

# I WAS DEEPLY ROOTED

(Written for "The Listener" by R.L.M.)

I WAS sitting in the library mugging up American Politics for an essay I had to do, when I heard someone say "Excuse me, but do you know how to work out the square root of a number?"

I admit that this baffled me a little. When you're sitting in the Library reading about American politics, you simply don't expect anyone to have such bad taste as to request information—especially information pertaining to the lower sphere of knowledge. And I was just on the point of discovering the exact relationship of President to Congress, too. However, when I looked up and found the questioner was a rather bright young lass wearing a bow in her hair and a puzzled expression, I decided that it was very meet, right, and my bounden duty to help her in her trouble. The damsel-in-distress touch always works, doesn't it?

Then I realised with awful suddenness that I didn't know how to find the square root of a number. It was like those General Knowledge tests—you

feel you ought to know the answer, but you never do know it, and then you read the answer and you say, of course!

Having realised that I didn't know how to do it, I asked myself, "Should I admit my ignorance, or should I play for time, in the hope that divine afflatus might descend?" I decided to stall.

"Why do you want to know?" I asked, and immediately I'd spoken, I realised how silly it sounded. That was her business, anyway. And besides, she might be "doing" abnormal psychology or something like that, and it might embarrass her to answer.

"I'm doing Education III," said the girl. (That was a relief, anyway.) "There's a lot of statistical stuff in it. I want to find the square root of one point four nine five three."

The "point" got me. If it had just been plain one four nine five three I might have tried to bluff it out—but one point four, etc.—oh no! The divine afflatus stopped in its descent, went into reverse, and shot upwards out of sight.

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said, trying to make my tone of voice mean

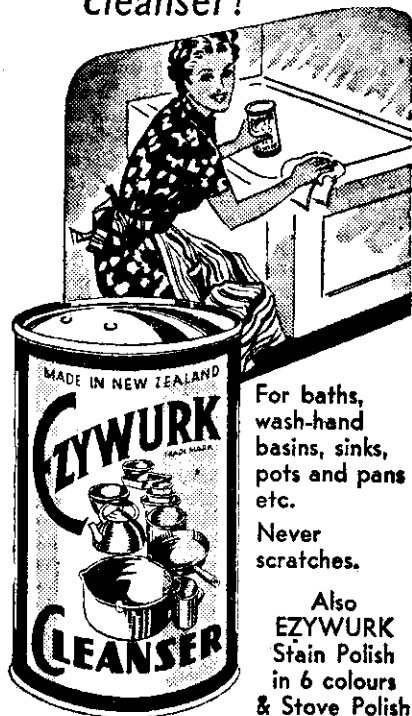


"Isn't it funny, but I, who know so much about everything else, simply don't know how to do such a simple thing as work out the square root of a number." It was a valiant effort, but I think it failed. I haven't yet reached that pinnacle of fame, where you can say that you don't know something, and everybody thinks you're being funny.

"I think you divide it in pairs from the left," said the educationist helpfully. "Or is it from the right? I can't remember."

(continued on next page)

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