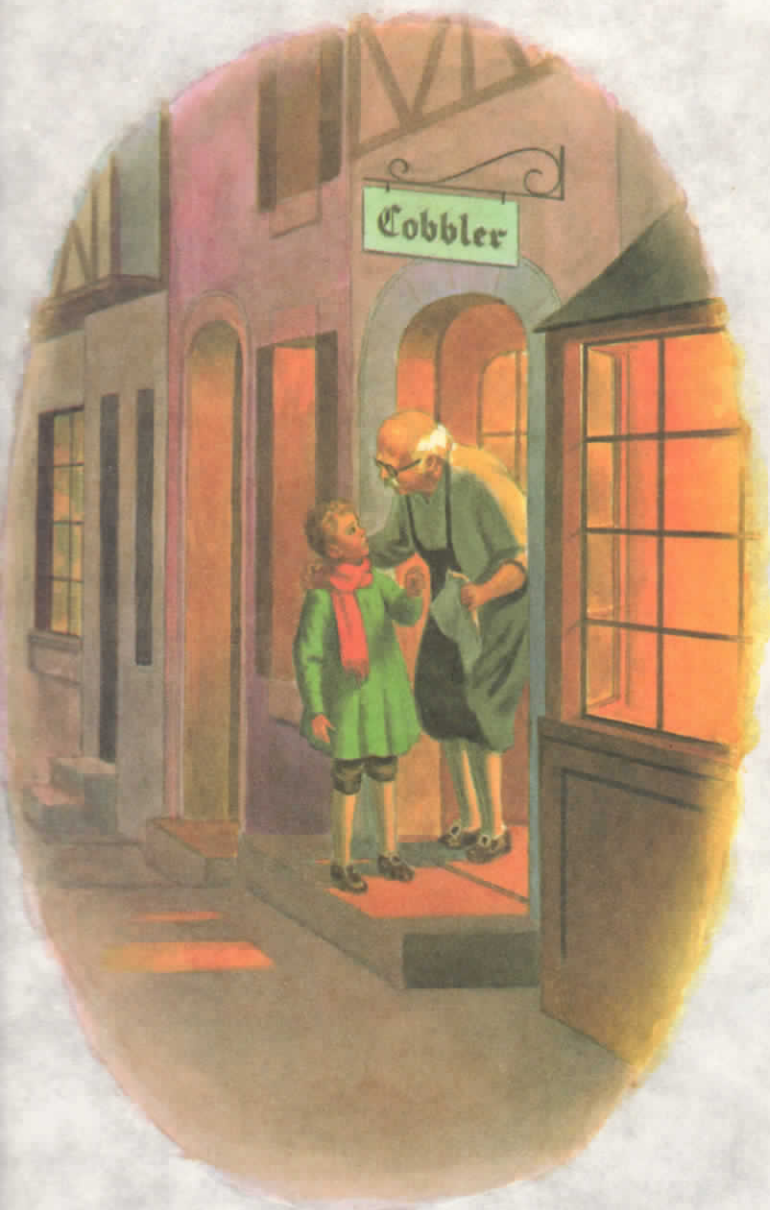


The Shoemaker's Dream

by NORMAN VINCENT PEALE



One of the most beautiful of all Christmas stories was told by the American poet, Edwin Markham, about a cobbler, a godly man who made shoes in the old days.* One night the cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to visit him. The dream seemed so real that he got up very early the next morning and hurried to the woods, where he gathered green boughs to decorate his shop for the arrival of so great a Guest.

He waited all morning, but to his disappointment, his shop remained quiet, except for an old man who limped up to the door asking to come in for a few minutes of warmth. While the man was resting, the cobbler noticed that the old fellow's shoes were worn through. Touched, the cobbler took a new pair from his shelves and saw to it that the stranger was wearing them as he went on his way.

Throughout the afternoon the cobbler waited, but his only visitor was an elderly woman. He'd seen her struggling under a heavy load of firewood, and he invited her, too, into his shop to rest. When he discovered that for two days she had had nothing to eat, he saw to it that she had a nourishing meal before she went on her way.

As night began to fall, the cobbler heard a child crying outside his door. The child was lost and afraid. The cobbler went out, soothed the youngster's tears and, with the little hand in his, took the child home.

When he returned, the cobbler was sad. He was convinced that while he'd been away he had missed the visit of his Lord. Now he lived through the moments as he had imagined them: the knock, the latch lifted, the radiant face, the offered cup. He would have kissed the hands where the nails had been, washed the feet where the spikes had entered. Then the Lord would have sat and talked to him.

In his anguish, the cobbler cried out, "Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay? Have you forgotten that this was the day?"

Then, soft in the silence a voice he heard:

"Lift up your heart for I kept my word.

Three times I came to your friendly door;

Three times My shadow was on your floor.

I was the man with the bruised feet;

I was the woman you gave to eat;

I was the child on the homeless street."

*With credit to an original story by Leo Tolstoy