

SPELL A WORD AND EARN £7-10-0

How To Make Money At "Spelling Jackpots"

By J.G.M.

IT'S one thing to sit by your fireside and listen to people being submitted to the ordeal known as "Spelling Jackpots"; it's quite another to be one of the people gruelled. I know, because the other Monday night at 2ZB, I was gruelled.

I went along in nervous anticipation, I spelt out three words in a trembling voice, I emerged from the studio eight shillings to the good. In fact, I left with a highly inflated opinion of my ability to spell.

I must confess I do not know why "Spelling Jackpots" are called "Spelling Jackpots," or where and how they originated. The idea almost certainly had its birth in America, the home of radio stunts such as "Ask-it Basket," "Tongue Twisters" and "Information Please" sessions.

As most people who listen to the session know by now, the nucleus of the idea is a class, usually of six people, and an announcer who supervises the drawing of the numbers which allot the words to be spelt, explains the words to the trembling participants, and administers the gong.

There are 18 words (three to each contestant), with varying values placed on them. Each word is numbered, and in succession, the contestants draw numbers. They are given ten seconds to spell the word into the microphone. If they spell it correctly, they win the value of the word; if they muff it, the gong booms and the word is "jack-potted" up in value for the next week's session.

The result is that over a period, the 18 words will range in value from "re-joice," worth ninepence, to "platyrrhine" which, owing to several previous misspellings, may be worth as much as £4 10s or even more. Needless to say, the words are changed every session.

The evening I am in the studio there is a grim undertone. One word is worth £7 10s. This is due to an interesting progression of mistakes. One word was worth 30s; next session it was "tintinabulation" and it was worth £2; then "prestidigitation" was worth £3; "lachrymation" £3 10s; "reconnaissance" £4; "Phenolphthalein" £4 10s; "idiosyncrasy" £5; "eisteddfod" £5 10s; "psittacosis" £6.

And to-night, word number 14 we all knew was worth £7 10s.

There are six of us, as I said, in the class; three young women, all shifting uneasily in their chairs, and trying not to look nervous; and three men behaving similarly.

Off We Go

A red light shows, and off we go. The first contestant shuffles up to the microphone, selects a number, and the announcer (Lane Patterson to-night, taking the place of Rex Walden, who usually conducts it), gives her the word, which is "puncheon," tells her that it is worth a shilling if she can spell it correctly, and, just to help her along, explains that it means a large cask.

She muffs it, the gong goes, and the shilling remains intact.

Then come a succession of tricky words like "amylaceous," "rhotacize," "Aphyllous," and when it comes to my turn, the gong has gone five times and no one has collected a penny.

I take a deep breath, draw a number—"innutritious"—a "sitter." I spell it out in one breath and collect two shillings and sixpence amid polite applause.

Second time round the others have better luck, and I myself (gaining confidence by now), collect another two and six for spelling "heinous." More applause.

Then, late in the third round, the contestant on my right, a small man in a brown suit, draws number 14, "the word." It is "trinitrotoluene," and as he prepares to spell it, there is noticeable tension in the studio. Quickly and accurately he rattles through it. Seven pounds ten shillings for five seconds work. Loud applause.

To cap the proceedings, I collect three shillings for spelling "vilify." Mild applause.

At any rate, the evening was worth it, and I'm going along again. I could spell "trinitrotoluene" standing on my head.

FAIRY TALES FOR OLD AND YOUNG

SOPHISTICATES, of course, like a polished cynical touch to their fairy stories. "Tom Thumb" for instance, an American humorist has rewritten into an anecdote about a small boy who is walking in fairyland one day when he meets a giant. "Who are you?" he asks the giant. "I'm Tom Thumb" comes the reply. "But Tom Thumb is only a little man." "I know," says the giant, "This is my day off."

The average child, however, and the average adult too, for that matter, prefers the simply-told fairy stories that have been passed down in the same form for hundreds of years. "Mother Goose," "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," "Jack the Giant Killer," and a hundred others are to children an adventure into worlds just as real as their everyday surroundings, and to adults escape literature as fascinating as detective stories and thrillers.

Some of these old fairy stories have been dramatized for radio by one of America's best known recording studios, and will be presented over the ZB stations, in the near future. They will be heard in the children's session, but they are certain to have a large following of adults as well.

Among the most effective are several from the Arabian Nights, including "Ali Baba," "Aladdin" and "Sinbad."



SCENE in 2ZB's STUDIO during a "Spelling Jackpots" session. At the left is Michael Forlong, who is conducting the class in the absence of Rex Walden

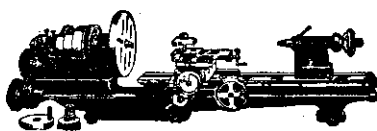


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