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Conducted by Carl Purington Rollins & John T. Winterich

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Signers and Magicians

At some yet to be announced date in January, within a few short weeks of the bicentennial of Washington's birth, there will be sold at the American Art Association Anderson Galleries an Anglo-Saxon manuscript which antedates Chaucer by the approximate interval that Chaucer antedates Washington. The Blickling Ho-

milies were produced sometime between the year 959 and the end of the tenth century—the date 971 appears clearly at one point. The churchly writer (or more probably writers) made due note of the imminence of the year 1000 and admitted he could see no good in the omen—the calendar had been getting along on a maximum of three digits as far back as anybody could remember and any attempt to improve the technical position would be bound to result in a disastrous bear raid.

Until the arrival of the Blickling Homilies for disposal there was no Anglo-Saxon manuscript in the United States in either public or private hands. Whether the Homilies will remain in the United States (which seems likely) and whether they will become a unit in a private or an institutional collection will be determined with the dispersal of the superb library of the Marquess of Lothian, which, in any event, will be the most important auction held in this country in the past three years—perhaps for a longer period.

A surpassing Psalter of about 1300 is another item of impressive moment. The name of its illuminator survives—he was Brother John Tikytt, or Tikyll, prior of the Augustinian monastery of Wyrkesopp—and the state of the manuscript offers pathetic testimony to the end of his own story. The first ninety leaves are elaborately and brilliantly illuminated; from ninety-one to 114 the decorations are

either only partly finished or merely sketched in; from leaf 115 onward the spaces left for decorations and illuminated initials are blank. Good Brother John was called home before his pious masterpiece was completed, but this late and inquisitive age can turn his passing to good account. For the fact that examples of his work can be studied in every stage, from the first rough delineation to the completed illumination (he wrought in lapis lazuli and gold and silver for the glory of God), makes the Tikytt Psalter a living laboratory of medieval craftsmanship.

So important is the Lothian sale regarded that a somewhat extraneous but superlatively impressive item from another English source will be appended to the second evening's quota. While the details of this surprise lot have not been announced, it can be said that it is a document signed by no fewer than twenty of the fifty-six Signers of the Declaration of Independence—probably the largest single grouping of the company in existence with the exception of the original Declaration. Gwinnett and Lynch are not among the twenty, but *que voulez-vous?*

Mention of the Signers recalls the story, which seems never to have appeared in print, of how the late Harry Houdini almost acquired a set and what he had planned to do with it if he had acquired it. The set was the second-string collection of Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet. The qualification is not used disparagingly. The first-string Emmet set is now in the New York Public Library—it contains such a pearl of price as the only Lynch autograph letter known. Houdini wanted the set badly and bid up to twenty thousand dollars for it, for this was in the brave old days when twenty thousand dollars was not an utterly ridiculous bid for a set of Signers. But the set sold for a few thousand more, and Houdini went without it.

What he wanted to do with it was this: he planned to engage a college professor, entrust the set to him (the examples were mounted in a thick folio volume), and send him around the country a week

ahead of himself to give exhibitions and talks in public libraries. It would have been an admirable and dignified publicity program, and it is matter for regret that the price was a little too high to suit. But the idea is still worth adoption. Why shouldn't Charlie Chaplin's next picture be preceded by a display of Pickwick in parts or a run of Elizabethan dramatists? Did any comedy ever assay for a higher percentage of Chaplin than "Gammer Gurton's Needle?"

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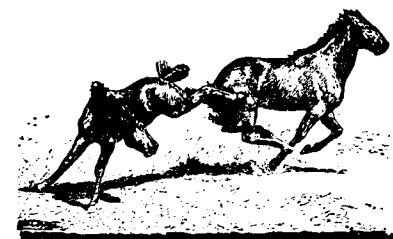
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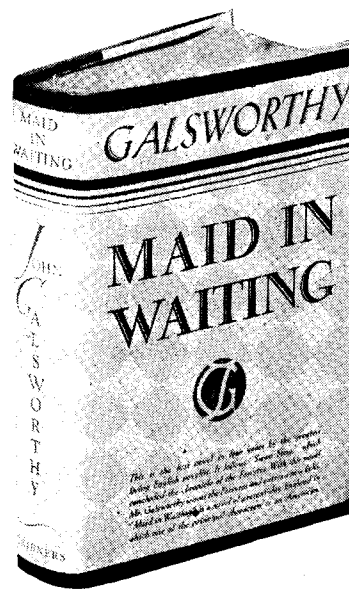
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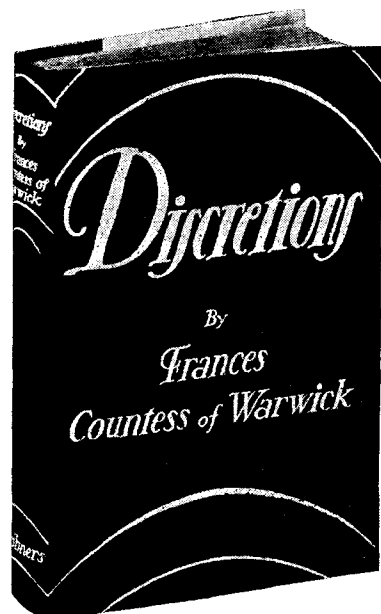
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