

Suicide Doctor

by **WELDON MELICK**

IF DR. HARRY M. WARREN had a medal for every life he's saved in the past thirty-two years, he wouldn't be able to stagger around under the load. But he doesn't need anything to commemorate his achievement except the knowledge that thirty thousand souls are enjoying or have enjoyed years that wouldn't have been lived, have accomplished things that wouldn't have been possible, if Warren or one of his cohorts hadn't talked them out of committing suicide.

The National Save-A-Life League, of which Dr. Warren is the President and founder, has reduced its system of saving a dozen lives a day to efficient, well-regulated, card-catalogued office routine. A capable field staff runs down leads and rounds up prospects, and, until recent years, Dr. Warren was the high-pressure "closer" or supersalesman against whose arguments the most determined self-destructionist broke down and consented to go on living. Less than a score have resisted his persuasions to the extent of going out and jumping off another roof or drinking another bottle of poison. For the sake of his own health, Dr. Warren now delegates the more strenuous part of the work to his assistant, Miss L. B. Bonnell, but he is still the guiding force of the organization.

Churches, hospitals, courts, medical examiners, clipping bureaus, and police report to the Save-A-Life League's New York office on unsuccessful suicide attempts. The despondent persons are visited personally or asked to call at the office, if they live in New York. Others get a correspondence course on the folly of harakiri from Dr. Warren himself. When relatives or friends of the prospective deceased are alarmed over a threatened or attempted self-murder, they can call League headquarters at any time of day or night, and a lifesaving squad will rush to the spot to cauterize the dangerous mental infection with sound logic.



Some troubled souls appear of their own accord, willing to keep up the struggle if someone can figure out a good reason for it.

One of the stock tricks of the persuaders is to invent a pretext for postponing the act a day or two — the desire usually wanes.

Many would-be suicides are good Christians at heart and susceptible to religious arguments.

Brass-tack analysis works on others, replacing the glamour of a phantom martyrdom with sordid, slightly nauseating "before" and "after" word pictures. ("You don't really hate your body enough to destroy it. You don't hate it at all. You like it. Look at this leg. It's a fine leg — it doesn't want to be crushed to a bloody pulp when you jump off the Empire State Building. See, it even jerks away from a little harmless pinching. What a pity it would be to make mincemeat of such a splendid leg.")

A third of the prospects are mental cases, and are submitted to psychiatrists. The rest are treated with human sympathy and understanding. Often, just a chance to unburden their minds will bring into focus the pattern of their lives.

Whatever it is they need, the League tries to bridge their slough of despair and put them on solid ground. Sometimes a meal ticket or a night's lodging will turn the trick — or free legal advice or medical aid. Such cases are referred to the proper social-welfare organizations. The staff has helped to obtain widows' and old-age pensions; assisted in procuring jobs; written letters; established personal, home, or friendly connections for desperate strangers and foreigners. It has arranged for remorse-stricken persons to return stolen money anonymously and helped pregnant girls through their ordeal without their parents'

finding out (which saves two lives at once) and in one instance even induced the incipient father's estranged wife to divorce him in order to give the baby a square deal.

Another time it patched up the home life of an eighteen-year-old girl who later confessed she was ready to kill her husband (who had abandoned her), his two extracurricular sweethearts, herself, and her unborn child.

The League sends children of suicides to summer camps every year and annually distributes Christmas baskets to families bereaved by suicide.

Radio addresses have furthered the work of the League, which is supported by several thousand voluntary contributors throughout the country.

CASES FROM THE FILES

PERSONS WITH SUPERIOR mental gifts that make them invaluable to society are paradoxically the most apt purposely to plant their footsteps in eternity — if the League doesn't get to them first. Among the N.S.A.L.L.'s satisfied customers are large numbers of teachers, lawyers, doctors, actors, and engineers. And Dr. Warren, himself a former Baptist minister now seventy-three years old, has been instrumental in preventing the self-inflicted deaths of sixty clergymen of all creeds and denominations.

Salvation frequently consists in finding an activity to engage the thoughts and energies of those who think there is no place in the world for them. One widowed and retired preacher was given the after-school punishment of searching the Bible for admonitions against suicide. He became intensely interested and prepared a pamphlet on the subject.

