

Caesar of Heisterbach

Part 1

1180 ca-1240 ca

PURGATORY

Caesar of Heisterbach was prior of the Cistercian Abbey of Heisterbach, today Siebengebirge near Oberdollendorf in Germany. He entered the Abbey in 1199 and died there around 1240. He wrote primarily works of hagiography, among those the most important is *Dialogus magnus visionum et miraculorum* (*Great dialogue of visions and miracles*), a collection of stories in the form of a dialogue between a monk and a novice.

“A distinguished young man became a monk in a Cistercian Order. He had an uncle Bishop who loved him immensely. When the Bishop found out that his nephew had become a monk, he went to the monastery and tried to convince him to return to the world, however in vain. Following the year of probation, he took the religious vows of the Order. Soon, he progressed, step by step, becoming a priest. Nevertheless advised by the devil, through whose fault the first humans were driven out from the earthly Paradise, he forgot his vows, his priestly ministry, and worse yet he forgot God his Creator and left the Order. But since he was ashamed to return to his family, Caesar joined a group of bandits. And then reached a state of degradation to surpass that of all his companions. Then it occurred that during a siege of a fortress he was mortally wounded by a shooting from the fortress. His companions brought him to a nearby village and allowed that some people took care of him. But since there wasn't any more hope for recovery, he was exhorted to

confess in order to escape at least in that way, eternal death. But he answered: ‘For what could a confession help me since I have done so much evil and so many crimes?’ It was answered him ‘The mercy of God is greater than your crimes.’ At last he obeyed their requests and said: ‘Send me a priest.’ The priest arrived and went close to the wounded man. Then God Who can transform a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, enkindled in his heart such a remorse and repentance, that the wounded man not only confessed once, but he wanted to repeat his confession crying in such a way, that he could not talk anymore due to hiccups. Finally he succeeded to recover himself and said: ‘Lord my sins are more numerous than the sand of the sea. I was a Cistercian monk, and I was ordained a priest. I left the order dragged by my passions. And it wasn't enough for me to be a renegade. I joined a group of bandits that I surpassed all in cruelty, whereas they just stole some things, I killed and spared no one. Whereas they had human feelings and spared someone at times, I, in the hardness of my heart, spared no one. I attacked women and youth and destroyed many things with fire.’ The poor dying man recounted many more things about his life as a bandit, which almost exceed human capability. The priest frightened from hearing such crimes and beside himself, gave this senseless answer: ‘Your sins are too excessive, for you to still receive forgiveness!’ ”

