

191

Leapin' lizards, I've finally finished fretting about FAPA's golden anniversary and now I realize I might need to endure the same thing for Horizons if I can hang on a few more issues. This here is whole number 191, FAPA number 186, volume 49, number 1, dated November, 1987, except in Nebraska. Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740, U. S. A., did the bulk of the writing and expects the Coulsons to do all of the mimeographing.

### In the Beginning

The Fantasy Amateur: It's a macabre notion, but sometimes I think we should select each quarter some elderly fan and write about him or her all the nice things we would normally save until eulogy time. It isn't fair to deprive fans of all that egoboo by waiting until they are dead to do it. ' ' A few fans had enough money to have covers and full-page interior illustrations photo offset in the long ago days Fred Pohl writes about. It was the only way to reproduce properly art with large black areas, until United Kingdom fans discovered ways to achieve it on Gestetners. ' ' What were the publishing or writing credits that entitled Burbee to a place on the waiting list? We Remember Terry Carr: I've already commented on this in my SAPSzine. It's a fine tribute and simultaneously a description of a different kind of fine tribute. Spirochete: I have trouble, too, deciding which early memories are genuine and which are false. I had lost faith in one of them, involving a glimpse of the Los Angeles hovering over Hagerstown, because in later years I suddenly realized I wouldn't have seen it en route home from being registered for my first or second year at the Catholic school, through the trees in the church yard as we walked up Walnut Street, because we wouldn't have detoured via Walnut Street on our way home. But years after I had made that deduction, I was looking through old newspapers and found a mention of something else I'd forgotten: Prospect Street, the direct route home from the Catholic school, wasn't open yet in one block when I was a small boy, my parents and I would have needed to make that detour, so the memory must have been genuine. Black Hat: I was depressed for days after reading this. The writing is superb, the matters dealt with are interesting, but my genial spirit drooped because the unidentified western fiction writer had done a job of being a hermit with so much more effectiveness than I have. I feel as if I'd failed. The House of the Hidden Poet: This is probably the best thing in this big mailing. The tale seems real because walking after dark is such a strange activity in Hagerstown, now that sidewalks are almost deserted, most buildings are dark, and sodium vapor street lights cause all the colors of things to change. Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung: Computerized equipment not only takes the drudgery out for fanzine publishers, it also takes out most of the fanzine publishing. With a few exceptions, the general pattern has been a reduction in productivity by fanzine publishers after they convert to Up To Date methods. The decline in the nation's fanzine output makes it obvious that new fanzine publishers aren't evolving as they once did. The Ragabash Papers: I once had one of those cats with freakishly long back legs. He looked awfully strange when he ran but he made excellent speed. Rim-i-nes-cent: The cost of putting up a Christmas display is peanuts to Denver government. If the atheists' organization wanted something more than newspaper pub-



licity for litigation over a triviality, it would go out for bigger game: a court ruling that government money can't be used to pay employees for work they don't do when they have time off for religious holidays. The atheists would find it necessary to flee for fox-holes where they might lose their status, if millions of teachers were required to work on Christmas and Thanksgiving and if compulsory school attendance laws required parents to send kids to school on those holidays, and if millions of other government workers had to report to their offices, mail routes, and other places on religious holidays. Moreover, if it's not permissible for "government to promote a religion", all federal and state funds for education, welfare and other purposes would presumably be cut off from big cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, St. Louis, St. Paul, San Diego, St. Petersburg, San Jose, San Antonio, and Santa Ana, as well as hundreds of smaller towns. Courts might even be forced to rule that the United States is still a part of the British Empire, since its status as a separate nation began with a Declaration of Independence whose second paragraph is based on creationism. ' ' I was represented in a prozine with a story about time slowdown. It was a Probability Zero that Campbell published these many years ago.

Creature of Habit: The Fanzine Index covers only fanzines published through the early 1950s, but by then there was already an impressive assembly of titles that could be abbreviated SFC: Science-Fantasy Correspondent, Science Fiction Circular, Science Fiction Collaboration, Science Fiction Collector, Science-Fiction Convention!, Science Fiction Conventioneer, Science Fiction Courier, Science Fiction Critic, SF Check-List, for instance, and I may have missed one or two others. Some were one-shots, others appeared regularly for a while.

Read this if you wish: I decided I didn't wish to after I saw the alternate title. The Dillinger Relic: I can't understand why some people think the PTL problem has discredited television evangelism. The evangelists repeatedly tell us that we're all sinners and I don't think they claim immunity from Adam's precedent.

Advocatus Diaboli: "Peace through strength" is hardly an original slogan with the current administration. It's just another way of saying Teddy Roosevelt's advice to walk softly but carry a big stick.

' ' I'm afraid I say concertos and concerti interchangeably. For one thing, worry about that matter could be an ominous early symptom of speeritis. For another, where do you stop? If we use the Italian plural for concerto, must we say piani, opere, viole, soprani and pizze?

Ben's Beat: I'm looking forward to the Met's Turandot. I have the Arena di Verona Turandot but it's not particularly well sung or staged. However, I'll never be satisfied with that opera unless I have a chance to produce it with a different ending. I feel absolutely certain that Puccini would have made a drastic last act alteration if he'd lived. Even though Albani claimed he completed Turandot by using Puccini's preliminary sketches and from his talks with the dying composer, there's something unpleasant about Calaf's actions and the "happy" ending after the tragedy of Liu.

Puccini reworked many of his operas after first performances: the last act of Madama Butterfly is much different from the original conclusion of the first two-act version, the last act of La Rondine exists in two entirely different versions (in the one that's never used, the hero leaves the heroine after her sugar daddy comes to get her), the final aria for the baritone in Il Tabarro was replaced by an entirely different one, and so on. In my production of Turandot, the opera would end with the last of the music that Puccini-



ni composed, the awed measures for chorus and orchestra that follow the suicide of Liu. All I would change would be the stage action: after a moment's hesitation, everyone except Thrandot would follow the body and Timur in their solemn procession offstage. Thrandot would be left alone and would all of a sudden realize what a bitch she is and how fitting it is that everyone has deserted her in contempt, as the curtain falls. It would be a short third act but no shorter than the final act of Manon Lescaut. 'I'd love to see a traditional production of Parsifal. I have the film version on videotape. It's remarkably well sung and the orchestra is superb. But however commendable may have been the concept of turning the opera into a symbol of the guilt of the German nation, its realization puts too many barriers between the eye and the music. The text often refers to things that contradict what is visible, the leitmotives don't have visible analogies, and such eccentricities as three different Parsifals, one of them female, distract me. I suppose it'll be a long time before a stage production is offered on television, mainly because, as Mark Twain complained about his visit to Bayreuth, you get too much for your money. The Wild Colonial Boy: My instinct tells me it's wrong to allow even a seriously defective infant to die, as long as there are mechanical ways to prolong life. But logically, I know we could reach a situation in which most of the money and facilities and labor would be required for life support, to the neglect of other humanitarian purposes. So I wonder if it would be possible to work out arrangements for the same freezing technique for such children that has been tested on incurably sick old people, for revival whenever future science promises a chance at a long and useful life. I think it would be kinder to do it to infants than to old people. I know I wouldn't want my life indefinitely prolonged by freezing because I would find myself cured in a future in which everyone I knew would be dead and I would be unable because of my advanced age to adapt to the wildly different conditions of the future. Tiny children wouldn't have those problems if cured and awakened in the future. Meanwhile, their parents could cling to at least a faint hope that medical science would advance rapidly enough for the child to be revived during the parents' lifetime. 'I think Gernsback's main contribution to science fiction is rarely recognized as such. He provided the first major market for short science fiction stories. Until he founded Amazing Stories, most science fiction was being written in novel length. It is conceivable that a lot of fine short stories and novelettes would have never been written during the second quarter of this century if Gernsback hadn't created a market that needed lots of them. Yes, I know Wells wrote some short science fiction and there are a few famous examples of short science fiction stories from other celebrated pre-Amazing Stories writers. But I suspect a lot of potential science fiction stories before 1926 never got written because mundane magazines seemed to prefer novel-length science fiction and because there were almost no books being published containing anthologies of short science fiction stories. Snickersnee: I didn't do any reminiscing for the 200th mailing because I assumed almost everyone who published for that mailing would write a retrospective of FAPA past. So I'm glad Bob Silverberg and a few others accomplished what most members including me didn't. One minor correction: color mimeography for The Fantasy Amateur in 1949 wouldn't have been implausible. By then, the Decker Dillies had accomplished wonders of four and five color mimeo illustrations and other fans had experi-



