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THEATRE

JOWN IN THE FOREST SOMETHING STIRRED!!!

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—with its Gilbertian habit of pastoral of The Foresters: repetition—responds: "He'll tell tara- Titania: Pertest of our flickering mob, diddles when he's a bad Bart." Robin on the falsest of fiddles." It sounds very much like the piece at the Shaftesbury the programme, and becomes Twang!! the snapping of a bowstring. (with two) in a record of Lionel Bart's Some of the names on the Shaftesbury have a rough idea of the title.

called Son of Twang."

Sherwood, every leaf and twig.) Little one of a figure moulded from plasticine. enough remained for Mr. Bart to do. has done it very badly.

dead tree, and its company's loyal pro- must remain a puzzle to other lands. fessionalism cannot aid it. James Booth, of England rested on her frail little illustrates one of the alarming things-

WARDS the end of the first front of them. That said, Mr. Bart need Ruddigore, Robin Oak-sings, "When I'm a with the Robin Hood story; I cherish will tell tara- some of the unluckiest lines Tennyson diddles," to which the chorus ever wrote, those from his Sherwood

Wouldst thou call my Oberon Ob? goes on to something about "a bad part First Fairy: Nay, an please your Elfin

Never Ob before his face. Theatre which is called Twang (without Really, it sounds like Twang with any an exclamation mark) on the cover of number of exclamation marks. One hears

work on an inner page. In the last news- programme are Alan-a-Dale, Will paper advertisement I saw it was Scarlett, Friar Tuck, Robin Hood, the Twang!!! (with three): anyway, we do Sheriff of Nottingham, and Maid Marian. The Palladium programme offers Little Mr. Bart, I feel unhappily, has had John, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet, Mutch only a rough idea of his piece. Though the Miller, Allan-a-Dale, Maid Marion, there had been advance stories of pro- the Sheriff of Nottingham, and Robin vincial chaos, we had hoped for a possible Hood—a few different spellings but the surprise in London. No luck: it was a sad same people, and more or less the same night from the moment when down in arrows, though this time the bowstring the forest something stirred, and a first does not break. The piece is Babes in arrow twanged into its tree. Or, indeed, the Wood, a straightforward pantomime from an earlier moment when there (no exclamation marks), with several fluttered from the programme a mys- other personages that might have helped terious slip announcing that two of the Shaftesbury night: Big-Hearted "song items" were "now in a new show Martha, for one (she enters on a flying umbrella) or Bonzo the Dog.

The present piece, as you may have Pantomime, that wild game of inguessed, is about Robin Hood ("Wel-consequences, thriving upon irrelevance come to Sherwood Forest, world of of any sort, has always been able to legend and song "). Everybody reports contain and develop the Robin Hood for duty: all the outlaws; Maid Marian, legend. The man is a natural Principal though she can never have had so thin a Boy, especially now when traditions are shadow of a part; the superciliously often put by and Principal Boys can be cawing Sheriff of Nottingham; and at the male. At the Palladium he is Frank Ifield, end, King Richard himself, returned who enjoys singing more than acting, but from the wars pantomime-fashion. A who can rescue a pair of Babes (these are first arrival is the sinister Guy of Gisborne named Peter and Pauline) with the best (that good actor, Howard Goorney). My of them. Very well. Still, in pantomime, mind flicked back to a scene in Tom trimmings have always counted most, Sawyer when Joe Harper as Guy, waving the gags and falls and the corps-de-bally, his lath sword, said to Tom, as Robin: the ageless stuff of a Christmas rally, "Then art thou indeed that famous where reason totters and the comic rules, outlaw? Right gladly will I dispute with nonsense triumphant at a feast of fools thee the passes of the merry wood. Have —as somebody said, overcome by pantoat thee!" On the whole, the dialogue rhyme, of which there is little at the in Twain is better than in Twang Palladium this season. But practically (with any preferred group of exclamation everything else arrives, and especially a surge of comedians: Arthur Askey, over-Lionel Bart, presumably, had seen in whelmingly bland and skirted; Sidney the Robin Hood story material for an James and Kenneth Connor as the not extravaganza that would laugh at the very relentless robbers (who get, to no entire Sherwood business. But this, one's surprise, into a village school on the somewhere or other, is an annual theatre way); and Roy Kinnear, who is called the chore. (And television has also studied Sheriff's Page and who again can remind

Babes in the Wood—even to anyone though one must now relate that, with a for whom panto-glory has dimmed—is a libretto by Harvey Orkin and himself, wholly competent affair: a specimen of and his own score and "songwords," he the oddest of our indigenous seasonal romps ("Wanted, Singing Baron, ex-The thing indeed is as hollow as a perienced, good feed "), and one that

We can doubt whether there has been who must have been startled to find any pantomime on the planet Skaro, himself cast as Robin, even a mock- though once the Daleks are re-powered heroic Robin, and Barbara Windsor as a —as inevitably they will be—they will squeakily lisping platinum blonde named probably consider the idea: a Dalek Delphina (she says she had a Cockney Twankey should be a sight, and maybe a nanny) are usually around the place; and clanger. I have brooded about the Bernard Bresslaw is an outlaw massively creatures because they are now appearing glum. We have a masque and some (for matinees) on the Wyndham's Theatre morris dancing, a flurry of disguises stage in a play entitled The Curse of (Robin is practically anybody), such a the Daleks, by David Whitaker and line as "If only she knew that the future Terry Nation. The programme cover shoulder! ", and several determined tunes a cross between an embossed conning with "songwords" to match. The Oliver tower, an angry pillarbox, and a mobile Messel sets are the night's real pleasures; pepperpot fitted with vicious probes.



Twang (Shaftesbury) adds Delphina (Barbara Windsor) and "song items" (by Lionel Bart) to the Robin Hood legend, and exhibits James Booth as Robin and Bernard Bresslaw as Little John.



The Curse of the Daleks (Wyndham's) consists in their having been put out of commission for 50 and we must regret the evolutions in In speech a Dalek can sound like the years. But before the matinee is over, they clang briskly and menacingly to life again.



clusively of female Principal Boys) to singer Frank Ifield (above).

Enlisted among the traditional pantomime comedians are Roy

right), overwhelmingly bland and skirted, watches over the Babes
Pauline and Peter (played by Roberta Rex and Derek Lamden).

Babes in the Wood (Palladium), better than Twang at containing Kinnear (below left) as the Sheriff's Page and Jimmy Kaye as the Robin Hood story, gives Robin's role (once the province ex- Bonzo the Dog. Arthur Askey's Big-Hearted Martha (below





distant noise of slow and menacing

typewriters. static electricity. The dramatists discuss less genuinely frightening than the old this in detail; but all I know is that the (and outmoded) robots of R.U.R., they Daleks, who have been out of com- clang away briskly; Gillian Howell, the mission for 50 years, suddenly come alive. director, has sustained the tensions; the It is very awkward for the mixed crew cast never lets her down; and the proand passenger list of the space ship gramme invites us all to search for little Starfinder which has landed on Skaro, glass cubes, twice the size of a lump of but matters work out blithely by the sugar, that may be hidden in a clump of end of a play in which every second grass, or lying at the base of a tree . . . I person is somebody else (I am not speak- forgot to say that the planet Skaro is in ing of the leader of the race of Thais, or the next universe but one. Mr. Bart his sister, because we all know-or do might profitably send up a company with we?—that a Thai is just that).

The piece loiters along at first; it needs a Dalek to set it in real motion. Apparently they are powered by Though these things seem to me to be Son of Twang (four exclamation marks).