"Many of us expect and demand too much," says Warren. "We believe the world owes us happiness merely because we were born. We do not realize that happiness is an achievement and not an inheritance."

Every one of us believes he stands out from the common herd. When circumstances definitely sweep away our private proofs of superiority, apparently beyond redemption, there isn't one among us who isn't capable of thinking of suicide. We can convince ourselves that the world is against us and stew in such poisonous thoughts until bloated with despair. But often the sympathy of one person, even a

stranger, is enough to dispel the illusion that nobody cares.

A civil engineer unable to get work, feeling himself a burden to his daughter, planned to end it all in Long Island Sound.

But his daughter's dog, which idolized him, followed along and wouldn't go back.

He found he couldn't do the cowardly deed with the dog watching and returned, planning to lock the dog up and drown himself the next day. Then, in the morning, he saw a newspaper item about the League and paid its office a visit.

Dr. Warren advised him to give up the futile job quest and make himself useful around his daughter's home.

Subsequently, a neighbor noticed the improvements he had made about the place, learned his qualifications, and gave him a contract for a substantial amount of work.

Many a man has been dissuaded from an insurance suicide by having it pointed out to him that his widow, subjected to the emotional strain of an unnatural tragedy and with his example before her, may yield to the same impulse. In fact the widow of a suicide is considered a rush case, and the League gets to her as quickly as possible with its preventive treatment.

Certain cases call for strange cures.

There was the fellow whose friends were alarmed by his declared intentions into sending around a police officer, who found the man holding a pistol to his temple. "Drop that gun, or I'll shoot!" the cop yelled, pointing his own revolver.

The man instinctively let go and threw up his hands.

That and some trenchant reasoning brought him to his senses.

One of the toughest clients was a man who came in for the express purpose of beating up Dr. Warren because he interfered in other people's lives, after which he proposed to make a laughingstock of the League by committing suicide on its nice clean rug or perhaps out of its convenient twelfth-story windows.

One of the women assistants informed him that Dr. Warren was out of town — but wouldn't she do?

The man had had the kind of upbringing that didn't permit him to beat up a woman, even when she told him he was a blight on the human race, that she was sure Dr. Warren

SUICIDE DOCTOR

wouldn't consider him worth saving, but that he could come back later and verify this fact for himself if he cared to.

This was just one of the thousands of psychological tricks which the staff is prepared to use at a moment's notice and which might be fatal to the wrong patient. However, the diagnostician sensed that this individual was prepared for preaching but couldn't take derision.

He kept on living, just for spite.

A man who had planned his death to the day and hour had a wife who sensed what was in his mind and the same day read something about the League in a newspaper. She made him read it and exacted a promise that he would talk to Dr. Warren the following day.

He walked around the block the office was in and stood on the corner an hour but couldn't bring himself to break his promise, so finally went in and learned with great relief that Dr. Warren was out.

His wife made him come back once more, but no argument could deter him from his intention to make his exit the following Tuesday, before his insurance premium was due. Miss Bonnell followed him out of the office, trying to get his promise to return. "We'll see you Monday," she said. "Good-by," he answered. "I'm not coming back." She planted herself in front of the elevator and kept him talking.

He insisted the insurance was the only way he could provide for his family — the only other way that offered itself was a dishonest proposition. But he refused to do anything against the law. He couldn't imagine anything worse than for the apple of his eye to know her grandfather had been a criminal.

But Miss Bonnell could — and won her point then by convincing him that the stigma of a suicide would be far worse for the little girl. He agreed to come back the first of the week, which gave her time to arrange for his insurance payment, thereby erasing his arbitrary deadline, and then to find a job for him.

He comes in occasionally to thank her.

The files are full of records of patients who passed the crisis safely, but, of course, now and again one is lost.

After talking with one girl, the League recommended to her mother and brother that she be placed in an asylum, where she could be constantly watched. This was done, but she seemed so rational that when the asylum was

willing to release her the brother consented. Shortly after, she ended her life by jumping from a window.

DON'T OBEY THAT IMPULSE!

DR. WARREN has had so much experience with all phases of the suicide business that he is probably one of the best authorities in the country on that subject.

