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TOBACCO AUCTIONEERING IS OLD CUSTOM THAT DEFIES HISTORIANS he used to slap out the winning bid.

(By Gerald Tetley)

rived at Lynchburg, would be met Although the tobacco auctioneer by a man with a trumpet who would

of the Old South has become a na- thus announce the arrival of tobactional curiosity, through his alliter- co. The "gentlemen speculators"ative "cry," the history of this an- undoubtedly the genesis of the pincient profession is so nebulous as the hooker-then gathered round, broke a distinction between the auctioneer defy more than a circumstantial web open the tobacco on the street and who had a "lively" sale doing a bit gave their opinion as to the quality of clowning on the side to overcome of background material.

If tobacco today is one of this and what they would pay. Naturally, some of the repetitious monotony. country's worst economic headaches all sorts of abuses crept into this There were men who could twist and as such commands much nation- system and in 1825 the Virginia leg- their tongues around syllables at al attention, there is a question islature ordered an inquiry into the lightning speed and who never seemmark also about the origin of the auctioning of tobacco and remedied ed to pause to catch a breath. The some of the abuses. auction system.

Since the tobacco cry assumed Apparently the old fashioned in- tioneers and were out for speed and part and parcel of audible advertis- spector who appraised tobacco final- the shortest distance between opening, there has been a steady rise in ly became the auctioneer by starting ing hid and the knockout. the number of total strangers break. a price in the presence of the planting motor trips to attend a tobacco | or and the buyers and running up | however, and much of the art has sale. Most of them stand in awed the bid. silence and many wonder how it all

started. They want to know why the auc- part in that the priests of the early withstood the tests of time and has tioneer sings his tune and where he Roman church who, having to say been alternately applauded and gets his lingo from.

intoned their services. Musicologists going through a new testing period Gift Not Inherited and an intriguing similarity between with a strong suspicion that the fed-Norman Love, one of Danville's best auctioncers, seems to challenge inatches of the auctioneor's tune eral government would like to see it the long handed down story that the with a major triad or a diminished discarded entirely and the sale of Ifth and the occlesiastical incanta- leaf restricted to the graded appraicapacity to auction tobacco is attribion of liturgical music. sal method. utable to an inherited gift. His father

Few Auctioneers-Big Money never sold tobacco, but for years the son was a ticket marker and was on the buying line right behind the auclimited to few. It is understood that tioneer. He caught the technique and there are "schools" where the art of then, he says, hied him off by himauctioneering tobacco is taught. self, hit on the tune and practiced As a matter of precise fact, while yet devised for the sale of leaf. it. Louie Love, his brother, learned in the same way and Norman Love's | the auctioneer of today may be more

son is now a ticket marker in the streamlined and perhaps faster, the men who cried tobacco 30 years ago buying line next to his father. were local characters and eminent in On one point alone does there ap-

pear to be unanimous opinion, that their own domain. Thore was no such thing as a the tobacco auction is sung because a man can sing for hours without "starter," that is to say a man preover-exerting his larynx, when pure ceding the auctioneer to tip him off speech would soon wear out his vo- as to what figure he shall start the cal cords. That is why the old timers next pile. The art of instant appraicould sell tobacco from 9 to 5 with sal of tobacco's worth was one of the an hour for dinner and appear in prime assets of the old auctioneer. top form afterwards. The memory of many of them per-

weed.

crying tobacco in public sale. As weather,

he could easily be mistaken for a visiting congressman. At 9 he would he used to slap out the winning bid. Then he would start a dignified monotone and Capt. Ellington was still going strong towards failing light.

