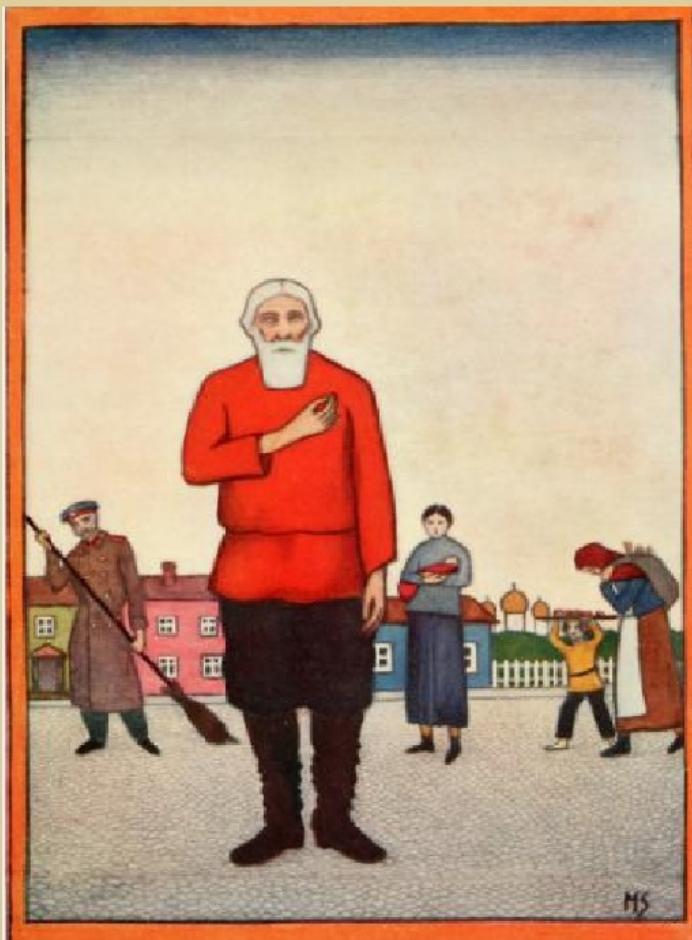


Where Love is,
there God is also



Lev Tolstoy

Where love is, there god is also by Lev Tolstoy

In a certain town there lived a shoemaker named Martin Avdeitch. He lived in a basement room which possessed but one window. This window looked onto the street, and through it a glimpse could be caught of the passers-by. It is true that only their legs could be seen, but that did not matter, as Martin could recognize people by their boots alone. He had lived here for a long time, and so had many acquaintances. There were very few pairs of boots in the neighbourhood which had not passed through his hands at least once, if not twice. Some he had re-soled, others he had fitted with side-pieces, others, again, he had resewn where they were split, or provided with new toe-caps. Yes, he often saw his handiwork through that window. He was given plenty of custom, for his work lasted well, his materials were good, his prices moderate, and his word to be depended on. If he could do a job by a given time it should be done; but if not, he would warn you beforehand rather than disappoint you. Everyone knew Avdeitch, and kept him always busy with work. He had always been an upright man, but with the approach of old age he had begun more than ever to think of his soul, and to draw nearer to God.

His wife had died while he was still an apprentice, leaving behind her a little boy of three. This was their only child, indeed, for the two elder ones had died previously. At first Martin thought of placing the little fellow with a sister of his in the country, but changed his mind, thinking: "My Kapitoshka would not like to grow up in a strange family, so I will keep him by me." Then Avdeitch finished his apprenticeship, and went to live independently with his little boy. But God had not seen fit to give Avdeitch happiness in his children. The little boy was just growing up and beginning to help his father and to be a pleasure to him, when he fell ill, was put to bed, and died after a week's fever.

Martin buried the little fellow and was inconsolable. Indeed, he was so inconsolable that he began to murmur against God. His life seemed so empty that more than once he prayed for death and reproached the Almighty for taking away his only beloved son instead of himself, the old man. At last he ceased altogether to go to church.

Then one day there came to see him an old man-pilgrim—one who was now in the eighth year of his pilgrimage. To him Avdeitch talked, and then went on to complain of his great sorrow.

