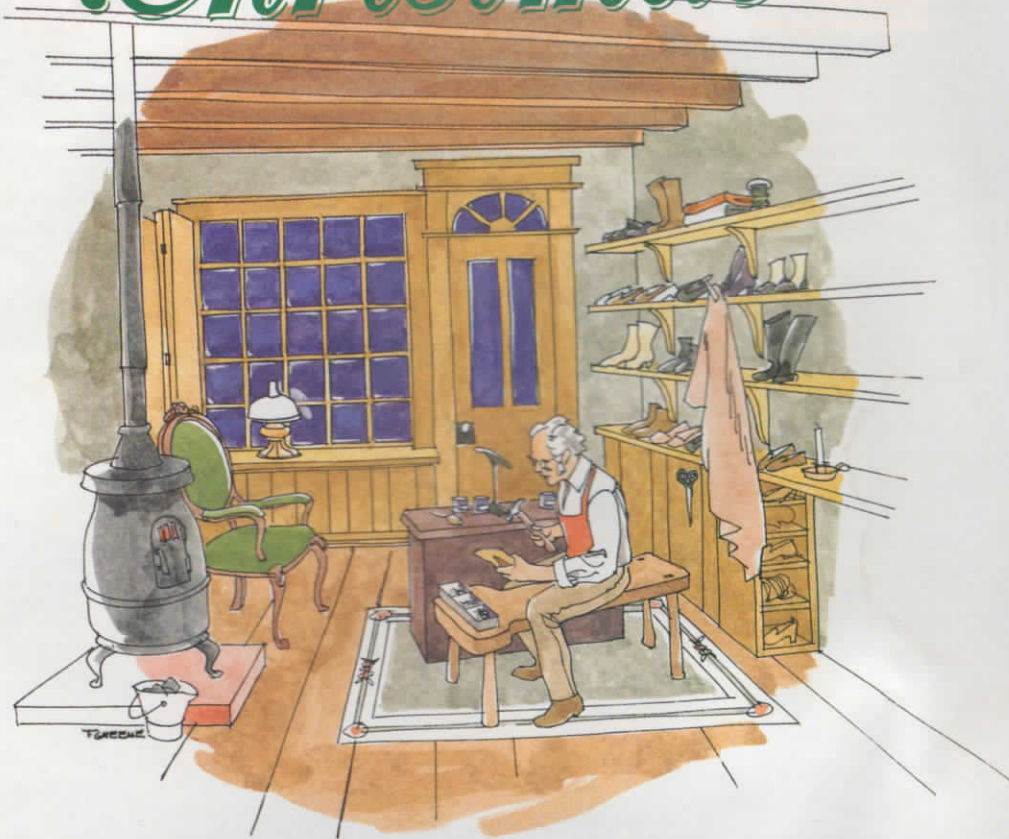


The Shoemaker's Christmas



Corrie ten Boom retells a much-loved story of a cobbler's memorable Christmas.

Don't you know Father Martin? Though he is only a poor shoemaker, he does not live in an attic. His workshop, his living room, his bedroom, and his kitchen—they are all in one in a small, wooden building at the corner of a square and a street in the center of the old part of Marseilles in France.

There he lives a philosophical life. He is neither too rich nor too poor, as he repairs the shoes of all the people in the neighborhood. But since his eyes have been growing older, the good man has not made any new shoes.

Although you do not know him, the fishermen of Quartier St. Jean and the women of the market on the square do know him—and also the urchins of the municipal school who pass his door like a swarm of bees when the church clock strikes four.

He has put patches on all their shoes; he knows where the shoes hurt them. The housewives trust only him for repairing their sons' shoes in a solid way, because the boys ruin the best shoes within a fortnight.

For some time now Father Martin has had the reputation of being pious. Not that he is afraid of laughing, but since he has been going to the "meetings," (where hymns are sung and people speak about God), he has changed. He doesn't work less or worse. On the contrary. He is no longer seen at the cafe as in former days. He has a large Book, which one often sees him reading when one looks through the small window. He seems far happier than before.

Father Martin has had a great deal of sorrow. His wife died more than 20 years ago; his son, a sailor, has not come home for 10 years. As for his

daughter—he never speaks of her. If anybody asks him what has become of her, a shadow passes over his face. Instead of answering, he just bows his head.

But then—even in the days when he went to the cafe after his daily work for a game of cards with his comrades—the old shoemaker was rarely really happy. At present, as we have said, he seems to be happier; his large Book is apparently the cause of this.

It was Christmas Eve. Outside it was cold and wet, but in Father Martin's dwelling it was light and warm. He had finished his work and had eaten his soup. His small stove was roaring and he sat in a wicker chair, his eyeglasses on his nose, reading: "Because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

Here the reader stopped to ponder. "No room," he said, "no room for Him!"