

The Cynological Institute

I

Ever since I can remember, I have had a fondness for animals, of whatever kind. At a tender age, I used to bring mice home and once, when I was missing school, I went through the whole period playing with a dead cat.

I took an interest in snakes as well. There was one time that I caught a snake on a stony hillside in a forest and was going to take it away with me to put it into my Aunt Anna's bed (I didn't like her). Fortunately, the gamekeeper came on the scene and he identified it as a viper and killed it and took it away to claim the official reward. Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, my inclinations lay towards animals of really substantial bulk, with a particular predilection for camels and elephants of all kinds.

This interest gradually waned and between twenty-four and twenty-eight, cattle and horses began to attract my attention. I fancied the idea of a stud, or of a breeding-herd of Siamese cattle. This turned out to be mere wishful thinking and I was left with no alternative but to transfer my affections to animals of smaller breeds. I gave dogs precedence over cats and when I reached the age of thirty, certain differences arose between me and my relatives. They reproached me with the fact that I did not have a proper job and had so far made no effort to stand on my own feet. I arrived at my decision quickly; I announced to my nearest and dearest that as a dog-lover, I was going into the dog-trade.

It is worthy of note that they derived no pleasure from this announcement.

II

If a man is going to set up in business, there is no question but that he must do so under a designation which makes it abundantly clear what

business he is setting up in. The common designation of 'dog-dealer' did not, however, appeal to me, in view of the fact that a certain distant relative of mine works in the Ministry and he would have objected to it.

The simple legend: 'Dogs for Sale' did not appeal to me either, for I had it in mind to carry on my trade at a rather higher level. In the Scientific Dictionary, I came across the term 'cynology', which means the science of dogs. Then I walked past the Agricultural Institute and that did it. I conferred on my establishment the title of 'Cynological Institute'. It was a proud, a learned title denoting, as I indicated in my large advertisements, 'the breeding and sale and purchase and exchange of dogs on cynological principles.'

These large advertisements, in which the expression 'Cynological Institute' was repeated so often, left me speechless with wonder myself. There I was at last, the proprietor of an *Institute*! No-one who has not experienced it for himself can know the pride, the magic that lies in that word. In the advertisements, I had undertaken to provide expert advice on all matters pertaining to dogs. Anyone buying a dozen dogs, I announced, would get one puppy as a free gift. A dog, I went on, is the ideal thing as a gift for a birthday, a confirmation or an engagement, or as a present for a wedding or a jubilee. For a child, a dog was a toy that could not easily get broken or torn. A faithful guide which will not attack you in the forest. All breeds of dog in stock. Direct contacts with abroad. A training-establishment attached for dogs that were badly behaved. In my Cynological Institute, the fiercest dog would be cured of snapping and barking within a fortnight. Where to put the dog when you went on holiday? In the Cynological Institute. Where to get your dog trained to sit up and beg within three days? In the Cynological Institute.

On reading these advertisements, an uncle of mine shook his head apprehensively and said: 'No, no, lad, you're not well. Don't you sometimes feel a pain at the back of your head?'

I, however, looked to the future with hope and without having as yet acquired a single dog, waited eagerly for an order of some kind and advertised for an assistant of honest character and good behaviour who was not currently liable for military service and would not have to go back into the army until the dogs had had time to win their way into his affections.

III

My advertisement for a 'Man to assist in the breeding and sale of dogs' brought in a whole sheaf of replies, some of which showed a great deal of frankness. One retired country policeman wrote that if he got the post, he would teach all the dogs to jump over sticks and walk on their heads.

Another wrote that he knew how to handle dogs, for he had worked for years for the knacker in Budějovice and had been discharged on account of the gentle way in which he had handled the dead animals.

One applicant confused 'Cynological' with 'Gynaecological' and wrote that he had worked in a maternity hospital and in clinics for women's diseases.

Fifteen applicants had completed courses in law, twelve were qualified teachers. In addition, I received a communication from the Society for Aid to Former Prisoners saying that with regard to the post of assistant, I need look no further; they had just the man for me, a former convicted safebreaker. Some applications struck a very sad and hopeless note. Many began by writing themselves: 'Although I know in advance that I will not get this job . . .'

