

Missing, Presumed Dead

AN earnest note came today from a Riccarton reader begging me not to shoot Mac but to ask a veterinary surgeon to give him an injection. I am not sure that it is kinder to have a dog put to sleep by a stranger than to send a bullet into his brain when he is asleep in his own environment; but it is a

FEBRUARY 9 decision I have no longer to make. Mac disappeared five weeks ago, and must now be presumed to be dead. How he died, and where, no one will tell me.

It is, of course, possible that no one knows. He may have wandered away, and on and on, and died in a thicket or a gully. There is a theory that dogs sometimes do this when the end approaches, and are not seen again. It is, I suspect, the dying elephant theory, or mystery, with about the same basis in fact. Left to themselves dogs would die as, in the end, men usually do, without warning, preparation, or clear awareness. But they are not often left to themselves. On farms they are usually removed before nature has quite finished with them, and we therefore do not know

by "SUNDOWNER"

what the last move would be. All I know myself is that, the two dogs I have allowed to continue to the end died as near to me as they could get—one on the doorstep and one under the floor.

A simpler explanation is that Mac wandered out on to the roadway, and being deaf and half blind, was run over by a car. But this does not satisfy me either. Even if the driver stopped to investigate he would not be likely, however guilty he felt, to carry the body away or bury it. In this case he would have had no responsibility at all, but even if he did not know that he would either drive on without stopping or stop just long enough to throw the body into a ditch or under a hedge. Long before five weeks had passed it would have announced its hiding place.

If Mac is dead and buried there is someone not far away who knows where he is and how he got there; but I don't expect him to tell me. I am not myself tolerant of wandering dogs, and I don't expect my neighbours to be tolerant either, however harmless they must have known Mac to be with his slow trot and toothless jaws. If one of them



"Mac, who knew neither fear nor discretion"

shot him I hope he had a good rifle and a straight eye.

But I can think of another explanation that implicates no one. It is possible that Mac, blind, deaf, and toothless though he was, heard a siren call and followed her to his death. One passed this way the day before he disappeared, and it is very likely, I think,

that he became aware of her presence and followed. If he did, the rest can be imagined—the steadily increasing following, the queue, the fights, and Mac, who knew neither fear nor discretion, worried to death in life's last madness.

A CORRESPONDENT who remembers that I "scoffed some months ago at rook parlaments" suggests that I "read the evidence" in the latest issue of *The Countryman*. I had read it before this advice reached me, and today, to make sure that I had missed nothing, I have read it again. But I would not

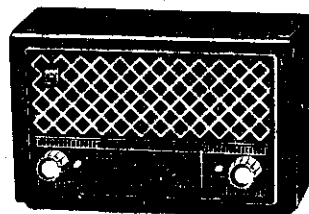
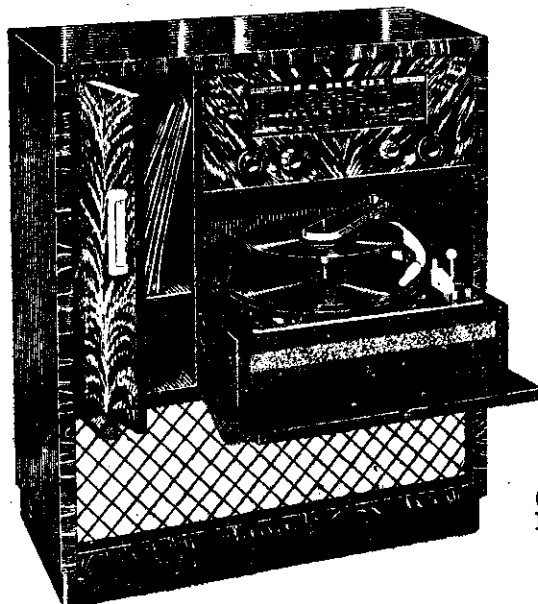
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call it evidence. It is a series of eye-witness descriptions of incidents that the reporters are all as sure they saw as Luther was sure that he saw the Devil. I don't doubt that Luther saw the Devil—the brooding, agitated, mystical Luther whose mind projected the image on the wall. Nor do I doubt that *The Countryman's* correspondents saw what they thought and said they saw. They saw a circle of rooks, probably excited and noisy, surrounding one or more other rooks which (in every case but one) they pecked to death. They did not see a court or parliament of rooks or rooks bringing other rooks to trial and sentence. They may have seen a colony of rooks killing intruders from

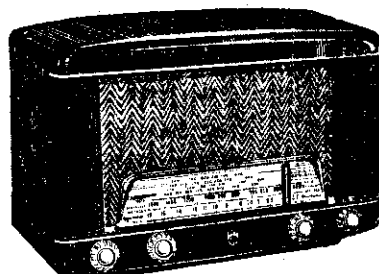
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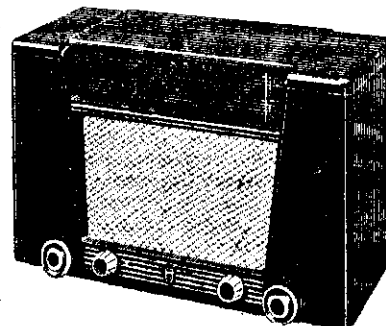


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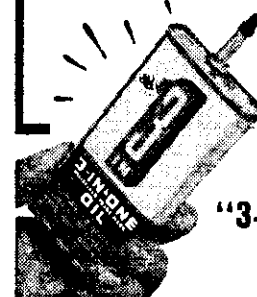


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