

WHERE LOVE IS, THERE GOD IS ALSO

by Leo Tolstoy

Translated from the Original Russian and edited by Leo Wiener
Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University

1885

Shoemaker Martin Avdydich lived in the city. He lived in a basement, in a room with one window. The window looked out on the street. Through it the people could be seen as they passed by: though only the feet were visible, Martyn Avdyfich could tell the men by their boots. He had lived for a long time in one place and had many acquaintances. It was a rare pair of boots in the neighbourhood that had not gone once or twice through his hands. Some he had resoled; on others he had put patches, or fixed the seams, or even put on new uppers. Frequently he saw his own work through the window. He had much to do, for he did honest work, put in strong material, took no more than was fair, and kept his word. If he could get a piece of work done by a certain time he undertook to do it, and if not, he would not cheat, but said so in advance. Everybody knew Avdydich, and his work never stopped.

Avdydich had always been a good man, but in his old age he thought more of his soul and came near unto God. Even while Martyn had been living with a master, his wife had died, and he had been left with a boy three years of age. Their children did not live long. All the elder children had died before. At first Martin had intended sending his son to his sister in a village, but

then he felt sorry for the little lad, and thought: " It will be hard for my Kapitoshka to grow up in somebody else's family, and so I will keep him."

Avdydich left his master, and took up quarters with his son. But God did not grant Avdydich any luck with his children. No sooner had the boy grown up so as to be a help to his father and a joy to him, than a disease fell upon him and he lay down and had a fever for a week and died. Martin buried his son, and was in despair. He despaired so much that he began to murmur against God. He was so downhearted that more than once he asked God to let him die, and rebuked God for having taken his beloved only son, and not him. He even stopped going to church.

One day an old man, a countryman of Avdy^{ich}'s, returning from Trditsa, – he had been a pilgrim for eight years, – came to see him. Avdydich talked with him and began to complain of his sorrow:

" I have even no desire to live any longer, godly man. If I could only die. That is all I am praying God for. I am a man without any hope."

And the old man said to him:

“You do not say well, Martin. We cannot judge God’s works. Not by our reason, but by God’s judgment do we live. God has determined that your son should die, and you live. Evidently it is better so. The reason you are in despair is that you want to live for your own enjoyment.”

“What else shall we live for?” asked Martin.

And the old man said:

“We must live for God, Martin. He gives us life, and for Him must we live. When you shall live for Him and shall not worry about anything, life will be lighter for you.”

Martin was silent, and he said:

“How shall we live for God?”

And the old man said:

“Christ has shown us how to live for God. Do you know how to read? If so, buy yourself a Gospel and read it, and you will learn from it how to live for God. It tells all about it.”

These words fell deep into AvdyRich’s heart. And he went that very day and bought himself a New Testaments in large letters, and began to read.

Avdy6ich had meant to read it on holidays only, but when he began to read it, his heart was so rejoiced that he read it every day. Many a time he buried himself so much in reading that all the kerosene would be spent in the lamp, but he could not tear himself away from the book. And Avdy^ich read in it every evening, and the more he read, the clearer it became to him what God wanted of him, and how he should live for God; and his heart grew lighter and lighter. Formerly, when he lay down to sleep, he used to groan and sob and think of his Kapitdshka, but now he only muttered:

“Glory be to Thee, glory to Thee, O Lord! Thy will be done!”

Since then Avdy^ich’s life had been changed. Formerly, he used on a holiday to frequent the tavern, to drink tea, and would not decline a drink of vddka. He would drink a glass with an acquaintance and, though he would not be drunk, he would come out of the tavern in a happier mood, and then he would speak foolish tilings, and would scold, or slander a man. Now all that passed away from him. His life came to be calm and happy. In the morning he sat down to work, and when he got through, he took the lamp from the hook, put it down on the table, fetched the book from the shelf, opened it, and began to read it. And the more he read, the better he understood it, and his mind was clearer and his heart lighter.

One evening Martin read late into the night. He had before him the Gospel of St. Luke. He read the sixth chapter and the verses: " And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke 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."