mented with the techniques, although striped ink lay waiting in fandom's future. ' ' This is indeed the same typewriter that was stenciling Horizons in 1949. I acquired it some time in the 1940s as a Christmas gift from my parents and it has served faithfully for all sorts of fanac ever since. Alas, the office equipment firm that kept it in good operating condition all through these years has closed and I don't know what to do the next time it needs repairs. I hate to be laughed at and I'm sure I would be if strangers saw me walking in with such an old typewriter to be fixed. The Yngwie J. Malmsteed Story: I've never looked up dichotomy in the dictionary, but I assume it's what happens when a German fellow's female acquaintance orders him to stop using the second person singular pronouns he has been using in his effort to get more familiar. Alphabet Soup: Demonstrations strike me as the most useless expenditure of energy in the nation. I'm sure they wouldn't happen if the media ignored them and the media should do that very thing because they have no additional significance on issues that have already waxed and waned in the press and over the air. Horizons: I don't know if any mailing comments will seize upon one element in the fiction, the references to mail delivery. I know that many mailmen don't do their job in the manner described in the story, instead popping in and out of a small motor vehicle in suburban areas or picking up additional stacks of mail to be delivered at locked mailboxes on their route. But some areas still have mailmen like the one I described and I didn't want to go into a long description of different ways of delivering mail right in the middle of a story. Dreams and False Alarms: Those costs for publishing a fanzine via commercial offset sound discouragingly high. Surely there must be some fan in Australia who would do the running off for a reasonable profit on a mimeograph, cutting the bill by at least 50%. ' ' It's tempting to think all commercial timber cutting is evil. But most houses, apa mailings, pencils, and many other important things wouldn't exist without timber cutting. Unlike mining and quarrying, proper timber cutting does no permanent harm. Minerals and metals don't grow again the way trees can be made to do. ' ' I'm glad to find another Kathleen Ferrer devotee. That makes at least three of us in fandom. It's not often that three fans agree about anything. Grandfather Stories: Reading about this wonderful party, I confess that all I could think was how wonderful it would be to be 62 again. The photographs are particularly welcome, giving me my first look at several fans. Moonshine: Goshwowboyoboy goes back to the late 1930s. Time quoted it from a prozine reader section when it ran a little article about fandom. I still have a copy of that Time somewhere on the attic and I wonder if it's the sole copy in fannish hands today. ' ' I find myself unable to remember one FAPA member at the time of the 68th mailing, Joseph Miller. I would have trouble stating any specific facts about some of the other members at that time, but at least all the other names look familiar. JM's doesn't. ' ' I can't claim continuous NFFF membership. I belonged to it from the start, then dropped out during my semi-gafiation, probably in the late 1940s, and I didn't rejoin until the 1960s. ' ' The Baltimore area fan who got Dean Grennell's mail studied by postal authorities must have been the same one who wrote a scurrilous loc, signed my name to it, and drove up to Hagerstown so he could have a Hagerstown postmark on the envelope. He made the mistake of writing it to a fanzine editor who knew me well enough to know I would never have written such a letter and



guessed what had happened. '' Rick Sneary's pages were particularly interesting. It was hard at first to believe these were genuine Sneary memoirs, because of the conversion of his prose into orthodox spelling. '' I also enjoyed Len's autobiographical material. But doesn't The Riverside Quarterly descend from Inside, rather than Fantasy Advertiser? '' That Mexican prozine pirated one of my stories, too. But in my case it was a little story Paul Freehafer had published in Polaris. Detours: The Mortal Storm was the title of a best-selling novel by Phyllis Bottome published in the late 1930s, about the effects of the Nazi regime on a German family. A movie version was released in 1940 to critical acclaim, starring Margaret Sullavan, Robert Young and Jimmy Stewart. '' I like very much this proposed simplification of the egoboo poll. The only thing I might suggest in addition would be restraint on the number of places to be voted on in each category. The Devil's Work: Why would anyone make a special effort at Christmas time to see Blithe Spirit? If the reference is to the playwright's first name, he created a lot of other excellent dramas, several of which are more Christmassy in theme. '' It took a lot of remembering but I think I finally know the identity of this awful secret Ossie Train dragged out of my past. I had received a number of locs on All Our Yesterdays and published them in Horizons. I warned Ossie that I was omitting one section of his letter because I felt it was potentially libelous. Ossie claimed such intimate knowledge of fandom in his critical loc that I just assumed he knew about the assumption that a loc is meant for publication unless a DNQ is appended. None of the other letter writers thought I'd done such a dreadful thing in publishing their praise and their complaints. Night-Dreams and Daymares: I liked this very much and I wish this awful curse didn't inhibit me from writing specific comments on art work. Some Comments &c: Was the Walter J. Daugherty recording project a disc magazine? The home recording machines in use for 78 rpm discs created records with subterranean fidelity and severe surface noise which worsened with every playing. I don't see how he could have created multiple copies to qualify as a magazine rather than a custom-made unique recording. If he had tried to make copies by playing what he had recorded on a record player and making a second generation copy, the contents would have become unintelligible very soon. I received one or two discs from him but I assumed they were made specifically for me. '' There are laws to try to control the number of people using drugs because legalizing them would increase the social problem they create to a frightening extent. Ending Prohibition was the biggest mistake the United States has ever made with Constitution-tampering. A local district court judge estimates that alcohol figures in 80% of all criminal cases he hears, and the figure is estimated at 66% by a circuit court judge. The problems bootlegging created during Prohibition were minimal compared with what it's done by being eliminated. '' Jim Blish was an all-out Joyce enthusiast and even began to publish in VAPA a glossary of significances in Finnegans Wake. Several of the other Futurians shared his interest. Doc Lowndes, for instance, derived from Joyce the name of his fanzine, Agenbite of Inwit. Past, Present & Future: The material on Walter Rose is fascinating, not only for its own intrinsic interest but also for the implication that there might be equally colorful personalities behind the bylines of many other unknowns who wrote for the prozines in their earliest years. There's the other significance, that it's get-



ting very late for retrieval of such information on authors from the 1920s and 1930s. Would Rose's grandchildren have saved the manuscripts and would they have known the information that became available because his daughter happened still to be alive? I'm Not Boring You, Am I?: S/Z is probably Roland Barthes' massive reference work covering the hiss in popular fiction, written under the influence of H. C. Koenig's campaign to bring into the glaring light of publicity all fictional characters who hissed words that contained no sibilants. Notes from Arinam: Young punks who engage in cruising are a problem here, too. They've been snarling traffic, monopolizing parking lots of establishments they don't patronize, piling up litter, and creating other problems in an area just east of downtown Hagerstown. If police look the other way the citizenry becomes outraged for inaction and if police make arrests the citizenry becomes outraged for persecution of minor offenses while murderers and rapists go uncaught. ' ' I think the real cause of the campaign against lines-across-the-page is a dislike of reading. When material is published in two or more columns per page, there's room for fewer words per page and thus less reading is required. ' ' There are advantages to spending a lot of time commuting on bus or train when driving would be much quicker. Time spent driving is wasted time in the sense that you can't do much except drive. When you use public transportation you can achieve a lot of reading or you can write first drafts longhand or you can think without distracting events that must be watched on the highway or you can enjoy the luxury of doing absolutely nothing which may be better for health than jogging. There is also the absence of the nervous strain of driving and of blood pressure eruptions when other drivers misbehave. Dynatron: I think "fanzine fandom" is usually meant to refer to the entire publishing field. What Roy is calling fanzine fandom has been nicknamed cafe society fandom by Eric Mayer, distressing some of its members. These are the fanzine publishers who write about one another much of the time, put much stress on the light and humorous essay type of fanzine material, show contempt for such nice things as Australian fanzines and the NFFF, and show many characteristics of a Hotel Algonquin-type clique. I admire many of their fanzines but not the narrowness of their range of fannish interests. ' ' I also suspect that the greenhouse effect is upon us sooner than scientists predicted. After an unusually warm summer of 1986 and two consecutive mild winters in Hagerstown, the summer of 1987 was the hottest since consecutive official weather records began to be kept in the 1890s, averaging about one-half degree per day hotter than the previous record summer. More important, perhaps, is the way the weather forecasts so frequently underestimated what the day's maximum temperature would be. Errors in forecasts are inevitable but when the great bulk of those errors miss in one direction it seems to indicate conditions that are affecting normal forecasting systems. I'm typing this in mid-September and this first half-month since the summer period has also been abnormally warm. FAPA Festival Fanzine: Erg can't be "the longest running regular fanzine". If regular refers to regularity of publication, Horizons hasn't been irregular since it missed one issue in the winter of 1943-44 because of my intestinal flu. If regular means non-apa fanzines, and organizational publications like the NFFF fanzines aren't counted, the oldest currently appearing fanzine that hasn't had name change or interruption in output is probably Bill Danner's Stefantasy which has been coming



