

The SMART SET

July, 1921
p. 37

Répétition Générale

*By H. L. Mencken and
George Jean Nathan*

LAMENTOSO —My one permanent regret is that I did not take holy orders and become a bishop. The office, all things considered, is the most desirable in Christendom. All secular functionaries are exposed to the whims of the mob, but a bishop, once consecrated, is almost bullet-proof; even armed uprisings of the proletariat leave him unharmed. In fact, the rising of the proletariat commonly makes him more powerful than he was before, for the common people, no matter how much rationalists may labor with them, simply can't get rid of their 'congenital belief that he has the powers of the air under his thumb and can work very devastating and painful sorceries.

A bishop is well-paid, well entertained, highly respected, and free from care. If he wants to take a day, or a week, or a month off, he simply puts on his shovel hat and goes. If the mood strikes him to horn into a civilized dinner, with good cigars and sound wine, he intimates as much to some opulent and far-seeing layman of his diocese, and the birds go on the fire. If he is delivered of public remarks, however banal, the newspapers report him in full. If, on a gray day in winter, he is annoyed by his valet's knock at 7 A.M., he shoves the clock back, and sleeps until noon. If he dislikes anyone, all he has to do is to excommunicate the fellow. If he needs money, he simply arises in his cathedral and preaches upon Dives.

Altogether, a free, spacious and lordly life, full of ease, honor and contentment. Even atheists admit that a bishop is somebody. I know several gentlemen of the craft, and can testify that all of them are serene. I try not to envy anyone in this world; all my thoughts are concentrated upon the world to come. But whenever I think of any bishop of my acquaintance, and contrast his k.k. life with my own hard lines, I find it very difficult to chase away the green cast that sicklies o'er my gills.