Among this plethora of applicants, there were those who knew Spanish, English, French, Turkish, Russian, Polish, Croat, German, Hungarian and Danish. One screed was even written in Latin.

And then came a simple and frank request: 'Dear Sir, When do I start? Yours Respectfully, Ladislav Čížek, c/o Medřický, Košíře.' When an applicant approaches you as directly as that, there is nothing for it but to write and tell him to come on Wednesday at eight a.m. I felt myself under a deep obligation to him for having spared me the long and onerous business of selection.

And so on Wednesday, at eight o'clock, my assistant started work. He was a slightly-built, pock-marked, very lively man who, when he first saw me, grasped me by the hand and said gaily: 'It doesn't look as if the weather will perk up till tomorrow . . . did you hear that another two trams collided in Pilsen Street at seven this morning?'

Then he took a short-stemmed pipe out of his pocket and told me that he had got it from the chauffeur at Stibrals' and that he smoked Hungarian tobacco. He next informed me that at a place he knew in Nusle there was a waitress called Pepina and asked whether we hadn't by any chance been at school together. Then he began to talk about a certain dachshund which would need to be dyed a different colour if I

were to buy it, and to have its legs bent a little.

'You know about dogs, then?' I asked joyfully.

'Do I know about dogs? I've been in the business myself and already tangled with the law over it. One time I was taking a boxer home and out of the blue, a man stops me in the street and says this is his dog and he lost it on Ovocná Street two hours ago. "How do you know it's your dog?" "By the fact that its name is Mupo. Here, Mupo!" You wouldn't believe the joy with which that dog jumped up at him. "Bosko," I called out to him. "Bosko, for shame!" So he came dashing merrily back to me. Thick as two short planks, that dog was. The worst thing was, I forgot, when the case came to court, that I'd called him Bosko on that occasion. But he answered to "Laddie" as well and was just as pleased to see me. Would you like me to look round for a dog for you?'

'No, Čížek, I'm going to run my business on very practical lines. We'll wait for a customer and while we're waiting, we'll look through the advertisements in the Animals columns to see who's selling, and what kind of dog. Look, here's a lady who wants to sell a year-old white spitz for lack of space. Is a spitz really so big that it needs that much space? Off you go now to Školská Street and buy him. Here's thirty crowns.'

He parted from me with the assurance that he'd be back in no time, but it was three hours before he returned . . . and what a state he was in! He had his hard hat rammed down over his ears and was teetering alarmingly from side to side like a man on the deck of a ship during a storm at sea. Gripped tight in one hand, he held a piece of rope, which he was dragging behind him. I looked at the end of the rope. There was nothing there.

'Well now . . . h-h-how do you like him? . . . nice little chap, eh? . . . it's taken . . . a bit longer than I thought' (he began to hiccup and collided with the door) ' . . . look at his ears . . . come on then, nitwit . . . dig your toes in, would you? . . . she was very reluctant to sell him . . . '

He turned round as he said this and looked at the end of the rope. He rubbed his eyes, took hold of the end, fumbled with it and hiccupped: 'I-i-it was there an hour ago!'

He sat down on a chair, fell off it straight away and pulling himself up on my legs into a standing position, said triumphantly, as if he had made some fabulous discovery: 'It looks as if that dog of ours has run off.' He sat down on the chair and began to snore.

And that was how he began work in my employ.

I looked out of the window onto the street. There, amid the hustle and bustle, a variety of dogs were running about. Every one of them, so it seemed to me, was for sale while this fellow beside me was snoring his head off. I tried to wake him, for I had the *idée fixe* that a customer would come along and want to buy not one, but a whole dozen dogs.

But nobody came and it was a waste of time trying to wake him up, as well. All I achieved was that he slid out of the chair. Three hours later, he at last awoke of his own accord and said in a hoarse voice, as he rubbed his eyes: 'I have the feeling I've done something wrong.'

He began to recall individual details and went on at length about the spitz, what a pretty dog it had been and how cheaply that lady had sold it to him. He had given ten crowns for it, having told her that it was going to a very good home. Then he related how the dog had not wanted to come with him and how he had beaten it. He then made an abrupt leap to the point that he had an acquaintance who kept a pub down in Smíchov and so he had dropped in on him. There had been a number of other people there that he knew. They'd had a glass or two of wine and of spirits. A very frail vessel is man.