- I no longer wish to be a God-fearing man, - he said. - I only wish to die. That is all Task of God. I am a lonely, hopeless man.

And the old pilgrim replied to him:

- You should not speak like that, Martin. It is not for us to judge the acts of God. We must rely, not upon our own understanding, but upon the Divine wisdom. God saw fit that your son should die and that you should live. Therefore it must be better so. If you despair, it is because you have wished to live too much for your own pleasure.

- For what, then, should I live? - asked Martin.

And the old man replied:

- Need to live for God. It is He who gave you life, and therefore it is He for whom you should live. When you come to live for Him, you will cease to grieve, and everything will become easy to bear.

Martin was silent. Then he spoke again.

- But how am I to live for God? - he asked.

- And how to live for God - Christ has shown us the way, - answered the old man. - Can you read? If so, buy the New Testament and read it. You will learn there how to live for God. It is all shown there.

These words sank into Avdeitch's soul. He went out the same day, bought a large-print copy of the New Testament, and set himself to read it. At the beginning Avdeitch had meant only to read on festival days, but when he once began his reading he found it so comforting to the soul that he came never to let a day pass without doing so. On the second occasion he became so engrossed that all the kerosene was burnt away in the lamp before he could

tear himself away from the book. Thus he came to read it every evening, and, the more he read, the more clearly did he understand what God required of him, and in what way he could live for God; so that his heart grew ever lighter and lighter. Once upon a time, whenever he had lain down to sleep, he had been used to moan and sigh as he thought of his little Kapitoshka; but now he only said - "Glory to you, O Lord! Glory to you! Your will be done!"

From that time onwards Avdeitch's life became completely changed. Once he had been used to go out on festival days and drink tea in a tavern, and had not denied himself even an occasional glass of vodka. This he had done in the company of a boon companion, and, although no drunkard, would frequently leave the tavern in an excited state and talk much nonsense as he shouted and disputed with this friend of his. But now he had turned his back on all this, and his life had become quiet and joyous. Early in the morning he would sit down to his work, and labour through his appointed hours. Then he would take the lamp down from a shelf, light it, and sit down to read. And the more he read, the more he understood, and the clearer and happier he grew at heart.

It happened once that Martin had been reading late. He had been reading those verses in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke which run:

"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Then, further on, he had read those verses where the Lord says:

"And why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever comes to Me and hears my sayings, and does them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the storm beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that hears and does not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat

vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."

Avdeitch read these words, and felt greatly cheered in soul. He took off his spectacles, laid them on the book, leaned his elbows upon the table, and gave himself up to meditation. He set himself to measure his own life by those words, and thought to himself:

- Is my house founded upon a rock or upon sand? It is well if it be upon a rock. Yet it seems so easy to me as I sit here alone. I may so easily come to think that I have done all that the Lord has commanded me, and grow careless and - sin again. Yet I will keep on striving, for it is goodly so to do. Help me, O Lord.

Thus he thought, and wanted to go to bed yet he was loathe to tear himself away from the book. He began to read the seventh chapter of St Luke, and read on about the centurion, the widow's son, and the answer given to John's disciples; until in time he came to the passage where the rich Pharisee invited Jesus to his house, and the woman washed the Lord's feet with her tears and He justified her. So he came to the forty-fourth verse and read:

"And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, see you this woman? I entered into thine house, and thou gave me no water for my feet: but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil; but this woman has anointed my feet."

He read these verses and thought: "You didn't give me water for my feet, didn't kiss, didn't anoint my head..."

And once again he took off his spectacles, laid them on the book, and again started to ponder.

"That Pharisee must've been like I," - he thought to himself. - "I also must've thought only of my own needs. I thought only of drinking tea, and staying in comfort, - but never of a guest's needs. I was mindful only of myself, and not of my guest. And who is the guest? Why, even the Lord Himself! If, then, He

should come to visit me, should I receive Him the same way?"

And, leaning forward upon his elbows, he was asleep almost before he was aware of it.

- Martin! - someone seemed to breathe in his ear. He started from his sleep.

