relapses, and it so happened that I myself have also relapsed on such a day. We are both still somewhat weak, we must not separate ourselves. In the church porch, I can hear Mass just as well as inside in the nave, and the dog stands by my side; but as counsellor, I cannot, I suppose, always remain before the doors of the Council Chamber. Do not take my reason to be a caprice. I entertain the superstition that my house will not stand firm until Thasso's training is quite finished; I may not separate myself from the dog just yet. And how could I help to steady the wavering community when my own house is shaking far more violently?"

After this speech from the master, which seemed serious to some and facetious to others, the members of the Council decided that Thasso should be privileged above all dogs in the city with a seat in the Council Chamber under his master's chair, with the stipulation, however, that this right would be cancelled the instant the dog presumed to have a voice.

After some resistance, Master Richwin acquiesced in the will of his fellow burghers and appeared punctually with Thasso at the Town Hall whenever required. From this time on, the people of Wetzlar called the dog, "The Mute Counsellor," and he really did remain mute: in the course of many years, nobody heard of him violating the stipulation of his privilege.

In the street, he no longer frightened anybody with his boisterous playing; he had grown out of his fledgling years and strode, in the manner of large dogs, so quietly and proudly along behind his master, as if he were clearly conscious of the privilege he enjoyed above all other dogs of the Imperial City. Now it happened at harvest-time that Master Richwin was walking in the open country, close by the ditch which divided the city territory from a forest belonging to the Count of Solms. Thasso calmly padded along beside him. Then all of a sudden he was gone. Richwin peered around and called and whistled. The dog did not come. Then something rustled and crackled in the thicket on the far side of the ditch, and hounded by Thasso as by a wolf, a kingly stag burst out, a twenty-tined one at the least, stopped in its tracks on seeing the open country and the man, turned around, flung the dog to the side with the full force of its antlers, and made a path for itself backwards through the bushes to the rustling and snapping of the leaves and branches. But Thasso roused himself from his momentary defeat and rushed after the animal like a thing possessed, and soon a rustling, and the whimpering with which the dog gave tongue, were heard in the distance. Poor Richwin whistled his lips dry and called the breath out of his lungs; all his fine training had been swallowed up by Thasso's fever for the chase. Twice he drove the stag towards the ditch for his master, just as if he wanted to bring it to bay for him, and twice the stag broke his way back.

But the third time, a forest warden of Count Solms stepped out of the forest and took aim with his crossbow, not at the game, but at the dog. "Shame on you, who claim to be a hunter yet aim at the noblest of dogs,

who is, after all, only intoxicated by the same spirit of the chase as you yourself!” the master cried to the retainer.

Struck by the truth of these words and, at the same time, by the beauty of the fighting, splendid dog, the forester lowered his crossbow and walked defiantly up to the burgher. “The dog is forfeit to me,” he cried, “because it has hunted in my Count’s game-preserves. You will follow me to the Count with your dog, and if he takes the animal into his pack, its life will be spared.”

Master Richwin resisted of course, but the retainer held him fast, and when the burgher attempted to free himself using force, the other struck him on the arm with his naked blade. At the same moment, however, the retainer was pulled to the ground from behind by Thasso; for as soon as the animal saw his master in danger, his hunting-fever yielded to a loyalty which did not come from training. Also, several people of Wetzlar now ran over from the fields at the noise, freed the forest warden from the dog and took the man to the city as a prisoner because he had wounded a burgher on the Imperial City’s land. For their victorious fight with the families had made the cities pugnacious enough, and they had no fear of a new affray.

But the Council was mightily embarrassed as to what it should do with the captive retainer of Count Solms.

His arm in a sling, Master Richwin was able to attend the session on the following day in which the ticklish case was deliberated. All the counsellors were violently agitated; only Thasso lay under the chair in comfortable peace, as if the matter did not concern him in the least. And

yet it concerned his neck, and he found few advocates. However well-disposed they were to him as the Mute Counsellor, it yet seemed that on this occasion he would have to be sacrificed for the sake of weighty foreign affairs.

For at that time (1372), the evil knightly confederation of the “Sterner” was wreaking such appalling havoc in the neighbouring districts that the people in Wetzlar had secretly armed themselves for an open battle. The Sterner numbered a great many Counts, Knights, and Barons among their confederates, whereas the Imperial City had few friends and was most reluctant to clash with such a warlike neighbour as Count Johann von Solms at just that time, it not yet being known whether he would side with or against the Sterner.