And he read also the other verses, where the Lord says': " And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew 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 stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."

When Avdydich read these words, there was joy in his heart. He took off his glasses, put them on the book, leaned his arms on the table, and fell to musing. And he began to apply these words to his life, and he thought:

" Is my house on a rock, or on the sand ? It is well if it is founded on a rock: it is so easy to sit alone, – it seems to me that I am doing everything which God has commanded; but if I dissipate, I shall sin again. I will just proceed as at present. It is so nice! Help me, God! "

This he thought, and he wanted to go to sleep, but he was loath to tear himself away from the book. And he began to read the seventh chapter. He read about the centurion, about the widow's son, about the answer to John's disciples, and he reached the passage where the rich Pharisee invited the Lord to be his guest, and where the sinning woman anointed His feet and washed them with her tears, and he justified her. And he reached the 44th verse, and read: " And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."

When he had read these verses, he thought:

" He gave no water for His feet; he gave no kiss; he did not anoint His head with oil."

And again Avdydich took off his glasses and placed them on the book, and fell to musing.

" Evidently he was just such a Pharisee as I am. He, no doubt, thought only of himself: how to drink tea, and be warm, and in comfort, but he did not think of the guest. About himself he thought, but no care did he have for the guest. And who was the guest ? – The Lord Himself. Would I have done so, if He had come to me?"

And Avdydich leaned his head on both his arms and did not notice how he fell asleep.

" Martyn! " suddenly something seemed to breathe over his very ear.

Martyn shuddered in his sleep : " Who is that ? "

He turned around and looked at the door, but there was nobody there. He bent down again, to go to sleep. Suddenly he heard distinctly :

" Martyn, oh, Martyn, remember, to-morrow I will come to the street."

Martin awoke, rose from his chair, and began to rub his eyes. He did not know himself whether he had heard these words in his dream or in waking. He put out the light and went to sleep.

Avdydich got up in the morning before daybreak, said his prayers, made a fire, put the beet soup and porridge on the stove, started the samovar, tied on his apron, and sat down at the window to work. And, as he sat there at work, he kept thinking of what had happened the night before. His thoughts were divided : now he thought that it had only seemed so to him, and now again he thought he had actually heard the voice.

« Well," he thought, " such things happen."

Martyn was sitting at the window and not so much working as looking out into the street, and if somebody passed in unfamiliar boots, he bent over to look out of the window, in order to see not merely the boots, but also the face. A janitor passed by in new felt boots ; then a water-carrier went past; then an old soldier of the days of Nicholas, in patched old felt boots, holding a shovel in his hands, came in a line with the window. Avdydich recognized him by his felt boots. The old man's name was Stepduych, and he was living with a neighbouring merchant for charity's sake. It was his duty to help the janitor. Stepdnych began to clear away the snow opposite Avdydich's window. Avdydich cast a glance at him and went back to his work.

Evidently I am losing my senses in my old age," Avdydich laughed to himself. " Stepanych is clearing away the snow, and I thought that Christ was coming to see me. I, old fool, am losing my senses." But before he had made a dozen stitches, something drew him again toward the window. He looked out, and there he saw Stepanych leaning his shovel against the wall and either warming or resting himself.

He was an old, broken-down man, and evidently shovelling snow was above his strength. Avdydich thought: " I ought to give him some tea; fortunately the samovdr is just boiling." He stuck the awl into the wood, got up, placed the samovar on the table, put some tea in the teapot, and tapped with his finger at the window. Stepdnych turned around and walked over to the window. Avdydich beckoned to him and went to open the door.

" Come in and get warmed up ! " he said. " I suppose you are feeling cold."

" Christ save you ! I have a breaking in my bones," said Stepdnych.

He came in, shook off the snow and wiped his boots so as not to track the floor, but he was tottering all the time.

" Don't take the trouble to rub your boots. I will clean up, – that is my business. Come and sit down ! " said Avdydich. " Here, drink a glass of tea! "

Avdydich filled two glasses and moved one of them up to his guest, and himself poured his glass into the saucer and began to blow at it.