out since at least 1950 as a generally available fanzine. '' The latest episode of Army Daze made wonderful reading. I suspect it contains some facts and thoughts about World War Two that can't be found in any mundanely published source. '' I could swear I've read before either this Terry Jeeves episode or one remarkably similar. I even seem to remember writing a loc in which I expressed extreme doubt that any self-propelled bullets could achieve anything remotely resembling accuracy. FAPamentary: People apparently can live on jobs paying \$5 an hour because on ~~my~~ daily walks and drives through all parts of Hagerstown I never see anyone collapsed from hunger, nor do I read about local residents going naked or living in cardboard shacks. I haven't ciphered out the exact figures, but I suspect that during my five years of retirement I've lived on yearly spending considerably below what a regular job paying \$5 per hour would bring me. This isn't out of necessity because I've been saving a considerable portion of my retirement income each year, but rather a reflection of the fact that I don't have expensive tastes, I don't throw away money on gambling, drinking and drugging, and I don't try to support a loose woman, much less a wife or kids. Memory Dump: Has anyone contemplated how easy it might be to convert that central 47-story lobby of the Marriott into a spaceship suitable for a generations-long journey to another star? '' Page 7 of this conreport contains my favorite fragment of fanzine writing of 1987: "Dismissing Skel like that was like Ed Wood boasting of tossing Hyphens in the trash unopened. He never knew what he missed, and neither do they." '' One secret for writing notes that still mean something after some time has elapsed: write them in the form of complete sentences with subjects and predicates. Most of the time, a note becomes meaningless because it omits a noun or a verb that was in the writer's mind while scribbling but then got forgotten. The Lime Jello Gazette: Reading over the list of proposed topics for the next Fancyclopedia, I began to suspect it's in danger of becoming too lopsided toward California. The fact that its committee members all live in California makes this an understandable tendency. But consider: the list contains Cal Tech but not Irish Fandom. Carl Brandon is there but not Sgt. Joan Carr. The Breendoggle is listed, so where's the Exclusion Act? Is Walt Daugherty as important a fan as Lee Hoffman or Don Wollheim or John Berry? Fanquet is a topic but no Ditmars or St. Fanthony. Coventry is here but where's the quotecard mania? Is the Institute for Specialized Literature more deserving than FAPA? Lofgeornost: Bad conduct by kids at large cons is probably as much a reflection of the national problem as a deterioration in youthful fans. The local mall has had to beef up its security force on weekends because kids running uncontrollably through stores have been driving adults away. I find in restaurants and lunch counters that not one family out of ten is able to control the children it brings along; they seem incapable of sitting at a table and eating for more than thirty seconds at a time, between eruptions of fighting, screaming, racing away and back, and other near-hysterical misconduct. '' Don't be too sure that "Everybody knows about China". Poll men and women under the age of 30 or thereabouts with some simple question like what continent China is on, or ask them to find China on a world globe without peering down to read the wording. I doubt if more than half of the individuals in that age group know anything about China. '' There may be truth in that suspicion that the Social Security Administration is a front for a supersecret agency that gov-



erns the FBI and CIA. Local Social Security offices now advise the public not to visit the offices, but to telephone. If something can't be handled over the telephone, the caller will be given an appointment instead of being permitted to drop in at his convenience. Maybe those offices are too busy with national security matters to spend much time on old age and disability pensions. Hawai'i: The only real reason for continuing the fanzine Hugo awards, I believe, is the publicity they give fanzine fandom. Conceivably, we pick up an occasional new fanzine fan who wouldn't have heard about fanzines without the Hugo awards. F-Words: A series of FAPA anthologies is a splendid idea. But I have grave doubts that it could ever be accomplished by a group of fans headed by a central coordinator. The whole history of fandom has been a record of success when one fan pitches in and achieves a monumental publishing project, endless delays and usually eventual failure when a committee tries to do something big. Maybe FAPA's bulging treasury could repay part of the publishing expenses for anyone who actually completed one of those decade anthologies. Fanthology '75: I usually take a dim view of ancient publications appearing in FAPA. But this one is an exception, for its excellence and because I probably hadn't seen it before. Some of the contents seemed familiar but that could come from having read them on their original fanzine appearance. However, certain aspects of this fat volume made me feel sad. One was the evidence it gives of the existence of so many fine, large fanzines only a dozen years ago, contrasted to the present tendency for fanzines to be quite small. Another was the fact that only two or three of all the writers anthologized here are still contributing an occasional bit of writing to fanzines; an awful attrition in a few years of good fanzine writers. Finally, the splendid reproduction seems like an almost lost fannish art, in this day of faint or fuzzy or microscopic fanzine pages as a result of computer intervention into fanzine publishing. The Reader & Accumulator: I hope this is one of the first fruits of the imminent FAPA membership of several lovely SFFPA and SAPS members. I hope their energy and interest in apa publishing will help to shake up FAPA's lethargy. 'I haven't re-read much of John W. Campbell, Jr.'s fiction in recent years. But looking over the bibliography, I felt again the old thrill that his wonderful titles used to give me when I opened a new issue of a prozine and found his byline under stories with titles like Beyond the End of Space, When the Atoms Failed, or The Mightiest Machine. Where have all the good titles gone? I find in a recent fanzine reviews of new or recently published books with such titles as The Kindly Ones, Agnes Day, Triplet, and The Legacy of Heorot. The Campbell fiction listing also shows why there's more than old habits as a reason for acquiring and saving old prozines. I was surprised to see how many stories by a writer as famous as Campbell remain unreprinted in book form. 'The reprints of Fanewscard awoke lots of memories, too. They really deserve to be supplied with lots of footnotes to make their news notes comprehensible to younger fans. The Unteleported Fan: For instance, the 130th issue reprinted here which lacks the year in its date was published in 1945. The Zissman and Emden foursome had as female components the individuals better known today as Judith Merrill and Virginia Kidd Blish. Vanguard Amateur Press Association was the Futurians' answer to FAPA after the latter passed out of their control. Tumbrils, one of the best VAPAZines, was Jim Blish's only mature fanzine. The "shipment overseas" in reference to Milt Rothman



meant he was about to leave for overseas duty as a member of the armed forces, not that he was expecting a package from a fan in England or Australia. The 2¢ price wasn't a misprint; Fanewscard was mimeographed on the back of a postal card, postal cards cost only a penny to mail in 1945, so it must have turned a tidy profit for its editors. DAW was Donald A. Wollheim. Hysteresis: I don't know how many of the inaccuracies in this interview result from poor memory or how many derive from old prejudices. Whichever, it's a good warning to any future fan historians not to rely too much on personal memories voiced by fans in their old age about long-ago events; contemporary documentary evidence infanzines, correspondence, and similar sources is much more trustworthy. I imagine that this will result in an eruption of awesome scope from Newark, and I would expect Speer to unleash a refutation if he isn't too badly distracted by someone's intolerable conduct with a gerund elsewhere in this mailing. So I'll content myself with pointing out two mistakes involving myself: I don't persist "to this very day in commenting on every fanzine" I get, and it is not true that "It was years before anyone ever met" me after I became an active fan. There was a steady stream of pilgrims to Hagerstown that began almost as soon as the first issue of Spaceways appeared, including two of Wollheim's Futurian cronies, Fred Pohl and Jack Gillespie. Several present FAPA members like Speer, Elmer Perdue, and Art Widner were among the early visitors who might still remember me as a neofan. Trending: It is probably an unworthy suspicion, a result of the inroads of senility, but I sometimes can't help wondering if the low response to the FAPA poll is caused in part by a desire to make a good showing. FAPA doesn't permit those participating to vote for themselves. As a result, any member who can expect to make a fairly good showing in at least one category will worsen his place in the voting in that category by sending in votes for his rivals. This is why I feel it might be better to subtract point totals for non-voters, instead of giving additional points as a bonus to those who vote in the overall tabulation. I have been conscientious with the poll, voting every year as far back as memory extendeth with the exception of one year a dozen or more years ago when the ballot was so enormously complex in categories and point distribution instructions that I simply couldn't understand it and refrained. I know there have been years when I would have finished higher than someone I finished behind in this or that category, simply because I voted for him and he didn't vote at all. ' ' The Cult must not have been itself in 1959 and 1960 if membership in it enabled the creation of friendly relationships. ' ' I have The Cunning Little Vixen on videotape. If I haven't written you a letter offering to provide you with a dubbing by the time this mailing comes out, remind me of my good intention. Faceless Bureaucrat: Don't the colleges and universities in the Boston area provide theatrical productions by students? My experience has been that a college play is often more entertaining and a lot less expensive than a production by a second-rate company of professionals. Interjection: My theory about the effect of the CD frequency response cutoff at 20,000 hz goes something like this: Human ears can't hear frequencies higher than 20,000 hz but we can hear the reinforcing effect that those supersonic frequencies have on lower, audible frequencies by coinciding vibrations. Thus, an overtone at 22,000 hz will be inaudible, but every other cycle of that overtone will coincide with each cycle of a simultaneous overtone at 11,000 hz. In complicat-