So when a counsellor represented that the forest warden had been in the right, many heads nodded in assent, and when he added that they ought not to refuse a request from the Count to release the hunter and hand over the dog, the majority immediately took his part and some remarked that Thasso had perpetrated enough mischief previously, they surely ought not to go so far as to let him bring the Count of Solms’s anger down on their heads.

Thasso remained perfectly calm, only looking around with questioning eyes when he heard his name mentioned. His master rose. He said:

“If Count Johann, the sly fox, is for us, he will not turn against us for the sake of the dog; if he is against us, we shall not win him with the present of a dog. That man knows where his advantage lies and looks for

other things than stags and dogs. Should the violation of his game-preserve be atoned for, I offer to pay down thrice the value of the stag and the dog. But I shall not deliver the dog over to any man; I would rather stab the animal to death on the spot. You do not know how indebted I am to this creature of God which, devoid of reason, has visibly become God's instrument. If God does not wish it, his holiest preachers will not convert us, and if He does wish it, a dog can convert us. This dog has brought order to my business affairs, discipline to my children, domestic peace to my wife; he has showed me the way to my friends and guild-brothers, the way to the church and the way to the Town Hall. While I thought I was teaching the dog, the dog was rather teaching me. My lady of the house has often told me so, and I regarded it as a clever joke; now that you purpose to take my dog from me, all at once I realise that it has become deadly serious."

Master Richwin spoke only these few words, but he spoke them with moist eyes, and Thasso, seeing his master's emotion, rose up slowly, touched him softly with his broad forepaw several times and licked his hand, as if he would comfort the worried man.

All had fallen utterly silent in the Council Chamber; the drawing of breaths could be heard.

Then the porter put his head round the door and announced a messenger from the Count of Solms. The burghers were startled and feared the worst. All the more surprising was the message which met their ears.

The Count had been grieved to hear that his retainer had struck,

indeed, wounded, a burgher of Wetzlar. Yet he asked them to set the forest warden free, for the sake of good neighbourship – he, the Count, would for his part make no further ado about the violated game-preserve, and in order that the city might see how well-disposed towards them he was, he herewith sent the august Council a stag which he had killed himself, and which was at least as good as the one hunted by the dog but not killed, together with a cask of Bacharach wine so their feast would not be wanting for drink.

The counsellors were frozen stiff with joyous astonishment when, instead of the feared storm breaking, such bright sunshine suddenly poured over them. They gave the messenger many courteous words and congratulated Master Richwin and his Thasso. But the master raised his strong voice to outsound the confused and whirling torrent of words, and requested that before an answer be given, the messenger be made to withdraw and he be given a hearing for a few minutes.

“Distrust the Count’s sweet words!” he cried. “If he had sent us his anger, I would not be afraid, but he sends us his favour and I feel fear. The Count does not send us his stag for nothing. We have no need of the Count; his cousin, Count Otto of Solms-Braunfels and Landgrave Herman von Hesse are better allies for us. But Count Johann needs us. And once he has us by the little finger, he has us completely. Thasso, Thasso! You have brought great harm upon us, not because you chased that stag of Count Solms into Wetzlar land, but because you chased *this* stag into the kitchen of the Wetzlar Council! I implore you, worthy friends, refuse the present with friendly words, demand our right and give the Count his. Send

back the stag and keep the hunter until the Count expiates his retainer's arrogance in due form" - -

Here the others interrupted the speaker and reproached him with taking his resentment of the light blow really too far, not being satisfied even by so much kindness.

But Master Richwin replied, "If I were to speak for myself, I am sure I would be the most satisfied with the Count's suggestion, above all because of my dog. But I am speaking here as a Counsellor of the Imperial City and I say: Demand our right and give the Count his. The dog has fallen forfeit to the Count because he broke into his game-preserve, and the forest warden has fallen forfeit to us because he violated the peace within our precincts. I would not deliver over this dog, my truest friend, for fear of the Count's anger, but I shall deliver him over for fear of the Count's friendship. A little while ago, when I spoke as the dog's counsel, I could have wept for the poor beast; now I speak as counsel for our community and so I could weep far bitterer tears, not for the dog – what do I care about *him!* – but for the ruin creeping up on my poor city!"