'All right then,' I said, 'you were given thirty crowns, as you know. Give me back the other twenty.'

This did not throw him off his stroke in the slightest. 'It's true, I should have given you back twenty crowns, but I thought I'd give you a nice surprise. So I called round at Švihanec as well and there I put down a deposit of ten crowns for some puppies with a bloke called Kratký. They've got such an odd-looking, interesting bitch there and she'll be having a litter soon. We'll be really keen to see what kind of pups she turns out. The main thing is, we've already got them secured. Then I went along to Paliárka; there's a lovely doe for sale there . . .'

'Wait a minute, Čížek, I'm not in the rabbit-trade, you know.'

'Did I say doe?' said my assistant. 'That was a mistake. I meant a Scottish sheepdog bitch. She's going to have pups as well, but I didn't put down the ten crowns on the puppies; they were just an advance on the bitch. The owner will keep the pups and we'll send for the bitch when she's had them. Then I went down Krocínová Street . . .'

'But you didn't have any money left by then.'

'Yes, that's true, I hadn't any money left by then. If I had had some money, then there's a Mr Novák there who has a large shaggy dog for sale and I'd have put it down as a deposit, so that we could have it at our disposal. Well, I'll just get myself sorted out now, and go over to Školská Street. That spitz is sure to have got home by now, after it ran

away from me. I'll be back with it within the hour.'

Čížek was true to his word. He returned in less than an hour, completely sober and out of breath. To my great surprise, he had brought along a black spitz.

'You just can't get it right, can you?' I exclaimed. 'That lady did say in her advertisement that it was a white spitz she wanted to sell.'

For a while, he stared at the dog in a puzzled manner, then ran off with it, without saying a word.

Two hours later, he was back with a white spitz, which was in a desperately dirty and muddy state and behaved in a terribly ferocious manner.

'That business about the spitz was all a mistake,' said Čížek. 'That there lady down in that Školská Street in Prague had two spitzes, a black one and a white one. She was very pleased when I brought her that black one back.'

I looked at the identification-mark on the one he had brought. It was from the Žižkov district. Suddenly, the feeling came over me that I wanted to cry, but I got myself under control. (Čížek, meanwhile, had removed the identification-mark, saying that they were dangerous things.)

That night, I was awakened by a scratching at the door. I opened it, and the black spitz, my old acquaintance from the previous afternoon, burst into the flat, barking joyfully. Perhaps it had been missing us, or maybe it was just too long a way for it to go home. Whatever the reason, I now had two dogs; all I needed was a customer.

IV

The customer arrived at about ten o'clock in the morning. He looked round the flat and asked: 'Where do you keep your dogs, then?'

'I don't keep them at home,' I said. 'Apart from two spitzes, which I'm training and which are already promised to the Archduke in Brandeis. I keep my dogs in the country, with a view to ensuring that they get fresh air and don't pick up vermin, or the measles, which not even the most careful dog-dealer in the city can guard against. It is a principle of our Cynological Institute that our dogs should be provided with the opportunity to run free and so out in the country, where we have our kennels, the keeper disperses them all over the area and the dogs don't come back till evening.'

'This also has the advantage that it teaches them to stand on their own feet, for during the day, they seek out their own food. We have leased large tracts of land for them, where they can feed on all kinds of game and you really ought to see the fun when one of those tiny ratters is fighting with a hare.'

The gentleman was very pleased by this, for he nodded his head and said:

'So you'll have some nice fierce dogs for sale, then, trained as guard-dogs.'

'Oh, certainly. We've got dogs on our books that are so terrifying that I can't even let you have a photograph of them. They would have torn the photographer limb from limb. I've got dogs that have already torn criminals apart.'

'That's just the kind of dog I'm after,' said the customer. 'I've got a timber-yard and now that it's winter, I'd like to get hold of a good guard-dog. Could you get one in from your kennels for me by tomorrow afternoon, so that I can come and have a look at him?'

'Why certainly, Sir. No trouble at all. I'll send my man for him straight away. Čížek!'

He appeared wearing an ingratiating smile and made it known straight away that he thought he'd seen the gentleman somewhere before.

'Čížek', I said, making a sign to him, 'go and get that really vicious guard-dog of ours. What's his name, again?'