Stepanych drank his glass; then he turned it upside down, put the lump of sugar on top of it, and began to express his thanks; but it was evident that he wanted another glass.

"^Have some more," said Avdydich ; and he poured out a glass for his guest and one for himself. Avdydich drank his tea, but something kept drawing his attention to the window.

" Are you waiting for anybody ? " asked the guest.

" Am I waiting for anybody ? It is really a shame to say for whom I am waiting: no, I am not exactly waiting, but a certain word has fallen deep into my heart: I do not know myself whether it is a vision, or what. You see, my friend, I read the Gospel yesterday about Father Christ and how He suffered and walked the earth. I suppose you have heard of it ?"

" Yes, I have," replied Stepanych, " but we are ignorant people, – we do not know how to read."

" Well, so I read about how He walked the earth. I read, you know, about how He came to the Pharisee, and the Pharisee did not give Him a good reception. Well, my friend, as I was reading last night about that very thing, I wondered how he could have failed to honour Father Christ. If He should have happened to come to me, for example, I should have done everything to receive Him. But he did not receive Him well. As I was thinking of it, I fell asleep. And as I dozed off. I heard some one calling me by name: I got up and it was as though somebody were whispering to me: ' Wait/ he said: ' I will come to-morrow.' This he repeated twice. Would you believe it,

– it has been running through my head, – I blame myself for it, – and I am, as it were, waiting for Father Christ.”

Stepdnych shook his head and said nothing. He finished his glass and put it sidewise, but Avdydich took it again and filled it with tea.

« Drink, and may it do you good ! I suppose when He, the Father, walked the earth, He did not neglect anybody, and kept the company mostly of simple folk. He visited mostly simple folk, and chose His disciples mostly from people of our class, labouring men, like ourselves the sinners. He who raises himself up, He said, shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be raised. You call me Lord, He said, but I will wash your feet. He who wants to be the first, He said, let him be everybody’s servant; because, He said, blessed are the poor, the meek the humble, and the merciful.”

Stepanych forgot his tea. He was an old man and easily moved to tears. He sat there and listened, and tears flowed down his cheeks.

“ Take another glass ’ ” said Avdydich.

But Stepanych made the sign of the cross, thanked him for the tea, pushed the glass away from him, and got up.

“ Thank you, Martyn Avdydich,” he said. “ You were hospitable to me, and have given food to my body and my soul.”

“ You are welcome. Come in again, – I shall be glad to see you,” said Avdydich.

Stepanych went away. Martin poured out the last tea, finished another glass, put away the dishes, and again sat down at the window to work, – to tap a boot. And as he worked, he kept looking out of the window, – waiting for Christ and thinking of Him and His works. And all kinds of Christ’s speeches ran through his head.

There passed by two soldiers, one in Crown boots, the other in boots of his own; then the proprietor of a neighbouring house came by in clean galoshes, and then a baker with a basket. All of these went past the window, and then a woman in woollen stockings and peasant shoes came in line with the window. She went by the window and stopped near a wall. Avdydich looked at her through the window, and saw that she was a strange, poorly dressed woman, with a child: she had stopped with her back to the wind and was trying to wrap the child, though she did not have anything to wrap it in. The woman’s clothes were for the summer, and scanty at that. Avdydich could hear the child cry in the street, and her vain attempt to quiet it. Avdydich got up and went out of his room and up to the staircase, and called out:

“ Clever woman ! Clever woman ! ”

The woman heard him and turned around.

" Why are you standing there in the cold with the child ? Come in here ! It will be easier for you to wrap the child in a warm room. Here, this way !"

The woman was surprised. She saw an old man in an apron, with glasses over his nose, calling to her. She followed him in.

They went down the stairs and entered the room, and Martin took the woman up to the bed.

" Sit down here, clever woman, nearer to the stove, and get warm and feed the child."

" There is no milk in my breasts, – I have not had anything to eat since morning," said the woman, but still she took the child to her breast.

AvdyAch shook his head, went to the table, fetched some bread and a bowl, opened a door in the stove, tilled the bowl with beet soup, and took out the pot of porridge, but it was not done yet. He put the soup on the table, put down the bread, and took off a rag from a hook and put it down on the table.