- Who is there? - he said. He turned and looked towards the door, but could see no one. Again he bent forward over the table. Then suddenly he heard the words:

- Martin, Martin! Look into the street tomorrow, I'll come over.

Martin roused himself, got up from the chair, and rubbed his eyes. He did not know whether it was dreaming or awake that he had heard these words, but he turned out the lamp and went to bed.

The next morning Avdeitch rose before daylight and said his prayers. Then he made up the stove, got ready some cabbage soup and porridge, lighted the samovar, slung his leather apron about him, and sat down to his work in the window. He sat and worked hard, yet all the time his thoughts were centred upon last night. He was in two ideas about the vision.

At one moment he would think that it must have been his fancy, while the next moment he would find himself convinced that he had really heard the voice. "Yes, it must have been so," he concluded.

As Martin sat thus by the window he kept looking out of it as much as working. Whenever a pair of boots passed with which he was acquainted he would bend down to glance upwards through the window and see their owner's face as well. The doorkeeper passed in new felt boots, and then a water-carrier. Next, an old soldier, a veteran of Nicholas' army, in old, patched boots, and carrying a shovel in his hands, halted close by the window. Avdeitch knew him by his boots. His name was Stepanitch, and he was kept by a neighbouring tradesman out of charity, his duties being to help the doorkeeper. He began to clear away the snow from in front of Avdeitch's window, while the shoemaker looked at him and then resumed his work.

- I think I must be getting into my old age, - thought Avdeitch with a smile. - Just because Stepanitch begins clearing away the snow I at once jump to the conclusion that Christ is about to visit me. Yes, I am growing foolish now, old greybeard that I am.

Yet he had hardly made a dozen stitches before he was craning his neck again to look out of the window. He could see that Stepanitch had placed his shovel against the wall, and was resting and trying to warm himself a little.

"He is evidently an old man now and broken," - thought Avdeitch to himself. "He is not strong enough to clear away snow. Would he like some tea, I wonder? That reminds me that the samovar must be ready now." He made fast his awl in his work and got up. Placing the samovar on the table, he brewed the tea, and then tapped with his finger on the window-pane. Stepanitch turned round and approached. Avdeitch beckoned to him, and then went to open the door.

- Come in and warm yourself, - he said. - You must be frozen.

- Christ be with you! - answered Stepanitch. - Yes, my bones are almost cracking.

Stepanitch came in, shook the snow off himself, and, though tottering on his feet, took pains to wipe them carefully, that he might not dirty the floor.

- Do not trouble about wiping that, - said Avdeitch. - I will wipe your boots myself. It is part of my business in this trade. Come over here and sit down, and have a tea to drink.

And Avdeitch poured out two glasses, and offered one to his guest; after which he emptied his own into the saucer, and blew upon it to cool it.

Stepanitch drank his glass, turned the glass upside down, placed his crust upon it, and started to thank his host. But it was plain that he wanted another one.

- You have some more, - said Avdeitch, and refilled his guest's tumbler and

his own. Yet, in spite of himself, he had no sooner drunk his tea than he found himself looking out into the street again.

- Are you expecting anyone? - asked his guest.

- Am—am I expecting anyone? Well, to tell the truth, yes. That is to say, I am, and I am not. The fact is that some words have got fixed in my memory. Whether it was a vision or not I cannot tell, but at all events, my old friend, I was reading in the Gospels last night about Our Father-Christ, and how He walked on this earth and suffered. You have heard of Him, have you not?

- Yes, yes, I have heard of Him, - answered Stepanitch, - but we are ignorant folk and do not know our letters.

- Well, I was reading of how He walked on this earth, and how He went to visit a Pharisee, and yet received no welcome from him at the door. All this I read last night, my friend, and then fell to thinking about it—to thinking how someday I too might fail to pay Our Father-Christ due honour. “Suppose,” - I thought to myself, - “He came to me or to anyone like me? Should we, like the great lord Simon, not know how to receive Him and not go out to meet Him?” Thus I thought, and fell asleep where I sat. Then as I sat sleeping there I heard someone call my name; and as I raised myself the voice went on (as though it were the voice of someone whispering in my ear): “Watch thou for me tomorrow, for I am coming to visit you.” It said that twice. And so those words have got into my head, and, foolish though I know it to be, I keep expecting Him - the Father - every moment.