'Fabian,' said Čížek, without batting an eyelid. 'His mother was called "Witch"; a fearsome dog that is. It's already savaged and eaten two children because they gave it to them to play with by mistake and they tried to climb on its back. Now, as far as the deposit is concerned . . .'

'Oh, of course!' said the customer. 'Here's forty crowns as a deposit. What's his price?'

'A hundred crowns,' said Čížek, 'and a gulden extra on his tail. We also have a cheaper one at eighty crowns, but he's only bitten off three of a man's fingers, when he tried to stroke him.'

'I'll take the more vicious one.'

And so Čížek set off with the forty crowns' deposit to look for a guard-dog and he came back in the evening with a sad-looking, broken-down specimen.

'But that's a real dish-rag!' I cried in astonishment.

'Cheap, though,' said Čížek. 'I met a butcher who was just taking

him off to the knacker's. Said he wouldn't pull any more and that he was starting to bite. So I reckon he'll make a first-class guard-dog. Anyway, if the thief knows what he's about, he'll poison it and that gent will be round to buy another from us.'

We spent some time arguing about this and then Čížek gave the dog a thorough combing and we cooked it a meal of rice and sinews. He ate two pots full of this, after which he looked just as listless and miserable as he had before. He licked our boots, walked about the room without taking an interest in anything and you could see that he was annoyed that his master had not got him as far as the knacker's yard.

Čížek tried one more trick to turn him into a ferocious creature. Because that dog was brownish-white, in effect grey in colour, he got some Indian ink and painted large black stripes across the body, which made him look like a hyena.

The gentleman, when he came to get him next day, stepped back in horror when he saw him.

'That's a fearsome beast,' he cried.

'He won't hurt anyone who belongs to the family. "Fox" is his name; go on, just try him out, give him a stroke.'

The customer feared for his safety, so we literally had to lead him up to the ugly brute and force him to stroke it. The guard-dog began to lick his hand and went off with him like a lamb.

And before morning, that gentleman had been comprehensively burgled.

V

Christmas was coming. In the meantime, we had turned the black spitz into a golden spitz by the application of an oxide lotion and made the black spitz into a white one by painting it with a solution of silver nitrate. Both dogs howled fearfully during this operation, which gave the impression that the Cynological Institute had at least sixty dogs at its disposal, instead of just two.

But we made up for this by our profusion of puppies. Čížek, to all appearances, suffered from the delusion that puppies were the key to prosperity and so, as Christmas approached, he kept on arriving with the pockets of his winter overcoat stuffed full of nothing but puppies. I would send him out to get a mastiff and he would bring me dachshund puppies. I would send him out for a pinscher, and he would bring me a

fox-terrier pup. We had thirty puppies in all and had put down deposits for a hundred and twenty more.

I had the idea of leasing a shop, in preparation for the holiday season, in Ferdinandová Street in Prague, setting up a Christmas tree there and selling the puppies, decorated with pretty bright-coloured ribbons, under the slogan: 'Make your children really happy this Christmas by buying them a healthy puppy.'

I hired the shop. This was about a week before Christmas.

'Čížek,' I said, 'take the puppies down to our shop in Prague, buy a nice big tree and put the puppies in an attractive display. Get some moss. In a word, I'm relying on you to do the whole thing in the best of taste. Got it?'

'You bet. I'll give you a real treat.' He put the puppies in boxes and loaded them into a handcart, and that afternoon I went down to take a look at this treat he had in store for me and to see how nicely and tastefully he had arranged his window-display.

The crowd of people in front of the shop told me that the puppies had aroused enormous interest. But as I came closer, I heard cries of outrage from among the throng. 'I've never seen anything so barbarous. What are the police doing? I'm amazed that something like this can be allowed.'

When I pushed my way through to the display-window, it's a wonder my legs didn't give way under me.

Čížek's pretty arrangement had consisted of hanging two dozen puppies on the branches of the Christmas tree as if they had been bags of sweets. The poor creatures were dangling there with their tongues hanging out like thieves hanging from a tree in the Middle Ages . . . And underneath stood the inscription: 'Make your children really happy this Christmas by buying them a healthy, adorable little puppy.'

That was the finish of my Cynological Institute.