

# HIT BOTTOM

## THEN

## BOUNCE

By Harold Hadley

The bookstalls currently offer two books, each by a celebrity who made a the difficult, trying escape from the black swamp that is alcoholism. There are tens, even hundreds of thousands of such stories of despair and, finally, triumph, which will never see print. But in them all there is one basic sameness, despite the differences in the social and financial classification of the individuals. They all **had** to hit bottom.

Naturally, a celebrity gets more attention if he has been before the public for years. But there are many other celebrities who, in the broad sense, do not get attention, nor do they wish it. The business tycoon, the professional gambler, the contractor, the crack salesman, the ladies-wear buyer...men and women who hit bottom as alcoholics and had the bounce to come back.

As one who found the foraging rather bleak in that black swamp and who managed some six years ago to recognize the bottom and accept the lift of A.A., and who is a winner as of today (we of A.A. go it one day at a time, I wish to talk about that hitting bottom. There is a general feeling in A.A. that if the alcoholic hasn't hit bottom, his chances of survival and, later, winning back a place in

society, are practically nil. So what is "bottom?"

Many think that skid row is bottom, and it is, to some. To others, skid row is a place of residence, occupied by men who would rather live in skid row than elsewhere. It is geared to their thinking.

Skid row would revolt others; yet these others have their own bottom in life, and I have heard a middle-aged son of a great banker say, after a splendid comeback in A.A., "I was never on skid row; I brought skid row to my apartment!"

Each group of A.A. members has its meetings, open and closed. Members speak. They discuss their problems. And they usually bring out their "low," their "bottom" in the drinking career.

One member said, "I owe a good deal to A.A. I now have two suits, a job, an apartment; when I awake I know what day it is, what happened last night. And only a little while back I was doing life in prison on the instalment plan."

So he was. In Los Angeles, twenty days in jail for being drunk. In Tucson, forty-five days in jail. In the next town two weeks. Wherever he went, he got alcohol, whether cheap wine or the more costly whiskey, or just plain rubbing alcohol, if broke. And he

always landed back in jail. This went on for years.

He got to thinking: "I have killed no one, but I am serving a life sentence." His low was unpleasant, but he was lucky. Somewhere he read about Alcoholics Anonymous and he asked for help. He got, it turned out, that help which amounted to an unconditional pardon.

My last post was that of radio executive, before I went to A.A. And in the Philadelphia A.A. club, where I first became associated with members of the fraternity, I was approached by a man walking gracefully into the twilight of life, his hair white, his steps firm, his eyes as young as a boy's. He was a celebrity. He was the head of a big manufacturing concern. He told me his low.

His skid row was a room in one of the city's finest clubs. Days on end and weeks on end he remained in that club, speaking only to his chauffeur, who came with mail, and to the houseman, who came with bourbon. Bourbon by the bottle.

Finally, a banker arrived. There was a discussion of notes that were due, of the company president whose desk had been empty so long. And then the glove was flung to the floor: "Give me your stock or pay the note by 3 p.m.," said the banker.

Well, you do not have that kind of money around if you have taken residence in the black swamp; so the manufacturer got his stock together and gave it to the banker.

And then he called A.A. He had hit his bottom.

He got his stock back. His firm is secure now. My friend summers in Maine and winters in Florida, but, wherever he is, he keeps in touch with A.A., and today he will tell new, flustered, insecure members his story of

hitting bottom. It helps tremendously.

Another who told me his low was another highly successful businessman. He still had a fine home and a going business when he came into A.A. And a skid row in his rumpus room in the basement of his suburban home.

He drank alone, in bars alone, at home alone. There was nothing social about his drinking. It was guzzling.

So he kept his favourite whiskey in his basement rumpus room. And one day his wife went downstairs and found him there, fogged up, shaking, bewildered. There was a finger of whiskey left in his last bottle. He was sitting on the floor. He had been there for hours.

His wife took in the situation, inquired how he was doing, and he complained that he would soon be in terrible shape, because he did not feel up to going out for more liquor and he was running desperately low.

His wife went back upstairs. Presently, in half an hour or so, she was back. She had a case of whiskey. She placed it beside him and said, "There...drink yourself to death."

My friend says it sounded like a command, and it cut through the fog in his brain and told him something. It told him he'd hit bottom. His basement floor was as hard a bed as skid row concrete.

He did not drink that case of whiskey. It's been better than seven years since he's had a drink. Now he spends a good deal of his time helping out at the club where he learned about living happily with sobriety, and where he told me about hitting bottom and recognizing it.

Of course there are less spectacular bottoms. The labourer who slept for years in boxcars,

wound up in the Salvation Army's place at Roxborough, Pennsylvania, talked with visiting A.A.'s and later got a job and stuck around. Ten or more years, that's been, and today this man who lived in boxcars has a wife and children, is a personality in A.A. and his community.

There is, too, the former head of a public utility. Now ten, eleven years in A.A., he will sit at a table in the A.A. club, have coffee and tell you that his son - in banking - changed his name legally and that was a low.

The same son, years later, heard of his father's late-in-life change for the better and called on him with a Christmas present. There

is the suspicion he called as much in curiosity as for any other reason, but he remained for days.

Now they correspond and that's a good deal.

One who has been around in the A.A. fraternity gets to know the weaknesses of many men. The hitting bottom is the next-to-last phase of an illness. For that's all it is: social drinkers enjoy a drink and more power, more fun to them! But, for a small percentage of us, alcohol brings on a disease.

Never will it be cured, but it can be arrested and, so long as it is arrested, there is no need to "hit bottom."