Stepanitch nodded and said nothing, but emptied his glass and laid it aside. Nevertheless Avdeitch took and refilled it.

- Drink it up for your health, - he said. - You know, I often think that when Our Father walked on this earth, there was never a man, however humble, whom He despised, and how it was chiefly among the common people that He dwelt. It was always with them that He walked; it was from among them —from among such men as you and I - from among sinners and working folk - that He chose His disciples. “Whosoever,” - He said, - “shall exalt himself, the same shall be abased; and whosoever shall abase himself, the same shall

be exalted" "You," - He said again, - "call me Lord; yet will I wash your feet." "Whosoever," - He said, - "would be chief among you, let him be the servant of all. Because," - He said, - "blessed are the lowly, the peacemakers, the merciful, and the charitable."

Stepanitch had forgotten all about his tea. He was an old man, and his tears came easily. He sat and listened, with the tears rolling down his cheeks.

- Oh, but you must drink your tea, - said Avdeitch; yet Stepanitch only crossed himself and said the thanksgiving, after which he pushed his glass away and rose.

- I thank you, Martin Avdeitch, - he said. - You have taken me in, and fed both soul and body.

- You're very welcome, come again another time, I am glad of a guest, - replied Avdeitch.

So Stepanitch departed, while Martin poured out the last of the tea and drank it. Then he cleaned the crockery, and sat down again to his work by the window—to the stitching of a back-piece. He stitched away, yet kept on looking through the window—looking for Christ, as it were—and ever thinking of Christ and His works. Indeed, Christ's many sayings were never absent from Avdeitch's mind.

Two soldiers passed the window, the one in military boots, and the other in civilian. Next, there came a neighbouring householder, in polished goloshes; then a baker with a basket. All of them passed on. Presently a woman in woollen stockings and rough country shoes approached the window, and halted near the buttress outside it. Avdeitch peered up at her from under the lintel of his window, and could see that she was a plain-looking, poorly-dressed woman and had a child in her arms. It was in order to muffle the child up more closely—little though she had to do it with! —that she had stopped near the buttress and was now standing there with her back to the wind. Her clothing was ragged and fit only for summer, and even from behind his window-panes Avdeitch could hear the child crying miserably and its mother vainly trying to soothe it. Avdeitch rose, went to the door, climbed

the steps, and cried out:

- Good woman, good woman!

She heard him and turned round.

- Why need you stand there in the cold with your baby? - He went on. - Come into my room, where it is warm, and where you will be able to wrap the baby up more comfortably than you can do here. Yes, come in with you.

The woman was surprised to see an old man in a leather apron and with spectacles upon his nose calling out to her, yet she followed him down the steps, and they entered his room. The old man led her to the bedstead.

- You sit down here, my good woman, - he said. - You will be near the stove, and can warm yourself and feed your baby.

- Ah, but I have no milk left in my breast, - she replied. - I have had nothing to eat this morning. - Nevertheless she put the child to suck.

Avdeitch nodded his head approvingly, went to the table for some bread and a basin, and opened the stove door. From the stove he took and poured some soup into the basin, and drew out also a bowl of porridge. The latter, however, was not yet boiling, so he set out only the soup, after first laying the table with a cloth.

- Sit down and eat, my good woman, - he said, - while I hold your baby. I have had little ones of my own, and know how to nurse them.

The woman crossed herself and sat down, while Avdeitch seated himself upon the bedstead with the baby. He smacked his lips at it once or twice, but made a poor show of it, for he had no teeth left. Consequently the baby went on crying. Then he bethought him of his linger, which he wriggled to and fro towards the baby's mouth and back again—without, however, actually touching the little one's lips, since the finger was blackened with work and sticky with shoemaker's wax. The baby contemplated the finger and grew quiet—then actually smiled. Avdeitch was delighted. Meanwhile the woman

had been eating her meal, and now she told him, unasked, who she was and whither she was going.