ed music with lots of high fundamentals, there must be scores of such reinforcements for high overtones created by supersonics that reinforce some of their vibrations. Additionally, it's conceivable that very faint false fundamentals are created by some of these reinforcements. If a CD simply can't produce anything higher than 20,000 Hz, there is bound to be an alteration in the strength of some overtones and it's the overtones that cause each musical instrument to have its distinctive sound. ' ' This week's TV Guide indicates that only about ten per cent of all blank videocassettes sold in the United States in 1987 are beta format. But my buying experience leads me to wonder. At stores that carry both VHS and beta blanks, if I show up on the first day of a big sale I'll find plenty of both varieties on hand, but if I don't get there until the second or third day of the sale, the beta cassettes are almost invariably sold out while there are still stacks of VHS blanks. It could be that beta VCR owners are stockpiling against the day when most stores will no longer carry their needs in this area. First Draft: Difficulties involved in getting extras to the public are undoubtedly one major reason why extras are virtually extinct. But there are other factors. Today, most editions of a newspaper cost the publisher more for the paper than the publisher's cut of the selling price, and profits must come from advertising. So an extra edition would go in the red, since advertisers couldn't be expected to fork over more money for the unexpected larger circulation of that particular day. It takes longer to put out a newspaper now than it did before computers speeded things up. In pre-computer days, the local newspapers could insert last-minute bulletins up to perhaps a half-hour before the first copies hit the streets. Now I'd guess that it would take more than an hour; news deadlines are an average of an hour or an hour and a half earlier than they used to be for the various parts of the newspaper. Finally, modern newspaper people aren't really interested in news and it probably never occurs to them that the public might be interested. Journalism today is a daily magazine syndrome. Editors grow vastly annoyed when something happens so important that they must change the plans they'd drawn up a day or two earlier on how to feature the edition's assortment of feature stories, rehashes of old stories, "investigative journalism" series on themes everyone is sick and tired of reading about, and photographs of little children playing with a ball. The local newspapers' last genuine extra was 'way back in 1945, the day FDR died. There was a so-called extra when the war ended, but that event was so predictable days in advance that lots of roundup features and reviews of the war had been put into type and stereotyped and all that was needed for the extra was one lead story and the headline. Several times since then the afternoon paper has replated its front page when important news broke before the press run was completed, particularly the day of the JFK assassination, but those special editions weren't billed as extras. The Bovo No-No: That long dreamed of fannish symphony orchestra is shaping up quite well, if Vanessa is a cellist. That gives us two members of the cello section, at least, since Mike Shoemaker is a good one. Yhos: All this information about the LASFS' facilities is quite interesting. I suppose I've read references to everything Len writes about in one fanzine or another over the years but this brings those half-forgotten mentions into one neat package. ' ' If Yhos goes to many fans outside FAPA, I wish Art hadn't made that reference to FAPA's non-existent "blackball section of the consti-



tution". Someone who had been thinking about joining FAPA might decide he wanted no part of an organization in which one member can bar someone from joining. " I agree that Speer wouldn't be as anxious to correct grammar in FAPA if he did it for a living as an English teacher. But I wonder why Speer chose FAPA for correcting people in public for their grammar. I assume he doesn't stop attorneys and witnesses while he's on the bench and instruct them in each flaw of grammar they've included in their spoken sentences. He seems to be on friendly terms with Albuquerque's fan club members, so he apparently doesn't ruin every meeting by interrupting at every confusion of pronouns, each mispronunciation, and every non-essential modifier. " I don't see why Vermont residents get so upset about the rustics who appear on the Bob Newhart comedy series. Ninety-nine per cent of the situations and events in those episodes could occur anywhere in the nation's rural and small town areas and aren't specifically dependent on Vermont as their locale. I don't remember Virginians getting furious when The Waltons had eccentric semi-regulars in the cast like Yancey Tucker and the Baldwin sisters. " Art has had the good fortune to visit Vienna and I haven't. But I can take some small consolation in the fact that I've apparently had a better look at the Hall of Mirrors than he got. One waltz sequence by the Vienna Opera Ballet was filmed in it for last winter's Vienna Philharmonic New Year's concert, and I must have played that entire concert back on videotape a half-dozen or more times already. On the other hand, I don't think Art would have heard the real Vienna Boys' Choir even if he'd gone to what was advertised as its concert. I saw the Vienna Boys' Choir when it made a tour stop in the United States back in the 1950s. If small boys are in the choir today, either they're ringers or the sponsors have been injecting them with some secret chemical to keep them from growing up. " Now you need hear from only two others who want Alicia reprinted. With the original illustrations, if possible, which I remember fondly. Nothin' Says Lovin' &c.: It's very wise to follow doctor's instructions about no smoking while pregnant. A waitress I know smokes incessantly and her small boy suffers dreadfully from asthma. Incidentally, Janice's interesting condition is a rarity in FAPA. I don't think statistics exist but I don't believe more than a handful of members have become parents while in the organization during its first half-century. The most impressive episode involving the birth of a baby to a FAPA member came long ago when Olon Wiggins was an officer. His wife had a child during his term of office, so the other officers got together and decided to change the name of the organization temporarily to Phantasy Amateur Press Association in his honor. " Resumes are one of the many modern phenomena that I can't adjust to. When did resumes become the in thing for job-seekers? Nobody had ever heard of the things back in the 1940s when I was last hunting work. Back then, you talked to someone who sized you up and jotted down a few facts about you and then called your high school principal or church pastor or someone else to determine what you were really like. Cognate: If residents of Boonsboro, a community ten miles from Hagerstown, ever discover that "Cantaloupe Center of America", something awful will happen. Boonsboro area residents insist that their soil produces the world's finest cantaloupes, and Boonsboro cantaloupes have as much fame as a selling name in this general area as York apples or Maine potatoes. Boonsboro cantaloupes give me a bigger stomachache than generic cantaloupes.



## Unless This Miracle Have Might

I have fallen into the same disgrace which we far-sighted fans sneer at mundanes for suffering. Science fiction readers are supposed to think about the future more than other people. So, when the issue of Horizons which contained a long article with the above title failed to appear in the November, 1986, FAPA mailing, I decided to reprint it in this November, 1987 edition. In making that decision, I failed to remember that FAPA's 200th mailing would occur three months earlier, the golden anniversary mailing would probably be larger than usual, and a large mailing means longer mailing comments three months later. Thus, those extra pages for comments mean fewer pages available for the main article. I refuse to inflict on long-suffering FAPAns a 32-page Horizons oftener than once each half-century. So the only thing to do is publish part of that article in slightly revised form in this issue, and save the rest of it until the last mailing of 1988, a foolhardy thing to do at my age.

As I wrote when I published the article originally a year ago, once a year on the average I permit myself to wallow in nostalgia in Horizons' main article. Old people like to dwell on the past and I don't think I've received enough credit for inhibiting my impulses to do so every issue rather than just once in a while. Even if this FAPA mailing goes out on time, few members will receive it much more than a month before Christmas. So this seems like the right mailing for reflecting on that holiday in general and the Christmases of my past in particular.