" Sit down, clever woman, and eat, and I will sit with the babe, – I used to have children of my own, and so I know how to take care of them."

The woman made the sign of the cross, sat down at the table, and began to eat, while AvdyAch seated himself on the bed with the child. He smacked his Ups at it, but could not smack well, for he had no teeth. The babe kept crying all the time. Avdydich tried to frighten it with his finger: he quickly carried his finger down toward the babe's mouth and pulled it away again. He did not put his finger into the child's mouth, because it was black, – all smeared with pitch. But the child took a fancy for his finger and grew quiet, and then began even to smile. Avdydich, too, was happy. The woman was eating in the meantime and telling him who she was and whither she was going.

" I am a soldier's wife," she said. " My husband was driven somewhere far away eight months ago, and I do not know where he is. I had been working as a cook when the baby was born; they would not keep me with the child. This is the third month that I have been without a place. I have spent all I had saved. I wanted to hire out as a wet-nurse, but they will not take me: they say that I am too thin. I went to a merchant woman, where our granny lives, and she promised she would take me. I thought she wanted me to come at once, but she told me she wanted me next week. She lives a distance away. I am all worn out and have worn out the dear child, too. Luckily our landlady pities us for the sake of Christ, or else I do not know how we should have lived until now."

Avdydich heaved a sigh, and said:

" And have you no warm clothes ? "

" Indeed, it is time now to have warm clothing, dear man! But yesterday I pawned my last kerchief for twenty kopeks."

The woman went up to the bed and took her child, but Avdy[^]ich got up, went to the wall, rummaged there awhile, and brought her an old sleeveless cloak.

"Take this!" he said. " It is an old piece, but you may use it to wrap yourself in."

The woman looked at the cloak and at the old man, and took the cloak, and burst out weeping. Avdy[^]ich turned his face away ; he crawled under the bed, pulled out a box, rummaged through it, and again sat down opposite the woman.

And the woman said:

" May Christ save you, grandfather! Evidently He sent me to your window. My child would have frozen to death. When I went out it was warm, but now it has turned dreadfully cold. It was He, our Father, who taught you to look through the window and have pity on me, sorrowful woman."

Avdy^fich smiled, and said:

" It is He who has instructed me: clever woman, there was good reason why I looked through the window."

Martin told the soldier woman about his dream, and how he had heard a voice promising him that the Lord would come to see him on that day.

" Everything is possible," said the woman. She got up, threw the cloak over her, wrapped the child in it, and began to bow to Avdy^dich and to thank him.

"Accept this, for the sake of Christ," said Avdy^dich, giving her twenty kopeks, with which to redeem her kerchief.

The woman made the sign of the cross, and so did Avdy^dich, and he saw the woman out.

She went away. Avdy^dich ate some soup, put the things away, and sat down once more to work. He was working, but at the same time thinking of the window: whenever it grew dark there, he looked up to see who was passing. There went by acquaintances and strangers, and there was nothing peculiar.

Suddenly Avdy^dich saw an old woman, a huckstress, stop opposite the very window. She was carrying a basket with apples. There were but few of them left, – evidently she had sold all, and over her shoulder she carried a bag with chips. No, doubt, she had picked

them up at some new building, and was on her way home. The bag was evidently pulling hard on her shoulder; she wanted to shift it to her other shoulder, so she let the bag down on the flagstones, set the apple-basket on a post, and began to shake down the chips. While she was doing that, a boy in a torn cap leaped out from somewhere, grasped an apple from the basket, and wanted to skip out, but the old woman saw him in time and turned around and grabbed the boy by the sleeve. The boy yanked and tried to get away, but the old woman held on to him with both her hands, knocked down his cap, and took hold of his hair. The boy cried, and the old woman scolded. Avdydich did not have time to put away the awl. He threw it on the floor, jumped out of the room, stumbled on the staircase, and dropped his glasses. He ran out into the street. The old woman was pulling the boy's hair and scolding him. She wanted to take him to a policeman; the little fellow struggled and tried to deny what he had done:

" I did not take any, so why do you beat me ? Let me go • "

Avdydich tried to separate them. He took the boy's arm, and said:

" Let him go, granny, forgive him for Christ's sake!"

