

THE MAN ON THE BENCH

By W. J. Campbell



... Almost instantly, a startling change could be noticed coming over the helpless animal. The clean, silky hair seemed to stiffen and become dirty and rough looking; the kind, intelligent eyes became glaring and steely, rolling in their sockets. With bared fangs the beast snapped at the doctor's hand as he extended it toward the table.

Dr. SEXTON was speaking. "It is a fact, gentlemen, regardless of what you have said or thought. I have brought you together today to demonstrate and prove what I have previously told you is true. It may seem to you that I am the victim of some strange hallucination, that my mind is overbalanced from too close application to my work, that I am acting under a delusion, or in other words, that I am crazy; but gentlemen, if these are your thoughts, you do me a wrong. Do not judge until you have seen. After that, I am perfectly willing to abide by your verdict."

The small group of scientists assembled in the doctor's laboratory looked at each other, doubt written in their faces. There was an interval of silence. Then Dr. Baker,

one of the most prominent members present, said, "Dr. Sexton, I would like to ask, could it not be that you are honestly mistaken? Couldn't it be but a dream—that perhaps you have imagined all this? Why, man, it seems to me that if there is an impossibility in the medical or scientific world, this is it."

Dr. Sexton smiled. "That is just what I thought some of you would say, but couched in gentler terms. Dr. Baker, I do not believe I am crazy, but a crazy person never believes that of himself, and this is no argument, I'll admit. What I am going to show you, however, will be proof that I am a person of sound mind. Remember, all I ask is, that you go with me to my laboratory, keep your minds open and if you are not convinced that I have

discovered something that will astonish the scientific world, you may pronounce me crazy and remove me to an asylum post haste. I shall abide by your verdict. Come, we shall repair to the laboratory at once.”

Slowly they followed the doctor down a long hall and came to a heavy oaken door. He unlocked and threw it open, stepping inside. The others followed but saw nothing unusual in the well equipped room. Chairs were placed across one end and in front of them a small upholstered table.

Dr. Sexton invited the scientists to be seated and then walked across the room to a small wall safe from which he took two small bottles and a hypodermic syringe. He retraced his steps to the table and faced the small but wondering audience.

Holding up the phials so they could see them, he said, “Gentlemen, these little bottles contain my secret, a formula never before dreamed of by man. These few drops of colorless liquid, that you see, are the result of almost a lifetime of study and research. It is all there is in the world at the present time but more can be produced now quite readily. I am the only person living who knows the formula and that secret is securely locked in my brain. It has not been committed to paper; perhaps may never be. I may also state that in my opinion, no chemist could ever successfully analyze it.

“It is not a something that can be placed in the hands of promiscuous persons, but if handled at all must be handled only by responsible parties. Even then I will admit it could be wrongly used, especially the one marked *Degen*. I have almost decided that it would not be safe in the hands of anybody, but that question I save to you. It can be decided later. Ponder well.

“Gentlemen, it has always been maintained, I believe, that in the worst of us there is some good, that in the worst character there is some redeeming feature that could be

brought out and developed to overshadow all his bad characteristics and a new, a better individual would spring from the old, the vile, the wicked. In this I would include the lazy, the liar, the thief, and the murderer. And why not? Science has banished or reduced to a minimum a number of diseases of physical man, why cannot some of his moral attributes be changed? These, as the others, may be due to heredity, accident or association. We now have the “Truth Drug” under whose influence criminals can’t lie. All these have been accomplished by what? By serum administered hypodermically.

“Finally, I may state that no person of his own free will, thus afflicted, ever overcomes these conditions. There must be an outside influence. Very few of them get the opportunity to meet such influence. Why not therefore meet these conditions in the same way that the physician has met, battled and conquered many human ailments?

“It is along this line that I have worked and I have at last succeeded in producing what I have chosen to call *Degen* and *Elimino*. *Degen* will bring out or magnify the predominating bad characteristics and *Elimino* will remove them in a few minutes’ time.

“I HOPE I have made it plain to you. We will now proceed with the demonstration.” With that the doctor pressed an electric button at the head of the table. Almost instantly a door at the end of the room was opened, and a man entered, followed by a beautiful collie dog, who trotted along quietly at his heels. Crossing the room, the dog leaped upon the table and turning, licked the doctor’s hand. A moment more and the animal had been strapped to the table by the doctor and his assistant.

Stepping aside, that all might see, Dr. Sexton said, “This is my dog, one of the kindest, cleanest animals I have ever seen. He seems possessed of almost human

intelligence. Everybody admires him and he is the friend of all the children in the block. If there is a bad streak in him, we have never discovered it, but I know it is there and only needs development. In his life, as I know it and as the neighbors see it, there is no need of *Elimino*. It would not benefit him in the least. Here then, *Degen* must be used to show that there is a dormant evil streak lurking in the system. I shall inject *Degen* at once and you shall see what you shall see. Then, when you are satisfied it will do what I claim for it, we will use *Elimino*."