One reason I value Christmas so much is its status as one of the only two major holidays that have survived with little change from my childhood to the present. The Fourth of July has lost its fireworks and its oratory in this area and in most other parts of the nation. New Year's Day is no longer a time for making resolutions and paying visits but for drinking. Even unions seems to have forgotten the purpose of Labor Day, so that occasion is devoted to slaughter on the highways and chaos at the worldcon instead of to organized labor. Thanksgiving no longer has much religious observance which makes it a silly holiday because there's no sense in giving thanks if you don't believe in a deity to give them to. Armistice Day has lost its name, its place in the calendar, and its patriotic nature. Hallowe'en turned into an opportunity to train children as beggars after I grew up. Only Christmas and Easter are recognizable today as the same basic types of holidays I knew when I was growing up.

But, you object at this point, Christmas has become commercialized to the point of ruin in recent years. This is the general impression of the public and the most frequent complaint against Christmas. I don't think Christmas has been commercialized to any noticeable extent during my lifetime. I know I commercialized Christmas as soon as I was old enough to understand that kids get gifts on December 25. If I felt any guilt over my selfishness in connection with getting secular stuff on a sacred holiday, it abated as soon as I became old enough to read Little Women. That book begins with four sisters feeling miserable because the Civil War is preventing them from looking forward to Christmas gifts. If such a sentiment was abroad in the land six or seven decades ago, I told my very young self, I should be pardoned for feeling the same greed before each Christmas in the late 1920s or early 1930s.



The Bible tells us so little about the Wise Men that anonymous sources masquerading as tradition have filled in details about their names, racial makeup, and so on. So maybe it isn't blasphemous if I speculate some more about those three famous individuals. I have a strong suspicion that when the Wise Men decided to follow the Star, they agreed among themselves to take frankincense as a gift for the Christ Child, but their local spice merchants persuaded them to include myrrh among their gifts. Moreover, I suspect that the Wise Men had no sooner said goodbye to their wives and departed in an easterly direction than the Wise Women began to shake their heads in disgust, telling everyone they knew how awful it was that commercializing tendencies should already have shown up for this very first Christmas gift season.

One frequent complaint almost twenty centuries later is to the effect that stores begin peddling Christmas merchandise much earlier in the year than they did a few years or a few decades ago. I heard this gripe so often from young and old acquaintances during my working years that I finally decided one day to do some research. I dug out microfilms of newspaper files, squinted long and hard at the cloudy green screen of the viewer, and what I found on it confirmed my own memories. I don't know where I could put my hands on the newspaper article I wrote on this topic so I can't quote exact facts and figures. But relying on memory, I found that as long ago as 1930, as far back as most people can remember clearly, local newspaper advertisements revealed in October and November that stores were pushing Christmas merchandise just about as long before December 25 as they did around 1980. One curious thing I found when I looked even further back through microfilms is that Christmas advertising continued to appear during the first half of January in newspapers published around the turn of the century. I have no explanation for that fact; maybe it was done for the sake of people who received money as gifts or maybe it was meant for those who had received unexpected gifts and decided to buy stuff to give in return after Christmas or maybe merchants just didn't bother to change the text of their advertisements promptly in the confusion just after the year-ending holidays.

I know that I began as a child to think a lot about Christmas as soon as the circus had completed its annual summertime visit to Hagerstown. Then I thought of nothing but Christmas after I had exhausted my supply of confetti on Hallowe'en night.

One very early annual sign of Christmas' approach that I looked forward to in youth no longer occurs. Each year there would come a day in June or July when I would go into Hays Brothers store and would find two or three of the elderly clerks busily engaged in the rite known as pricing Christmas cards. Mountains of Christmas cards loomed on a counter. To each the clerks affixed with pea-sized paperclips tiny slips of paper bearing such figures as 5¢, 10¢, and even 15¢ for the most elaborate Christmas cards. This was always a welcome sight, positive proof that another Christmas and Christmas gifts weren't too far distant. Pricing Christmas cards was necessary then because cards in that era didn't contain a printed line on the back side showing the selling price, as they do today. Retailers were forced to clip the price slips to cards sold individually. Obviously, this arrangement would be impossible in today's world because the combination of dishonest customers and self-service stores lacking a clerk at each counter would result in low price slips being switched to expensive cards by purchasers. I suppose



younger FAPA members will find it hard to believe in an era when large stores had no checkout counters near the door but instead posted a clerk at each counter who rang up your money and wrapped your merchandise. It made shoplifting and price tag switching much more difficult, because if a potential thief decided to sin while the clerk's back was turned to him at this counter, a clerk at another counter would probably see the snatch. However, I think perhaps 90% of the public were honest a half-century ago. Today about 90% of the public will break every law of God and man they think they can successfully break.

Incidentally, I sometimes daydream about all the millions of my words that have been published in newspapers, fanzines, and other places, permitting myself to hope that at least one paragraph out of all that output might contain information about the world of the 20th century that nobody else has happened to put into print. Is it possible that the 21st century's equivalent of computers, whatever they may be called, while digesting and arranging all published information about the previous century for reference purposes, will find no information about pricing Christmas cards except in Horizons? It's too great an honor to hope for, I'm afraid. Probably the topic has seen print in a trade journal or two when greeting card manufacturers switched to printing prices on their individual cards, or perhaps some clerk who retired after 73 years of faithful service in a stationery store gave a newspaper interview which mentioned the obsolete pricing chore.

Of course, other aspects of Christmas have changed during my lifespan, in addition to the way Christmas card prices are shown, even though the basics of the holiday survive. One additional example of change is Christmas tree lights. Most of us have a tendency to take for granted the things we found in our surroundings as soon as we became aware of the world during our emergence from infancy. Christmas trees had colored electric lights on them from my first Christmas onward, so I was surprised recently when I read an article on this topic and learned that electric lights intended for home use on Christmas trees had come onto the market only about ten years before my birth. I should have suspected that fact, however, because as a boy I always trimmed myself a tiny artificial tree a few days before Christmas and stood it on a cabinet top as a sort of preview of the big natural tree that Santa would bring and trim. That little artificial tree had metal sockets at the end of each branch, intended to hold candles. I myself never saw a candle-illuminated Christmas tree outside pictures in magazines and movies but many rural parts of the United States didn't have 110-volt power lines in the 1920s and I suppose the artificial tree was supplied with candle sockets in case it was purchased by residents whose home wasn't electrified.

Today, after all these years of seeing miniature Christmas tree lights, I can't get properly accustomed to their almost universal use on indoor trees. In my boyhood, every home's Christmas tree was lighted with the large, cone-shaped bulbs whose use is nowadays restricted mostly to outdoor yuletide decorations. I know all about the fire hazard created by those large bulbs which throw out considerable amounts of heat. But our large natural tree was always a pine or fir that had five or six strings of those large-bulb lights, we often allowed the tree lights to burn an hour or more at a time, we never had a fire from the Christmas tree, and I never knew anyone else who had suffered a fire from Christmas tree lights. I



sometimes wonder how many fires that have been blamed on Christmas tree lights down through the years were actually caused by careless smokers or kids playing with matches, and attributed to the tree bulbs because that would cause less wrath from the landlord or police.

In addition to the large standard-shaped Christmas tree bulbs that were in general use when I was young, larger and more decorative bulbs were available. Our tree always had a half-dozen or more of them, carefully packed away for use year after year. For some reason, they never seemed to burn out as the standard bulbs did. They took the form of stars, crosses, birds, and various objects associated with the holiday, painted in several colors in some cases. I'm sure they must have been expensive when new and I hate to think how much they must cost collectors of ancient Christmas memorabilia today. But I suppose even the basic large tree bulb could be classified as an image. Its conical shape must have been chosen as an imitation of the form a candle flame takes. But I don't remember anyone pointing all the bulbs on the tree in a straight-up direction, so the imitative nature of electric tree lights must have already become forgotten when I was young.

I always managed to be at the radio to listen to the annual late afternoon broadcast from the site of the national Christmas tree for the ceremony of having its lights turned on for the first time each season. I swear that I saw that enormous tree light up between me and the radio loudspeaker more vividly than the things that appear on the television screen nowadays. The thing I remember best about the audio portion of the radio coverage was the United States Marine Band trumpeter who played each year as a solo O Holy Night and never got through it without suffering accidents on two or three high notes. That trumpeter must have known some awful secret about one of the Marine Corps' top generals to be chosen for this honor every late November or early December.