Controls Interfere The tuneful lay persists, though the day has passed when there was others were labeled just "plain" auc-

The day of the oldtimer has gone. given way to certain controls ordered

The laryngeal factor in tobacco by boards of trade. selling finds an interesting counter-| While the auction system has

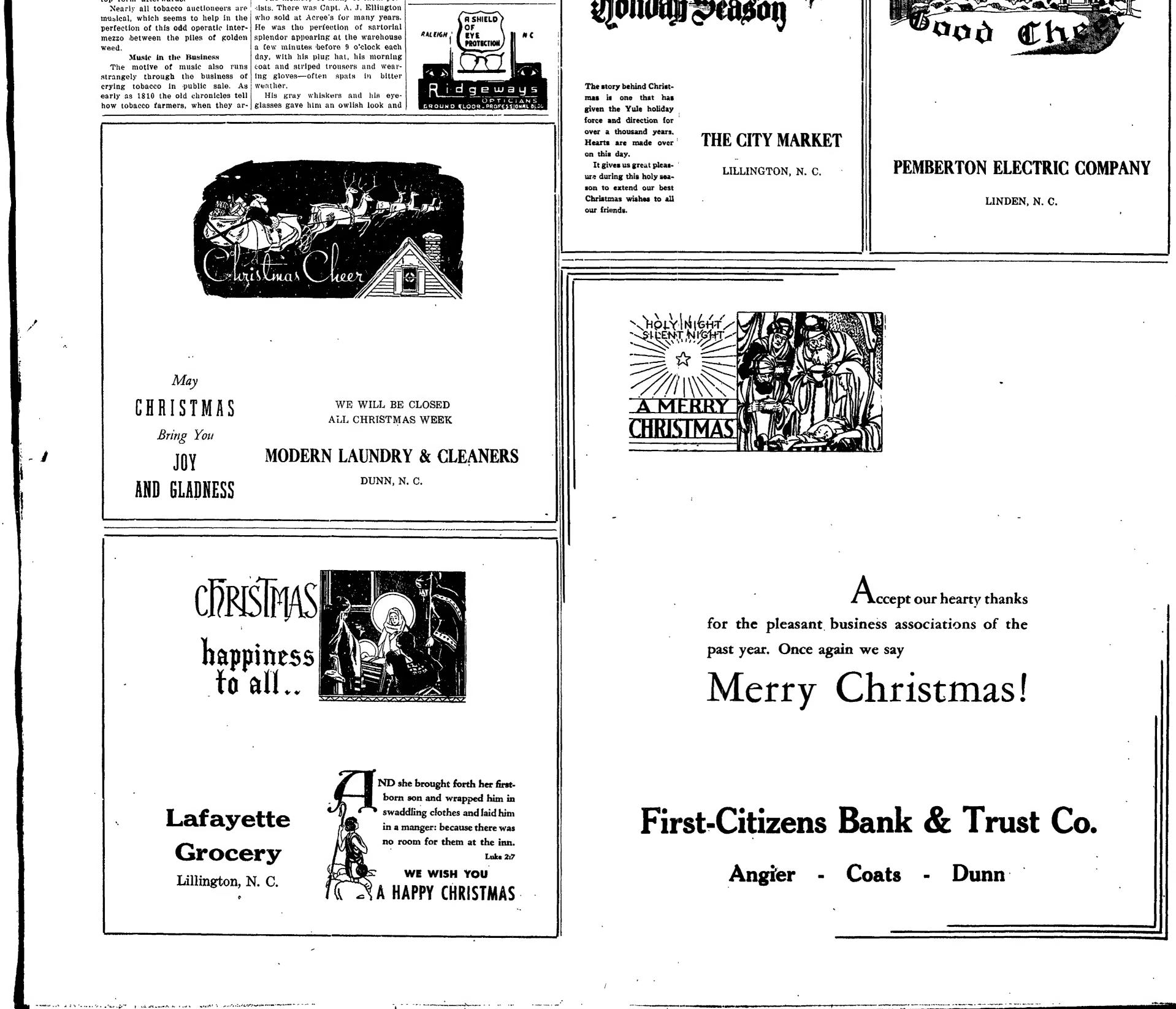
mass for the peasants all day long, damned with faint praise, it is now

To do this would be to deal a fur-Tobacco auctioneers draw big ther blow to the South which has a money as a rule, because their art is large investment in the form of warehouse realty and highly trained staffs. Most of the leaf men agree that the auction system is the best

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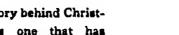
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