The master had spoken into the wind; he was left alone with his suspicion. The gift was accepted with words of thanks and suitably reciprocated, the retainer set free, and Count Johann von Solms was soon what he wanted to be, the avowed friend and support of the Wetzlar Council.

When the stag was consumed at the feast and the Bacharach wine was drunk, Master Richwin stayed at home sulking, and Thasso did not receive a bone of the game which he had chased into the counsellors'

kitchen.

Chapter Five

This had happened in the year 1372. In the following year, that hot battle was fought before the Upper Gate of Wetzlar in which the Sterner Confederacy was defeated and annihilated. The burghers of the Imperial City fought under the command of Count Johann von Solms, and their women defended the gates while the men fought outside. The Landgrave of Hesse and Otto von Solms-Braunfels shared the honour of the day with them. Master Richwin was there also.

The very evening after the battle, Count Otto had the captured knights of the Sterner who had fallen into his hands beheaded; Count Johann, on the other hand, pardoned the others without his allies having known his intention.

“Pay heed!” said Master Richwin to his fellow burghers. “A new warning-sign! Count Johann is playing a double game and is keeping the road open for himself to the right and the left.”

But the people of Wetzlar did not pay heed and thought the master was taking on the character of his dog all too faithfully. Because Thasso did not play anymore but now rather growled and bit, so Richwin thought he too must become grumpy and bite people’s heads off. He was just as moody a man as he had been before and he now harboured an irrational hatred of Count Johann, who had brought such glory to the city, as he had previously alternated between love and hate according to his whims and notions. Popular favour had turned away from the master very quickly.

In the Council, he now mostly sat as mute as the Mute Counsellor under his chair. When he did say a word, it was a warning against the excessive friendliness of Count Johann; that man lured as sweetly as the fowler before he caught the birds. Master Richwin often did not appear in the Council at all, especially when he knew that Count Johann was coming to the hall to offer the burghers some new service or other. For it almost seemed as if the Count, beside the adopted Mute Counsellor under the chair, had now also been adopted as a counsellor, but not as a mute one. On the only occasion when Richwin had sat in the Council at the same time as the Count, Thasso had growled so angrily at every one of Solms's words that his master had been compelled to take him out so the dog would not forfeit its privilege. The master remarked that the animal simply could not bear to see Solms's colours ever since the time of its tussle with the forest warden, and he took this for a good excuse to stay away every time that Solms came. For he would not on any account go to the Town Hall without the dog anymore. The people of Wetzlar said: Richwin really was taking the joke rather too far, and they made verses mocking the unpopular man. A pictorial broadsheet, drawn with very jocular pictures and containing many rhymes, went the rounds, and in it the events in which Master Thasso and Master Richwin had figured together were portrayed to the life, with the superscription:

“In all these pictures, readers may discern:

A dog doth teach, a counsellor doth learn.”

Master Richwin refused to be put out by this; he quietly presided over his flourishing house and let those things happen which he could not

prevent. Now it was not the least of Thasso's worthy actions that he had, with his many thousands of bad habits, taught his master to be patient and to pocket his over-fine sensitivity.

Two more years passed in this manner. Then one day – it was around the Feast of St. John the Baptist² – Master Richwin was summoned to the Town Hall. He was to present himself without delay – no excuse would be accepted this time; Count Johann von Solms had appeared with a message from the Emperor. The master was taken aback. A message from the Emperor, that was certainly a weighty matter! And yet he stated that he could not come: his dog would growl and bark when the Count read out the Imperial message. For Thasso, however wise he might be, was not able to distinguish the Emperor's words from the Count's relation, and might therefore, so to speak, growl at His Imperial Majesty Himself, and he would not go to the Town Hall without the dog – and that was that. Even Mrs. Eva tried to persuade her husband; but he remained resolute. Then a second messenger came and warned that the master *must* come, with or without the dog; the whole Council had to assemble this time; the honour and dignity of the city were at stake.

This insistence aroused the master's suspicions. But the honour and dignity of the city were at stake. So he called to his apprentice to put the dog on the chain and prepared to go out. He felt something close to dread at the thought of setting foot in the Town Hall alone, without his dog, for the first time.

² June 24th.