- I am a soldier's wife, - she said, - but my husband was sent to a distant station eight months ago, and I have heard nothing of him since. At first I got a place as cook, but when the baby came they said they could not do with it and dismissed me. That was three months ago, and I have got nothing since, and have spent all my savings. I tried to get taken as a wet nurse, but no one would have me, for the}' said I was too thin. I have just been to see a tradesman's wife where our grandmother is in service. She had promised to take me on, and I quite thought that she would, but when I arrived to-day she told me to come again next week. She lives a long way from here, and I am quite worn out and have tired my baby for nothing. Thank Heaven, however, my landlady is good to me, and gives me shelter for Christ's sake. Otherwise I should not have known how to bear it all.

Avdeitch sighed and said:

- But have you nothing warm to wear?

- Ah, sir, - replied the woman, - although it is the time for warm clothes I had to pawn my last shawl yesterday for two grivenki.

Then the woman returned to the bedstead to take her baby, while Avdeitch rose and went to a cupboard. There he rummaged about, and presently returned with an old jacket.

- Here, - he said. - It is a poor old thing, but it will serve to cover you.

The woman looked at the jacket, and then at the old man. Then she took the jacket and burst into tears. Avdeitch turned away, and went creeping under the bedstead, whence he extracted a box and pretended to rummage about in it for a few moments; after which he sat down again before the woman.

Then the woman said to him: "I thank you in Christ's name, good grandfather. Surely it was He Himself who sent me to your window. Otherwise I should have seen my baby perish with the cold. When I first

came out the day was warm, but now it has begun to freeze. But He, our dear Father, had placed you in your window, that you might see me in my bitter plight and have compassion upon me.

Avdeitch smiled and said:

- He did indeed place me there: yet, my poor woman, it was for a special purpose that I was looking out.

Then he told his guest, the soldier's wife, of his vision, and how he had heard a voice foretelling that to-day the Lord Himself would come to visit him.

- That may very well be, - said the woman as she rose, took the jacket, and wrapped her baby in it.

Then she saluted him once more and thanked him.

- Also, take this in Christ's name, - said Avdeitch, and gave her a two-grivenka piece with which to buy herself a shawl. The woman crossed herself, and he likewise. Then he led her to the door and dismissed her.

When she had gone Avdeitch ate a little soup, washed up the crockery again, and resumed his work.

All the time, though, he kept his eye upon the window, and as soon as ever a shadow fell across it he would look up to see who was passing.

Acquaintances of his came past, and people whom he did not know, yet never anyone very particular.

Then suddenly he saw something. Opposite his window there had stopped an old pedlar-woman, with a basket of apples. Only a few of the apples, however, remained, so that it was clear that she was almost sold out. Over her shoulder was slung a sack of shavings, which she must have gathered near some new building as she was going home. Apparently, her shoulder had begun to ache under their weight, and she therefore wished to shift them to the other one. To do this, she balanced her basket of apples on the top of a post, lowered the sack to the pavement, and began shaking up its contents. As

she was doing this, a boy in a ragged cap appeared from somewhere, seized an apple from the basket, and tried to make off. But the old woman, who had been on her guard, managed to turn and seize the boy by the sleeve, and although he struggled and tried to break away, she clung to him with both hands, snatched his cap off, and finally grasped him by the hair. Thereupon the youngster began to shout and abuse his captor. Avdeitch did not stop to make fast his awl, but threw his work down upon the floor, ran to the door, and went stumbling up the steps — losing his spectacles as he did so. Out into the street he ran, where the old woman was still clutching the boy by the hair and threatening to take him to the police, while the boy, for his part, was struggling in the endeavour to free himself.

- I never took it, - he was saying. - What are you beating me for? Let me go.

Avdeitch tried to part them as he took the boy by the hand and said:

- Let him go, my good woman. Pardon him for Christ's sake.

- Yes, I will pardon him. - She retorted, - but not until he has tasted a new birch-rod. I mean to take the young rascal to the police.

But Avdeitch still interceded for him.