He reminds me of another aspect of Christmas that has shown gradual change down through the decades as well as some blessed stability. That's Christmas music, both sacred and secular. I have the impression that the current repertoire of Christmas carols and songs gradually expands because new compositions win favor faster than old ones become forgotten. But it's hard to be sure on this matter, because I must rely on my own unscientific observation for lack of any scholarly reference work on this topic.

I can think of only one or two pieces of Christmas music that seem to have fallen completely from favor in the more than a half-century of my yuletide listening. Hang Up the Baby's Stocking was a frequently performed ditty when I was a boy. But I hadn't heard it for decades until two Christmas<sup>s</sup> ago when Play It Again Ed Walker, a Washington radio personality, played a recording of it made by a popular vocalist in the 1940s or 1950s. That performance distorted the melody almost beyond recognition. I'm less certain about Star of the East, because I'm not sure if it was a national favorite when I was a boy or if it was a composition that happened to be greatly loved by my relatives and me. I owned it as a piano composition but I know there were words which could be sung to it. I haven't heard it performed or mentioned for at least three or four decades.

Jolly Old St. Nicholas seemed to be forgotten by everyone except me during a long series of Christmas seasons. But I've heard



it with increasing frequency these past few years and I even own a recording of it by, of all imaginable artists, Maurice Chevalier.

When I was small, my father used to sing a Christmas song that began with the words The Candles Were Shining. Alas, that must have been a Christmas song that had lost general popularity before my birth because I've never heard it from any other lips, I've been unable to find it in print, and I can't remember more than the first few words and the opening bars of the melody. I'd love to hear it again and I hope there are such things as Christmas singing in Heaven. I'm also curious about some other Christmas songs I've found in old collections of printed music which seem to have been totally forgotten by musicians by the time I started to listen. But it's hard to be sure if any given Christmas song was included in a collection of printed music because it was popular at one time or because the publisher knew the composer and used it as a favor to him. One good source of such yuletide songs which occasionally turns up in second-hand stores is The Book of a Thousand Songs. My copy is copyright in 1918. New to me were such songs as Christmas of Old, identified as a "Swiss air", a nice melody in triple time with words that recall God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen. Softly the Night Is Sleeping is another, attributed to A. T. Gardner (the book sometimes lists the poet rather than the composer with a song so I can't be sure about his function) and probably better suited for choral singing than as a solo.

I remember one Advent in the late 1930s or early 1940s when two new secular Christmas songs came on the charts at just about the same time: Santa Claus Is Coming to Town and The Santa Claus Express. The former has retained a toehold on the Christmas music market, although it isn't heard too frequently in the 1980s. The latter, which I liked better when both were new, was forgotten by the next Christmas and I haven't heard it since. I'm sure there must be dozens of Christmas songs that were published, quickly became popular, then almost as rapidly fell out of sight and hearing. Some of them might be worth another listen in modern times.

It's an accepted fact of the popular music industry that a Christmas song hit is the hardest type to produce, because there's such a short span of time in which it can be promoted before it goes out of season for ten months or so. Not too many Tin Pan Alley Christmas songs have become standards in my lifespan. Of course, there are Silver Bells from an old Bob Hope movie whose plot was only marginally about Christmas, Mel Tormé's The Christmas Song, a few of the so-called Burt carols (written by a jazz musician and sent to his friends at the rate of one per year on personalized Christmas cards and probably never intended to have the public fame they attained), and White Christmas, among a few others. There has been a welcome increase in the past quarter-century in the use of Christmas melodies from foreign lands over the air and on records. Fads in serious music composition have militated against the creation of Christmas songs from the longhairs, since dodecaphonic tonerows and musique concrete aren't too conducive to use in carols. I prefer not to think what a minimalist Christmas tune would be like.

One of the most famous songs associated with Christmas has always puzzled me. It's Jingle Bells whose title is almost always published as I've typed it, without a comma between the words. I can't understand the exact meaning of its celebrated opening words. Is "jingle bells" a command to the sleighbells to make a continuous



tinkling during the ride? If so, I believe there should be a comma between the two words of the imperative sentence, but I can't remember seeing it printed that way often. Or is it a declarative sentence with the subject and predicate inverted from their normal order, a simple statement of fact, that sleighbells jingle as the vehicle scoots over the snow? In English, verbs are quite shy and reluctant to usurp the place of the noun for the honor of starting a simple sentence. Usually, the verb is willing to lead off only if introduced by another word or two, like Here Comes the Bride or Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day. I am also unable to figure out how Jingle Bells became so inextricably linked with Christmas in the first place. The lyrics have no reference to the holiday season and almost half the nation isn't geographically suited for sleighing at Christmas time.

I was a deprived child in the Christmas season in one sense. I never experienced the delight of hearing a wandering group of carolers strike up Christmas songs outside our window, something that seemed to have taken place in every book and magazine story about yuletide that I read in my youth. For no apparent reason, the old custom of young people roving neighborhood streets and singing carols just before Christmas didn't occur in Hagerstown in my youth and it hasn't caught on since. My parents and I always looked forward instead to listening to Ernestine Schumann-Heink sing Stille Nacht over the radio each Christmas Eve.

Another Christmas custom that did exist in my youth has gone into serious decline in the Hagerstown area. That is the elaborate decorations with Christmas themes that most retail stores put into their show windows a month or more before December 25. Some of the largest stores made quite a production of their Christmas window trimmings, hanging drapes over the window while the displays were being put into place and publicizing in advance the day and the hour when the concealing folds would be removed and the full splendor of the yuletide display would burst upon local shoppers' eyes. Some stores did little more than squeeze as many items of merchandise suitable for gift purposes as possible into their show windows. But other establishments created less commercial displays: Santa and helpers creating playthings at the North Pole, or a typical family gathered around the fireplace to hang up stockings, or an animals' Christmas party, perhaps. Some window displays were automated to a considerable extent: little motors caused Santa to move parts of his body, electric trains scooted around constantly, lights twinkled in random fashion, and other fascinating actions occurred.

All this reached its peak in Hagerstown's downtown shopping district before the first shopping centers and malls began to open in this general area. Fortunately, the downtown window displays were still flourishing by the time I'd grown up and acquired a good camera. So I fell into the habit of preserving on color slides the best window displays each December. I was proud of the quality I attained, because photographing through the glass of a store window is very difficult. You get reflections of things behind you if you don't choose your position cannily (professional photographers use large panels of black paper or cloth behind the camera, but that's cheating) and light was a problem with the slow color films available in those years, since use of a flash would destroy the image in a flood of reflected bright light. In the late 1950s, everything began to go wrong for yuletide displays in local store windows. The



shopping centers began to spring up. Most stores in those outlying shopping areas didn't have display windows in the usual sense, and it made little sense to trim elaborately such windows as existed, since the only reason people would be walking out there was to shop. When the big shopping mall was built a couple of miles from town, it was even more lacking in orthodox show windows for display. Many downtown stores closed and others moved to the boondocks. Some of those that survive today in downtown Hagerstown no longer decorate their show windows at any season of the year, having either rendered them opaque or using them solely to provide a view of the insides. I doubt if there are more than a half-dozen Christmas display windows worth looking at today in the typical Christmas shopping season in the Hagerstown area. I hope my slides survive, because I suspect that not many other photographers took the trouble to record this almost lost yuletide art form.

On the other hand, I don't think the custom of decorating the exterior of homes at Christmas time had found much general favor in my boyhood around Hagerstown. I am shaky on this topic: we didn't have a car then and perhaps we didn't get around town enough at Christmas time to be aware of external yule light shows. But I have the impression that this particular manifestation of the Christmas spirit didn't become widely practised by the middle and lower classes until after World War Two. At my home, we didn't even put a wreath on the front door for the holidays, because that particular decoration had funereal connotations for my mother. I don't think we acquired electric candles to put inside windows facing the street until I was in my late teens or early twenties. Now, it's very pleasant to drive through suburban areas and even some of the older neighborhoods near the center of town just after dark in late December, to enjoy the colorful and sometimes ingenious outdoor lighting displays. You mustn't do it very long after dark, because that's when the drunks start driving.

