Nor are princes by themselves in their manner of life, since popes, cardinals, and bishops have so diligently followed their steps that they've almost got the start of them. For if any of them would consider what their Albe (vestments) should put them in mind of, to wit a blameless life; what is meant by their forked miters, whose each point is held in by the same knot, we'll suppose it a perfect knowledge of the Old and New Testaments; what those gloves on their hands, but a sincere administration of the Sacraments, and free from all touch of worldly business; what their crosier, but a careful looking after the flock committed to their charge; what the cross born before them, but victory over all earthly affections—these, I say, and many of the like kind should anyone truly consider, would he not live a sad and troublesome life? Whereas now they do well enough while they feed themselves only, and for the care of their flock either put it over to Christ or lay it all on their suffragans (bishop who assists a diocesan bishop), as they call them, or some poor vicars. Nor do they so much as remember their name, or what the word bishop signifies, to wit, labor, care, and trouble. But in racking to gather money they truly act the part of bishops, and herein acquit themselves to be no blind seers.

In like manner cardinals, if they thought themselves the successors of the apostles, they would likewise imagine that the same things the other did are required of them, and that they are not lords but dispensers of spiritual things of which they must shortly give an exact account. But if they also would a little philosophize on their habit and think with themselves what's the meaning of their linen rochet, is it not a remarkable and singular integrity of life? What that inner purple; is it not an earnest and fervent love of God? Or what that outward, whose loose plaits and long train fall round his Reverence's mule and are large enough to cover a camel; is it not charity that spreads itself so wide to the succor of all men? that is, to instruct, exhort, comfort, reprehend, admonish, compose wars, resist wicked princes, and willingly expend not only their wealth but their very lives for the flock of Christ: though yet what need at all of wealth to them that supply the room of the poor apostles? These things, I say, did they but duly consider, they would not be so ambitious of that dignity; or, if they were, they would willingly leave it and live a laborious, careful life, such as was that of the ancient apostles.

And for popes, that supply the place of Christ, if they should endeavor to imitate His life, to wit His poverty, labor, doctrine, cross, and contempt of life, or should they consider what the name pope, that is father, or holiness, imports, who would live more disconsolate than themselves? or who would purchase that chair with all his substance? or defend it, so purchased, with swords, poisons, and all force imaginable? so great a profit would the access of wisdom deprive him of—wisdom did I say? nay, the least corn of that salt which Christ speaks of: so much wealth, so much honor, so many victories, so many offices, so many dispensations, so much tribute, so many pardons; such horses, such mules, such guards, and so much pleasure would it lose them. You see how much I have comprehended in a little: instead of which it would bring in watchings, fastings, tears, prayers, sermons, good endeavors, sighs, and a thousand the like troublesome exercises. Nor is this least considerable: so many scribes, so many copying clerks, so many notaries, so many advocates, so many promoters, so many secretaries, so many muleteers, so many grooms, so many bankers: in short, that vast multitude of men that overcharge the Roman See—I mistook, I meant honor—might beg their bread.

A most inhuman and economical thing, and more to be execrated, that those great princes of the Church and true lights of the world should be reduced to a staff and a wallet. Whereas now, if there be anything that requires their pains, they leave that to Peter and Paul that have leisure enough; but if there be anything of honor or pleasure, they take that to themselves. By which means it is, yet by my courtesy, that scarce any kind of men live more voluptuously or with less trouble; as believing that Christ will be well
enough pleased if in their mystical and almost mimical pontificality, ceremonies, titles of holiness and the like, and blessing and cursing, they play the parts of bishops. To work miracles is old and antiquated, and not in fashion now; to instruct the people, troublesome; to interpret the Scripture, pedantic; to pray, a sign one has little else to do; to shed tears, silly and womanish; to be poor, base; to be vanquished, dishonorable and little becoming him that scarce admits even kings to kiss his slipper; and lastly, to die, uncouth; and to be stretched on a cross, infamous.

Theirs are only those weapons and sweet blessings which Paul mentions, and of these truly they are bountiful enough: as interdictions, hangings, heavy burdens, reproofs, anathemas, executions in effigy, and that terrible thunderbolt of excommunication, with the very sight of which they sink men's souls beneath the bottom of hell: which yet these most holy fathers in Christ and His vicars hurl with more fierceness against none than against such as, by the instigation of the devil, attempt to lessen or rob them of Peter's patrimony. When, though those words in the Gospel, "We have left all, and followed Thee," were his, yet they call his patrimony lands, cities, tribute, imposts, riches; for which, being enflamed with the love of Christ, they contend with fire and sword, and not without loss of much Christian blood, and believe they have then most apostolically defended the Church, the spouse of Christ, when the enemy, as they call them, are valiantly routed. As if the Church had any deadlier enemies than wicked prelates, who not only suffer Christ to run out of request for want of preaching him, but hinder his spreading by their multitudes of laws merely contrived for their own profit, corrupt him by their forced expositions, and murder him by the evil example of their pestilent life.

Nay, further, whereas the Church of Christ was founded in blood, confirmed by blood, and augmented by blood, now, as if Christ, who after his wonted manner defends his people, were lost, they govern all by the sword. And whereas war is so savage a thing that it rather befits beasts than men, so outrageous that the very poets feigned it came from the Furies, so pestilent that it corrupts all men's manners, so unjust that it is best executed by the worst of men, and yet, omitting all the other, they make this their only business. Here you'll see decrepit old fellows acting the parts of young men, neither troubled at their costs, nor wearied with their labors, nor discouraged at anything, so they may have the liberty of turning laws, religion, peace, and all things else quite topsy-turvy. Nor are they destitute of their learned flatterers that call that palpable madness zeal, piety, and valor, having found out a new way by which a man may kill his brother without the least breach of that charity which, by the command of Christ, one Christian owes another. And here, in troth, I'm a little at a stand whether the ecclesiastical German electors gave them this example, or rather took it from them; who, laying aside their habit, benedictions, and all the like ceremonies, so act the part of commanders that they think it a mean thing, and least beseeming a bishop, to show the least courage to Godward unless it be in a battle.