

Repentance

An old story is told of a certain hermit who had lived for many years with a great reputation for sanctity and who began at length to entertain dangerous thoughts of self-complacency. Filled with these temptations, he was setting out one morning to visit a neighboring church when he beheld, seated on the banks of the river which flowed past his little cell, a poor man who appeared to be weeping bitterly.

On approaching him, the hermit perceived that the afflicted man was a notorious robber, the terror of the surrounding country. The hermit was about to retrace his steps when the man advanced to meet him, threw himself at his feet, confessed his crimes, and begged to know if he might ever hope for pardon.

The hermit, astonished and shocked at hearing the recital of so many enormous sins and comparing them with his own innocent and blameless life, began to swell with pride and in tones of indignation exclaimed, "Do you hope for pardon, you wicked sinner? Sooner shall roses bloom upon this dry staff than a just God will grant forgiveness to such sins as yours!"

So saying, he turned away, leaving the poor sinner on the brink of despair. The hermit had not proceeded far when the staff which he carried in his hand became rooted in the ground. He endeavored to pull it out, but it resisted all his efforts and became every moment more firmly seated in the soil. Then he beheld bud, and leaf, and flower sprouting forth until at last the dry stick was laden with beautiful roses; and at the same time he heard a voice whispering, "Sooner shall roses bloom on the barren staff than a good God will refuse mercy to the repenting sinner or grant it to the proud one."

At that, the hermit ran back to the sinner and made peace with him.