The opposite trend has occurred for an indoor form of honoring Christmas around here. What everyone locally called undergrounds were numerous and popular when I was growing up. I don't know exactly how they acquired that name or if the same term applied to the phenomenon in any other parts of the nation. They were usually under something, the tree, to be sure, but the "ground" puzzles me. Only seventy miles away in Baltimore, they were always called Christmas gardens. In hundreds of local homes, there used to appear each Christmas an underground which might represent a winter landscape or a tiny village, usually with an electric train in a starring role. These ranged from quite simple arrangements in a corner of a room to tremendous accumulations of miniature complexities on a platform that might occupy most of an entire room. During our years on Prospect Street, our home always had the biggest underground in the block. It was elaborate enough to cause neighbor kids and even adults to pay a visit each year, thanks to my father's remarkable skill with electricity and his patience with small objects. But a few local residents created such enormous undergrounds that they received newspaper publicity and attracted visitors from all over town. Years ago, I narrated at length in Horizons the story of the biggest local underground, the one Harry Feigley spent six months of each year renovating and changing so visitors would have new things to see when the holidays arrived. His was so complex that he didn't take it apart after the viewing season. I'll never forget the appalling day after Christmas in the early 1930s when my



father and I made our annual saunter to the Feigley home and found the underground an appalling mass of destruction: twisted and torn model railroad tracks, small houses in pieces, hunks torn out of the landscape. Harry had been suffering from the Depression and his bad mood had caused him to reproduce what he remembered from his World War One service in France. A few undergrounds were joint ventures like those created by one or two of the city's volunteer fire companies. It must have been the trend toward apartment living and the smaller residences built in new suburban developments that caused undergrounds to become scarce. Maybe the shrinkage of model trains was also to blame: they had looked splendid in standard and even in O gauge but when Lionel and other manufacturers began to turn out smaller and smaller gauges, trains became almost invisible and insignificant in large undergrounds. Occasionally I hear about an isolated underground in the 1980s but there can't be many of them left around nowadays.

It wasn't an underground but rather a window display in a residence that helped keep the spirit of Christmas alive for me during much of the year in boyhood. When I was small, my mother often took me along on her visits to my Aunt Nora. The direct route to her home led through Hagerstown's black neighborhood, which was safe enough for a woman without adult male escort a half-century ago. Somewhere along the way, we would pass a very small house inhabited by a tiny black woman of great age, and in one of her windows she placed each year an array of almost invisibly tiny Christmas symbols under a bell or a candle or some such decoration. The fascination of this window consisted of the fact that it was still arrayed with its Christmas display for month after month following December 25. When the weather turned fine in the spring, we would approach that house with confidence that Christmas would still be visible in the window. When it became hot summer weather, uncertainty would prevail during the early stages of our trip to Aunt Nora, because the window might have turned bare. It was a great relief to find the display still in place during June and sometimes throughout July and August. Finally would come the occasion when we would pass that house and find the window bare of decorations. Perversely, I would feel a great bound of joy at that discovery, because the removal of the Christmas decorations was a dependable sign that another Christmas had begun to loom up in the not too distant future.

Today I feel frustrated because I don't think I'll ever know the identity of that woman or why she hung onto her Christmas window so long. Did she sense the happiness she gave some people by stretching out Christmas over more than half the year? Or was it her way of expressing rebellion against the conformity that caused Christmas decorations to vanish in January everywhere else? Or did she just put off doing things? I can't remember today the exact location of that house. If I went into that general area and began asking residents if anyone remembers the woman and knows why she did it, I'm afraid Hagerstown's black residents would modify downward their already low opinion of whitey's mental stability. The 21st century will apparently be forced to get along without that particular morsel of information about the 20th century.

Just up the street from Aunt Nora's home was Zion Reformed Church, whose bells had a special Christmas significance to Hagerstown. They had been ringing for services at the church since 1790, and long before my time, for many years in the 19th century they were the first loud sounds heard in Hagerstown on Christmas Day, because



Zion Church used to have a pre-dawn service every December 25, and roused its faithful at an untimely hour with the bells. My home was only about a half-mile from Zion Church and even though the pre-dawn worship had been changed to a midnight service on Christmas Eve by the time I came on the scene, it was nice to be within easy ear-shot of those historic bells. There had been a wonderful episode involving them in 1878 when a severe spring windstorm destroyed the steeple of Zion Church and the bells tumbled fifty feet or more to the ground. Against all expectations, they were found to be undamaged when removed from the rubble. But the congregation couldn't afford immediate rebuilding. The bells were taken to the church cellar for safekeeping until a new tower could be constructed. This virtually ruined Christmas preparations for most local residents, because they knew the arrival of the great day would not be signaled in the traditional way this year and perhaps for years to come. So many persons must have leaped to supernatural conclusions when they were awakened on Christmas morning by the familiar joyous pealing of the Zion Church bells. Braver elements in the population who hustled up the hill to the church to see if this was a particularly devious plot of the Devil found what had happened. Several young men in the congregation had secretly built a wooden frame large enough and strong enough to suspend the bells, then had stayed up all night to haul the bells out of the cellar and attach them to the framework. Now they were taking turns ringing the familiar peals.

A mile away at St. John's Lutheran Church there was another Christmas tradition. Four or five members of the Hagerstown Municipal Band, the same ones each year, clambered to the top of the tower of the Lutheran church each Christmas Eve. At midnight they played carols and hymns like the town pipers of old Europe until they ran out of wind or their valves froze up.

My static form of existence handicaps me when I write about clear toys. I'm not sure if they were a Christmas phenomenon restricted to a comparatively small part of the nation including Hagerstown, or if they were something that was available everywhere. I've never seen mention of them in nostalgia pieces about Christmas in national publications, and this leads me to suspect they may have been regional treasures. Clear toys were neither clear nor toys. They were candy molded by some recipe that produced semi-opaque shapes of animals, stars, and various other objects. It took much longer to eat a clear toy than to consume a large lollipop because they had greater mass, often stretching two or three inches in width or height. I don't remember any child in my neighborhood having a great fondness for eating clear toys. But everyone accepted the fact that it wasn't Christmas if there weren't a few clear toys lying around the house. Like so many kinds of candy in that era, clear toys were sold in unwrapped accumulations from bins in grocery stores and dime stores. So if they had a different official name, it couldn't be learned from the packaging. I haven't seen clear toys for sale for many years. I suspect they have become as obsolete as sugarplums and the huge hunks of solid chocolate from which candy counter clerks once chipped off enough to fill a customer's order.

Vanished into the same limbo as clear toys are all the men and women who made door to door rounds before each Christmas to sell stuff related to the holidays. Farmers created wreaths and other decorations of greens and peddled them throughout Hagerstown, begin-



ning in early December. Long before the farmers arrived, you had received visits from individuals who had believed magazine advertisements promising wealth and easy income by door-to-door salesmanship of Christmas cards. I can't remember exactly where the church calendar saleswoman fitted chronologically into these knocks on the door, but she always showed up long before January 1 with a sample of the full-color calendar for the coming year with a different religious painting above the days of each month. I believe there were also Christmas tree merchants who drove their trucks through residential areas for the benefit of anyone who couldn't or wouldn't haul a tree home from vacant lots where they were put on sale in many parts of town. Now I live alone and I'm not home all the time, so I might not know about an isolated salesperson with Christmas-related offerings who came calling when I was out, but I know I haven't been at home when someone tried to sell me something for yuletide during the past three or four years.

Fortunately, Christmas cards haven't joined the vanishing act of clear toys and Christmas salespersons. A lot of my earliest memories of the holidays are linked with Christmas cards. My mother loved the task of purchasing and preparing them for the mails. Long before it was time to drop them into a mailbox, she would sort through the cards she had purchased, writing in pencil on the gummed band of the envelopes the names of those for whom cards seemed most appropriate, sometimes deciding later to change destinations of some of the cards. This system permitted her to change her mind without ruining an addressed envelope. Then there was the great question each Christmas: should we seal our cards or send them unsealed? For many years when first class postage's basic rate was three cents, the postal people permitted Christmas cards to be sent for two cents, provided the envelopes weren't sealed and no writing other than the signature of the sender was on the card. Yuletide philosophers debated long and hard the ethics of whether it was too cheap to send unsealed cards or too extravagant to seal them. And one of the most dramatic signals that Christmas was finally imminent after the long wait was the stepped-up delivery rate during the final days of the Christmas card season. Normally there were two deliveries every day to residential areas in those years, but the mailman came three or four times a day during the peak of the yule card barrage, often making a final delivery long after dark had fallen on Christmas Eve to make certain that nothing resembling a Christmas card would languish undelivered in the post office until December 26.

