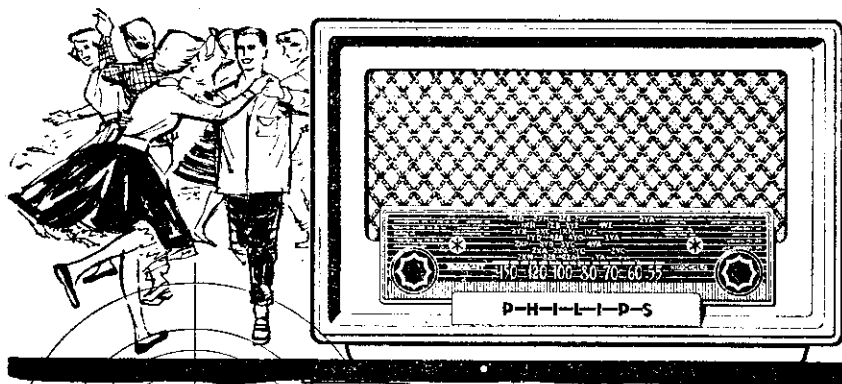


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NOVEMBER 22, 1957

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The Dog in the Sputnik

MILLIONS of words have already been written and spoken about the dog in the sputnik. Much of the hubbub is a reaction from shock, and has taken forms that are characteristic in different countries. Some people, not unduly sentimental, have said that the news upset them, though they could not say why. The sentimentalists, who are very numerous in Anglo-Saxon countries, have known exactly what they thought; and their cry against "cruelty," taken up and echoed across the world, has made more noise than is usually heard in protest against the oppression of a human minority. Dog-lovers of the world have even been asked to unite in moments of silence—a suggestion which perhaps should be left without comment. And yet, in all the circumstances, a touch of delirium is understandable.

The Russians have produced a scientific marvel which, in the view of experts, may indicate that the invasion of space is now on its way to becoming a practical enterprise. Their first sputnik provoked a long gasp of amazement and sent people hurrying to their windows for neck-craning vigils; but the satellite was no more than a small object that had been catapulted into space: its "bleep-bleep" proclaimed a severely mechanical existence. Suddenly, however, the impersonal conception of space was shattered. The second satellite was much larger than the first; and it contained a dog. One small creature, 900 miles above the earth and hurtling in orbit at a fantastic speed, seemed to have made space habitable. Its heart beats were being transmitted to listening posts; the pulsing of its blood was an actual projection of life beyond frontiers that had remained out of reach until this point in history. At such a moment men and women could only stop and wonder—and look involuntarily upwards.

Much of the comment which followed the event showed how profoundly people had been affected. For some, perhaps, it was

almost a relief to be able to worry about the dog. It kept the imagination tethered to what was known and familiar, and it supplied an outlet for feelings that had been aroused by the launching of Sputnik 1. And how typical of human experience that the first satellite with a living creature in it should be the centre of an argument! People who see space travel as a way of escape are forgetting what angry dust it is that will make the journey. The hold upon space is tightening with every new projection of egotism: already there have been strange gestures by showmen and exhibitionists. As the first exhilaration fades, and human nature incorrigibly asserts itself, we see that life in the space age is not going to be very different from what it has always been. And indeed there are good reasons why the nations should not allow themselves to be seduced by distant prospects.

It is possible that in acknowledging the triumphs of the Russians we shall over-estimate their scientific power. But their achievements are formidable, and if experts believe that a rocket could be sent to the moon it is obvious that targets much closer—as close as New York and Washington—must now be within range of guided missiles. The invasion of space is about to begin while national rivalries, and especially the great schism between east and west, are unresolved. This could mean an extension of conflict, or of its danger, beyond the earth itself; but it is much more likely to intensify the danger at home. If mankind is destined to move out into space, the adventure will require the nations' collective wealth and energy; and there seems little hope that unity can be reached by agreement. If humanity remains true to its history, the journey into space may have to be postponed while men decide among themselves who shall have possession of the earth. And that, of course, could mean that the journey will never begin.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 22, 1957.