Then the apprentice came in from the street to chain up Thasso. "Master!" he whispered, "strange things are going on. It's fortunate for you that you hesitated so long! There are armed men behind the Town Hall, over a hundred, I'd say, and well-known faces look out from behind the armed men, patrician faces, and people say they saw some lords of the old council which was driven out seven years ago, they looked the spitting image of them. And Solms's retainers are pressing forward towards the City Gates, as though to prevent anyone from passing out."

The master blanched; yet he quickly collected himself. He told his wife, "Take the children, the apprentice, and the two caskets with the money and the jewels. Go softly to the mill on the Lahn, where there is a small gate, and it will still be open. In front of the small gate, there is a rowboat; cast it off and row to the other bank. Just avoid, for God's sake, the bridge and the large gate. Once you are safely across, go in haste to Giessen down the footpath on the far side. I shall meet up with you in Giessen, God willing."

He pushed the questioning woman forward until she tremblingly carried out his orders. Then he seized Thasso by his chain with his left hand, while his right one did not grasp his whip as usual, but his sword, and it was not to the Town Hall that he hurried, but to the market-square.

There he saw the burghers already armed, hundreds of them together. However, the Town Hall had been closely surrounded by foreign knights and troopers by this time. Cautiously, Master Richwin crept into the hindmost ranks of the burghers, who had also sensed danger and rushed over to stand by their Counsellors. But in front of the burghers stood Count

Johann von Solms in shining armour, surrounded by twenty knights, the Imperial Banner in his hand, and he announced that he had come in the Emperor's name to make peace between the formerly expelled families and the new Council of guild members. No injury would be done to anybody, least of all to his good friends, the Counsellors inside the Town Hall. Peaceful reconciliation was all that he required in the Emperor's name. New and richer prosperity for the city, an increase in her privileges, would be the fruit of this glorious day. As a true friend and neighbour, he therefore requested the burghers to lay down their arms, which they had over-hastily seized for their magistrates; for not the slightest danger threatened them now.

“Now? Yes!” said Richwin to those nearest him. “But what about in an hour's time? Hold on to your weapons, until the counsellors are among us as free men again!”

But he already saw the burghers at the front, won over by the Count's honeyed words, sheathing their swords and taking their spears home. As for the men whom Richwin had spoken to, they scolded him, said that his rightful place was rather in the Town Hall than here in the market-square, and asked if he intended to always be the same, snapping dog who barked at the city's best friends and set the burghers against each other?

Richwin, seeing from this that all was lost, took himself off in all haste, reached the back gate by the Lahn just in time, and swam across the river with the dog, the barque which had saved his wife now being on the other bank.

A few hours later, he reached his family and found safe refuge in Hesse; for Landgrave Herman had grown hostile to Count Johann after the Battle of Wetzlar on account of the prisoners whom the latter had pardoned on his own authority.

But soon a new report made its way into Hesse from the Imperial City. The Count of Solms, after coaxing the weapons out of the burghers' hands, had thrown the Council of guild members into the Tower, confiscated the counsellors' estates, and had three of them, Kodinger, Dufel, and Vollbrecht, beheaded. Two other counsellors, Beyer and Heckerstump, Solms's men threw from the bridge into the Lahn, summarily drowning them to save the executioner the trouble. They would very dearly have liked to hang the sixth man to these five for variety's sake: this man was Master Gerhard Richwin, whom the Count hated most bitterly of all. But in Wetzlar as in Nuremberg, they cannot hang anyone before they have him. The old families, with whom the Count had been in cahoots, now regained complete control.

Although Master Richwin had of necessity left the best part of his property in his enemies' hands, he was yet able, at a later time, to buy himself the rights of a citizen and start a new business in Frankfurt with what he had saved. Now when he sat there with his wife in secured contentment, faithful Thasso, already going grey, at his feet, he would sometimes say, with a wistful look at the "Mute Counsellor": "God forgive me for likening the teaching of children to the training of dogs! God rewards us for teaching our children, and we do not expect a child to pay us back to the last farthing for all our efforts. But this dog has, to thank me

for my training, taught *me* and, as a reward for a thousand duly received sound thrashings, saved my very life at last in the year 1375! Never was a schoolmaster so quickly and fully rewarded as I have been by my, and the Imperial City of Wetzlar's, Mute Counsellor."