" I will forgive him in such a way that he will not forget until the new bath brooms are ripe. I will take the rascal to the police station !"

Avdydich began to beg the old woman:

" Let him go, granny, he will not do it again. Let him go, for Christ's sake !"

The woman let go of him. The boy wanted to run, but Avdydich held on to him.

" Beg the grandmother's forgiveness," he said. " Don't do that again, - I saw you take the apple."

The boy began to cry, and he asked her forgiveness.

" That's right. And now, take this apple!" Avdydich took an apple from the basket and gave it to the boy. " I will pay for it, granny," he said to the old woman.

" You are spoiling these ragamuffins," said the old woman. " He ought to be rewarded in such a way that he should remember it for a week."

"Oh, granny, granny!" said Avdydich. "That is according to our ways, but how is that according to God's ways ? If he is to be whipped for an apple, what ought to be done with us for our sins ? "

The old woman grew silent.

And Avdydich told the old woman the parable of the lord who forgave

his servant his whole large debt, after which the servant went and took his fellow servant who was his debtor by the throat. The old woman listened to him, and the boy stood and listened, too.

" God has commanded that we should forgive," said Avdydich, " or else we, too, shall not be forgiven. All are to be forgiven, but most of all an unthinking person."

The old woman shook her head and sighed.

" That is so," said the old woman, " but they are very much spoiled nowadays."

" Then we old people ought to teach them," said Avdydich.

" That is what I say," said the old woman. " I myself had seven of them, – but only one daughter is left now." And the old woman began to tell where and how she was living with her daughter, and how many grandchildren she had. " My strength is waning," she said, " but still I work. I am sorry for my grandchildren, and they are such nice children, – nobody else meets me the way they do. Aksyutka will not go to anybody from me. 'Granny, granny dear, darling!' " And the old woman melted with tenderness.

" Of course, he is but a child, – God be with him!" the old woman said about the boy.

She wanted to lift the bag on her shoulders, when the boy jumped up to her, and said:

" Let me carry it, granny ! I am going that way."

The old woman shook her head and threw the bag on the boy's shoulders. They walked together down the street. The old woman had forgotten to ask Avdydich to pay her for the apple. Avdydich stood awhile, looking at them and hearing them talk as they walked along.

When they disappeared from sight, he returned to his room. He found his glasses on the staircase, – they were not broken, – and he picked up his awl and again sat down to work. He worked for awhile; he could not find the holes with the bristle, when he looked up and saw the lampman lighting the lamps.

" It is evidently time to strike a light," he thought, and he got up and fixed the lamp and hung it on the hook, and sat down again to work. He finished a boot: he turned it around and looked at it, and he saw that it was well done. He put down his tool, swept up the clippings, put away the bristles and the remnants and the awls, took the lamp and put it on the table, and fetched the Gospel from the shelf. He wanted to open the book where he had marked it the day before with a morocco clipping, but he opened it in another place. And just as he went to open the Gospel, he thought of his dream of the night before. And just as he thought of it, it appeared to him as though something were moving and stepping behind him. He looked

around, and, indeed, it looked as though people were standing in the dark corner, but he could not make out who they were. And a voice whispered to him:

" Martin, oh, Martin, have you not recognized me ? "

" Whom ? " asked Avdydich.

" Me," said the voice. " It is I."

And out of the dark corner came Stepanych, and he smiled and vanished like a cloud and was no more.

" And it is I," said a voice.

And out of the dark corner came the woman with the babe, and the woman smiled and the child laughed, and they, too, disappeared.

" And it is I," said a voice.

And out came the old woman and the boy with the apple, and both smiled and vanished.

And joy fell on Avdydich's heart, and he made the sign of the cross, put on his glasses, and began to read the Gospel, there where he had opened it. And at the top of the page he read :

" I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

And at the bottom of the page he read:

" Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt, xxv.)

And Avdydich understood that his dream had not deceived him, that the Saviour had really come to him on that day, and that he had received Him.