- Let him go, my good woman, - he said. - He will never do it again. Let him go for Christ's sake.

The old woman released the boy, who was for making off at once had not Avdeitch stopped him.

- You must beg the old woman's pardon, - he said, - and never do such a thing again. I saw you take the apple.

The boy burst out crying, and begged the old woman's pardon as Avdeitch commanded.

- There, there, - said Avdeitch. - Now I will give you one. Here you are,

And Avdeitch took an apple from the basket and handed it to the boy.

- I will pay you for it, my good woman, - he added.

- Yes, but you spoil the young rascal by doing that, - she objected. - He ought to have received a reward that would have made him glad to stand for a week.

- All, my good dame, my good dame, - exclaimed Avdeitch. - That may be our way of rewarding, but it is not God's. If this boy ought to have been whipped for taking the apple, ought not we also to receive something for our sins?

The old woman was silent.

Then Avdeitch related to her the parable of the master who absolved his servant from the great debt which he owed him, whereupon the servant departed and took his own debtor by the throat. The old woman listened, and also the boy.

- God has commanded us to pardon one another, - went on Avdeitch, - or He will not pardon us. We ought to pardon all men, and especially the thoughtless.

The old woman shook her head and sighed.

- Yes, that may be so, - she said, - but these young rascals are so spoilt already!

- Then it is for us, their elders, to teach them better, - he replied.

- That is what I'm saying, - rejoined the old woman. - I had seven of children myself, but have only one daughter left now.

And she went on to tell Avdeitch where she and her daughter lived, and how they lived, and how many grandchildren she had.

- I have only such strength as you see, - she said, - yet I work hard, for my

heart goes out to my grandchildren— the bonny little things that they are! No children could run to meet me as they do. Aksintka, for instance, will go to no one else. "Grandmother," - she cries, - "dear grandmother, sweetheart" - and the old woman became thoroughly softened. - Everyone knows what boys are, - she added presently, referring to the culprit. – May God go with him!

She was raising the sack to her shoulders again when the boy jumped forward and said:

- Nay, let me carry it, grandmother. It will be all on my way home.

The old woman nodded assent, gave up the sack to the boy, and went away with him down the street. She had quite forgotten to ask Avdeitch for the money for the apple. He stood looking after them, and observing how they were talking together as they went.

Having seen them go, he returned to his room, finding his spectacles— unbroken—on the steps as he descended them. Once more he took up his awl and fell to work, but had done little before he found it difficult to distinguish the stitches, and the lamp-lighter had passed on his rounds. "I too must light up," - he thought to himself. So he trimmed the lamp, hung it up, and resumed his work. He finished one boot completely, and then turned it over to look at it. It was all good work. Then he laid aside his tools, swept up the cuttings, rounded off the stitches and loose ends, and cleaned his awl. Next he lifted the lamp down, placed it on the table, and took his Testament from the shelf. He had intended opening the book at the place which he had marked last night with a strip of leather, but it opened itself at another instead. The instant it did so, his vision of last night came back to his memory, and, as instantly, he thought he heard a movement behind him as of someone moving towards him. He looked round and saw in the shadow of a dark corner what appeared to be figures - figures of persons standing there, yet could not distinguish them clearly. Then the voice whispered in his ear:

- Martin, Martin, do you not recognize me?

- Recognize who? - said Avdeitch.

- Me, - whispered the voice again. – this is I, - and Stepanitch stepped from the dark comer, smiled and then, like the fading of a little cloud, he was gone.

- It is I, - whispered the voice again—and there stepped from the same corner the woman with her baby. She smiled, and the baby smiled, and they were gone.

- And it is I, - whispered the voice again - and there stepped forth the old woman and the boy with the apple. They smiled, and were gone.

Joy filled the soul of Martin Avdeitch, he crossed himself, put on his spectacles, and set himself to read the Testament at the place where it had opened. At the top of the page he read:

- For I was a hungry, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in...

And further down the page he read:

- In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these brethren, you have done it unto me. (Matthew 25)

Then Avdeitch understood that the vision didn't deceive him, it did come true, and that his Saviour had, in very truth, visited him that day, and that he had received Him.