A SUCCESSFUL YEAR COMES TO A CLOSE: From the standpoint of the number of puppies whelped this year has been outstanding. Not only numerically but also from the quality of the youngsters and also from the way they sold and the type of people who purchased them. Great credit must go to Fred Leary for his care in breeding, his plugging of the advantages of Fellowship membership and his equal care in the selection of the type of people to whom he offered his dogs. This is in no way an effort to be snobbish but it does us all a favor to see our breed owned by people of substance. Even in this most democratic of all nations it is true that the ownership of a dog, a car or a certain type of ball point pen carries more weight if the purchaser happens to be in the arts, the sciences or otherwise in the public eye.

There is no logic perhaps in the feeling that actress Rita Gam will love the Briard she received as a Christmas present to any greater extent than if her name was not well known. Yet the facts are that our breed will probably benefit from the association.

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BRIARDS AND COLD WEATHER: This is being written when the roads of Northern New Jersey can be used only with care. Drifts from the unseasonable snow storm are piled on each side of the alley we had to cut to reach the office. To reach the kennel buildings took some doing and we found one dog huddled in a corner of the box. The indications were that she was cold and miserable and something should be done about it. A suggestion was made to shift her to another kennel where there is a stove. What happened? The door was opened and this "cold, miserable dog" was let loose.
She gleefully leaped into the deepest drift in sight, rolled in it, dashed madly through the field until she was so covered that she looked like a Polar bear and had the time of her life. She was finally coaxed into the warm kennel but, sometime later when we opened her door to see how she was coming along, she again dashed out, ran to her "cold miserable" kennel and barked to have the door opened. It is this sort of thing that makes the experienced dog owner a bit unsympathetic when people insist that a dog must lie on a perfumed cushion and be served its meals from imported china.

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SOME INFORMATION ABOUT DOGGY THINGS: A recent issue of Gaines Dog Research Progress is devoted to canine digestion and the point is brought out that a dog's teeth are primarily used for seizing and cutting food. While broken or infected teeth will cause pain and the possibility of a spreading infection, it has little to do with actual digestion. The dog swallows his food in chunks and, unlike the human, does not have to grind it into a pulp before it passes to the stomach. His diet is largely protein and if he did chew it into the semi-liquid state as is the case with the human, he would suffer from digestive troubles. Liquid, or semi-liquid foods do not remain in the stomach long enough for proper digestion to take place. It is further stated that the saliva of a dog or cat contains no digestive enzymes. It appears that the main function of saliva is to act as a lubricant to facilitate swallowing.

Another issue of the same publication relates the experiences of many researchers in discovering that certain types of what we commonly call "summer eczema" are caused by what human doctors call neurodermatitis. One researcher reported an immediate cure of a skin disorder when a dog from a kennel was taken to a training class. It appeared that he had been left behind when his kennel mates were taken out and felt neglected. As soon as people gave him some special attention his skin cleared up. In another case it was found that skin troubles cleared up spontaneously when a dog that had been bored when left alone was taken to a kennel where he had companionship.

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DO THEY PREFER OTHER DOGS TO US: With all the talk about how dogs must have human companionship, it is sometimes a shock to find that our pets seem content when they are kenneled with other dogs. Most boarding kennel operators will verify this. People worry if poor Towser by necessity must be left for a few days in a boarding kennel. They expect to come back and be greeted with enthusiasm. Sometimes they are. In many cases they almost have to drag Towser to the car for he has been having the time of his life exchanging gossip with his new friends on the other side of the fence. If this applies to "regular dogs", can it be that the same thing can be said of milady's Pinky Winky carried in her muff and adorned with a mink collar. Or are such remarks heresy that should not be published in a dog-lovers bulletin?
"POINT PUSHERS": A certain segment of the dog show world is obsessed by the drive for points. For the professional breeder and puppy peddler, points probably do mean something in the way of extra cash. In other words, professionalism, no matter whether you give it some other pretty name or not. Gone is all of the satisfaction you get from spending a few hours at a show, getting a ribbon or two and giving your dog an extra pat on the head. All the fun goes out of showing and it becomes a grim affair which ends up in either bitter disappointment or the accumulation of another of those wonderful championship points.

Actually the award of a championship certificate -- and this writer has a dozen or so of them -- takes all the fun out of showing. The dog can no longer be shown in the regular classes, he can no longer look forward to "going through the classes" nor even to get a lot of satisfaction by being awarded a second or third prize. He is destined for the Specials Class where he is supposed to compete only against his peers.

All of which is unadulterated hocus. Champion dogs are a dime a dozen. We know of several Champion Briards that never truly deserved a second prize in good competition. Kipling said something about there being "Nine and twenty ways of constructing tribal lays" and we would like to add that there are even more ways of making a champion if you know the ropes. The simplest way is to gather a few Briards of very dubious quality and turn them over to a professional handler to take out over the circuit. With this group of tenth rate dogs you include one that at least has the proper number of legs, one on each corner. You can then advertise that your dog "Went through to his championship in three shows". It may bring you in a bit of kennel income but it is about as sporting as shooting trapped sparrows.

The writer happens to be somewhat familiar with the standard of a certain breed of dog -- not Briards -- where one of the main points is the coat markings. In a recent issue of a famous dog magazine are two photos of a pair of recently crowned champions. We will admit that a photograph will often fail to do justice to conformation but they cannot botch up markings. Both of these champions come about as far from complying with the standard as one could get and still be able to even identify the breed. There are judges who would refuse to award any ribbon to the animals yet they are now champions! How they ever got the title is a matter for conjecture.

If you are one of those who cannot enjoy life without boasting of the number of points you have collected, the best advice that can be offered is to get out of Briards. Get yourself one of the popular breeds, hire a professional handler -- he will take over without your even bothering to ever see the dogs -- and you will get points and championships and all sorts of things except sportsmanship.