He knows, for instance, that June is the most fashionable month for suicides as well as for weddings, December being least in favor. The first of the month is picked most frequently; Monday, after a week end of brooding, is the favorite day; and six or seven o'clock at night, after a long day of job seeking is the popular hour. Tuesday at 11 A.M. is also in great favor. Girls kill themselves more often than boys, up to the age of nineteen, usually over unrequited love. From then on, men take the lead in diving off the deep end, prompted most frequently by business failure. From nineteen to thirty-nine, only half or a third as many women as men are likely prospects for the Rope's End Reclamation Bureau, and, over forty, only a sixth as many. Married persons have a lower rate than single persons, and single persons lower than those widowed or divorced. Boys most frequently choose hanging, and women are less successful in results.

There is a suicide oftener than every half-hour in the United States.

The National Save-A-Life League believes that the total of twenty thousand a year could be reduced to a negligible number if each one could be reached by a trained worker from the League or a similar organization while shopping for a one-way ticket. The League's experience has shown that nearly everyone contemplating suicide can be persuaded not to do it, as the impulse is almost always short-lived and seldom strong enough to face organized opposition.

Dr. Warren and his helpers have considerably lowered the suicide rate in New York City, which undoubtedly holds bigger and better disappointments than any other city in the world and whose tall hotels attract hordes of despondents who want a metropolitan setting for the final fling.

Yet the Save-A-Life League has no elixir of life save hope and courage. When it administers a shot of that, the patient is vaccinated for life against voluntary death.

Robert H. Jackson

The Man Who Has Always Been a New Dealer

by MARQUIS W. CHILDS

IT WOULD BE difficult to give any abstract definition of that convenient Washington figment, the New Dealer. Ardent Administration sympathizers invoke an almost incredibly noble individual when they use the phrase. On the lips of the enemy, the term has sulphurous connotations. Lacking a definition, perhaps the New Dealer can be defined by example. And the best example, most Washington observers agree, is Robert H. Jackson. If there is any single individual who represents all the qualities that commonly inhere in the term, it is the man who has just been made Attorney General of the United States.

President Roosevelt is, of course, the creator, the author, of the New Deal. But the embodiment of his ideal is Jackson. In part, at least, both officialdom and the press have recognized this fact. Many people in and out of the government have said since 1936 that Jackson would be Roosevelt's ideal successor. From time to time there has been the suggestion that the President himself inclined to this view. Often this suggestion has been linked to rumors that steps would be taken to build Jackson up with the public so that he might have a chance for the nomination.

Even now these rumors have been revived in connection with his appointment as Attorney General. Actually, of course, if the President had wanted to groom Jackson as his successor — as Roosevelt I groomed Taft to run in his place — he would not have waited until this eleventh hour to put him in a cabinet post. If he had been sincerely interested in seeing Jackson acquire the attributes of eligibility, he would have appointed him Attorney General at the time of Homer Cummings' resignation, more than a year ago. To follow on the political administration of the amiable Cummings was, for a New Dealer, the perfect opportunity.

Frank Murphy stepped into that situation and took for himself the sweetest publicity bouquet of the entire Roosevelt Administration. Garnering a harvest of headlines, Murphy tended to neglect many of the far-reaching functions of the Department of Justice. Acting in certain income-tax cases, notably that of "Boss" Pendergast, he postponed others with even more serious political implications, in spite of the repeated urging of the Treasury. He let loose a series of doubtful espionage prosecutions, talking loosely of deporting "boatloads" of undesirable aliens. Friction, confusion, and delay seriously hampered the flow of work in the vast department under his care. Those behind the scenes in Washington, including President Roosevelt himself, it appears, were aware of the somewhat unhappy situation developing in the Department of Justice while the legend of Murphy the boss buster was growing to heroic proportions.

II

IT IS INTO this situation that Jackson has now been precipitated. Within less than a year he must resolve a number of thorny problems involving political potentialities and sensitivities in various key States. How such an appointment could serve to build him up, even for the vice presidency, on which rumor now centers, it is difficult to see.

In many respects this is typical of his experience in the New Deal. This is not the first time he has been told off to do an unpleasant front-line job. Invariably he has responded with the selflessness which has characterized his public service. In Jackson, the Washington climate has not produced that elephantiasis of the ego which has been, perhaps, the occupational disease of the New Deal. He has retained a remarkable balance through it all. If