It's a sad commentary on the passing of years, the failing of memory, and the shifts of interest that we can't remember in old age all the Christmas gifts we received as children. I'm sure if someone had been mean enough to tell me when I was six or eight years old that I would someday forget completely this or that long-wanted wonderful Christmas gift I'd just opened, I would have reacted with scorn and disbelief. A gift that was the most important thing in my entire universe on that particular Christmas Day couldn't ever grow faint and later fade completely from memory, I would have been sure. Alas, no matter how badly I had wanted those gifts and how happy they made me and how long I played with them, how grateful I was to my parents and other relatives and friends for giving them to me, by now I can recall with certainty only a small fraction of all I received. Worse, I can't pin down to one particular Christmas the coming of the minority of gifts I can still remember, except in a few instances. To a person of my lifelong packrat tendencies, it's dis-



maying to know that the majority of those treasured presents no longer exist or are no longer in my possession.

Fortunately, there are happy exceptions to this unhappy demonstration of human fallibility. I'm sure I still own most of the books I received as Christmas gifts, because I rarely loaned out my books, I took good care of them, and I retained books even after I'd passed the age level for which they were written. The only trouble is, I can't be sure which of those books from childhood came at Christmas time and which were gifts for my birthday or some other special occasion. I know my magnificently illustrated, luxuriously bound copy of Tom Sawyer was a Christmas gift because of the overwhelming impression from the most luxurious edition I'd ever seen. Just last year, I opened a box for the first time in several decades and found it filled with old books, one of which bore an inscription proving it to have been a Christmas gift in a specific year.

Most gifts involving manual skills have stuck in my memory because of the embarrassment they caused me. I was almost as clumsy with my hands as a child as I am as an old man. So if I received a set of Lincoln Logs one childhood Christmas season, I would do my best to master the art of building things with it, but my first log cabin would still have its roof uncompleted by the following Christmas, when I might receive an Erector set, and I wouldn't have figured out how to cause a right angle intersection of two beams to remain a right angle when subjected to gravity before yet another Christmas might bestow a Tinkertoy set to create still more proof of my incapacity.

One of my aunts inadvertently caused me to remember other gifts. She used to arrive for a Christmas visit with a gift package bearing my name. Before handing it over, she would shake her head sadly and tell my parents that I was so hard to buy for. The first two or three Christmases I heard this revelation, I had visions of my aunt having gone into a local store, having chosen a toy or a book for me, having given it to a clerk to be wrapped, and having been told by the clerk: "Look, if you're buying this for that little Warner kid, I'm not going to sell it to you. And it's no use trying to buy something for him in any other store, either." However, each year my Christmas gift from this aunt turned out to be the same thing, a white shirt. Eventually my aunt's ordeal with her difficult-to-buy-for nephew and her final inspiration to purchase a white shirt became a family joke. This went on even after I'd attained my final dimensions and my aunt couldn't continue to complain about my obstinate failure to wear the same size shirt as I had the previous Christmas. Finally, just a few years ago my aunt called me a few weeks before Christmas, to tell me she was afraid she couldn't continue to exchange Christmas gifts because of limitations of her retirement income and inflation. It ruined that Christmas for me, because I feared I'd failed to recognize poverty just as several FAPA members think I do. I didn't cheer up until three months later when my aunt, whom I'd been unable to contact for quite a while, phoned me to tell me she was just back from her Caribbean cruise.

My favorite uncle gave me Christmas gifts several times which have remained in my hands, unchanged in appearance but very different in value. My Uncle Ben presented me with gold coins as Christmas gifts in the last years before the nation stopped minting them. Most boys would have spent them before New Year's Day. But I'd read so much about all the hard work and dangers fictional heroes and villains had endured to acquire gold. Even though I wasn't sure



why the characters in my boys' books wanted gold, I decided that grownups wouldn't go to all that trouble without some good reason. So I saved the coins. When I recently looked up one of them in a listing of prices paid by dealers, I was amazed at how much it is worth. Please don't point out that it would also have multiplied in value many times in more than a half-century through interest payments, if I'd deposited the coin in a savings account at the bank. If I'd done that, the money would have been mostly lost when the bank where the Warners kept their savings failed during the Depression and depositors got back only about 30% on each dollar eventually. The gold coins are in a bank today, but in a safe deposit box.

Another gift I remember clearly was my toy piano. I must have received it when I was eight or nine years old, because the real piano I play today was a gift for my tenth birthday and was chosen for me because of the diligence and time I'd devoted to the toy instrument. As I remember it, the toy piano had a range of two octaves, with keys that struck a sort of xylophone arrangement and produced a tinkling but fairly in-tune sound. My father had saved a lot of sheet music from the popular songs of his youth, there was a hymn book or two in the house, and a short stack of songbooks of various types. I spent vast amounts of time using these to pick out melodies on that little piano and I think I managed some sketchy chords with my left hand, too. But there were two problems. The keys were so much smaller than those on a normal piano and the keyboard was so short that I couldn't use both hands at the same time. There just wasn't room for them. And the black keys were only strips of black paint on the white keys. So the toy piano could be played only in the key of C major. I didn't know how to transpose music written in other keys to C major, so any melodies I tried to play in other keys lacked sharps and flats at the proper pitch. I didn't even know I was inadvertently playing in the Lydian mode when I played music written in F major with a B natural instead of B flat. I tried pressing the F and G keys simultaneously in the hope that this would permit me to play F sharp and thus be able to use music written in G major, but it didn't sound right. When I received my tenth birthday present, I had no trouble adjusting my fingers to the real piano's full-sized keys but my right hand had attained so much more dexterity than my left hand that it was years before I attained anything approaching equality of the two hands.

Consistent with my general status of mental confusion, I'm not sure if some other Christmas gifts survive in boxes on the cellar and attic which I haven't opened in decades. I suspect my father may have preserved and packed for the move to Summit Avenue some of the better playthings that nobody had had the heart to throw away or give away after I outgrew them. And I'm still using daily several Christmas gifts that derive from slightly later Christmases: an amazing tube-powered AM-FM Zenith radio from the 1940s which has needed next to no repairs, for instance, and the desk at which I've committed almost all my fanac since the early 1940s.

Weirdly enough, I still have one of the Christmas gifts that I gave as a very small boy. When my grandmother was in her nineties and suspected she might not be with us much longer, she presented me one day with something I thought I had never seen before: a tiny metal horn fashioned after a bugle, which emits one clear note when blown and was manufactured for hanging on a Christmas tree. She told me she had been putting it on her Christmas tree ever since the



December when it was my Christmas gift to Momo, the way I said Grandma when I was tiny. Last year my cleaning lady trimmed an artificial tree for me but I was afraid to put the little bangle on a branch because it might have fallen or gotten lost during the untrimming process. I keep it in a compartment of a small stand in my living room so it will be close to me much of each day as a concrete link with my distant past.

Just the summer before last, another link with Christmas Past snapped for me. The Schindel-Rohrer hardware store in downtown Hagerstown ended its existence. For the past quarter-century or longer it had engaged only in wholesale hardware transactions until in its death throes it tried to get customer transfusion by inviting retail purchases and cutting prices radically. But earlier in the century, it was the biggest retail establishment in town throughout the year, and from October through December it was the biggest local source of Christmas toys. The entire second floor of its large building was given over each autumn exclusively to toy display. The front end of this floor was consecrated to an all-out display of Lionel trains which must have included almost everything in the firm's current catalog. Some of the trains were constantly running around a complex of switched tracks while others were in static displays in rows on the walls. The first pilgrimage of the season to this toyland was a significant preliminary to each Christmas because it gave me so many ideas for my want list.

If I survive, if FAPA survives, and if it is still legal to use the mails for material about Christmas, I'll continue this next November with stuff about Christmas at school, Santa Claus and me, Christmas at church, and assorted other matters.

# The Worst of Martin

Meet Aloysius Quibble D. Twerp  
He is an expert hectographer  
Of scienti-fan papers  
For the ignorant rabble  
Who don't understand  
His modern art, and stuff  
Like no punctuation and capitals  
Or nude purple half-tones of women with typewriter heads--  
They think he's silly--slap-happy.  
But A. Quibble D. Twerp is a genius.  
He's sure of it.  
He's not of this age.  
A hundred years from now  
People will exclaim over his work:  
"He was ahead of his time."  
"Genius—  
"Misunderstood."  
A. Quibble D. Twerp hectographs  
And hectographs  
Safe in his knowledge of things to come  
While the genius pours out of him  
Like the dripping of gilijex from a cracked Plutonian  
Aardferk's egg  
Which he is, no doubt....

(From Satyric, March, 1942, first issue)