The doctor thrust the needle through the bottle cork and stepping quickly forward, with well trained hand, injected a few drops under the skin of the collie's left front leg. Almost instantly, a startling change could be noticed coming over the helpless animal. The clean, silky hair seemed to stiffen and become dirty, and rough looking; the kind intelligent eyes became glaring and steely, rolling in their sockets. With bared fangs the beast snapped at the doctor's hand as he extended it toward the table. He spoke to the writhing animal in a soothing tone of voice, but that seemed only to increase the beast's struggles. From the quiet, docile collie there had sprung, and almost instantly, into action and appearance, the man hating wolf.

The scientists crowded around the table, wonder and amazement pictured on their faces at the strange action of the peculiar drug. What they now saw was a veritable beast of the forest or jungle. It was a demonstration almost beyond belief; something accomplished of which they had never dreamed.

Ample time was given them to view and comment on the appearance of the snarling, snapping creature before them, whose jaws were now dripping with foam. Then Dr. Sexton, with a smile on his face, stepped forward and said, "You see, gentlemen, *Degen* has brought out a quality

that the collie seemed not to possess—I would say, that of the wolf. I hope you are convinced of what you see? When you are, I will inject the other serum and you will see a counteraction just as astonishing."

The needle was again brought into play. *Elimino* was injected and in a moment the dog became quiet. The bristling, dirty brown hair settled down on the body, becoming soft and fluffy. The eyes lost their wild, steely look; the snarling and snapping ceased. The entire physical makeup seemed to undergo a radical change and once again the docile collie looked up into his master's face, wagged his tail and licked the hand extended to him. Released from the straps, he sprang to the floor and quietly trotted out at the door, which the doctor held open.

Dr. Howard was the first to speak. "Dr. Sexton, we take our hats off to you. I will admit I had my doubts but I am convinced and I believe I express the opinion of my fellow scientists. It is wonderful, marvelous. But like you, Dr. Sexton, I do not believe it advisable to give it to the world. Much harm would result from the use of *Degen* in the hands of unscrupulous parties, and they would get it, no matter what precautions were taken to keep it out of their hands. I believe *Degen* should be destroyed and its ingredients forgotten. Dr. Sexton, has either one or both of these serums ever been tried on a human being? If not, do you think it possible to find a subject? It seems the penal institutions would be the logical place to give *Elimino* a fair trial."

"I have made some effort along that line, but so far have not succeeded. They too believed that my story was but the workings of an unbalanced mind. Perhaps, after learning of this demonstration, they will see my offer in a different light. Sometimes I feel I should offer myself. And why not? Many a person has become a martyr to science. And although there would be no danger if the thing is perfect—and it is—yet I hesitate."

“Have you tried advertising in the papers?” queried one of the scientists.

“No, I have not resorted to the newspapers as yet, but had thought of doing so. One reason why I brought you together was to get suggestions. If any of you can think of a better plan, I would be pleased to hear it. Anyhow, think it over. Meanwhile, beginning in tonight’s papers I shall insert an advertisement for a week. If a subject presents himself, hold yourselves in readiness to report here upon my call.”

The evening papers carried in a conspicuous place, the following notice: “Wanted—Dr. Paul H. Sexton desires a male subject for an experiment. The applicant must be strong and healthy, and one upon whom nobody depends. Such person will be amply paid for his services. Apply at once at Dr. Sexton’s Laboratory, 1416 Miller Drive.”

SLATS NELSON shambled across the floor in Dago Frank’s Beanery and slumped into the only vacant seat at the lunch counter. Not a known face met his gaze as he surveyed his fellow diners. This did not disappoint Slats for he was a stranger in the place, not from choice, but because of a burly brakeman and a short hickory club.

It seemed that for weeks past, Slats had been unable to pull off any kind of a job that meant money to him. Twice in the last three years he had done time up the river for that which had appeared easy. Hard luck had refused to be shaken and fate hung persistently at his heels. When he was released from the Big Farm after the last stretch, he had changed scenes and the going had gone from bad to worse.

The bowl of watery soup finished, he fished a slick dime, the last, from his pocket and tossed it on the counter. Slipping from the stool, he ambled across the room and out at the door. Outside the air was chilly and he shivered as he pulled the well-worn cap down

over his eyes and buttoned the long, thin overcoat close to his chin. He stood on the sidewalk a moment, undecided which way to turn. Then shrugging his shoulders he headed south by east. The railroad yards lay in that direction.

Slats did not hurry. He had no definite place in view, so he walked slowly along, hoping something would happen that might at least bridge him over the night. Four blocks, and he turned in at the west gate of Newton Park. At the first green slatted bench he paused and drawing the coat closer around his slender frame, sank down upon it. A shiver passed over him as the keen east wind whipped through the shrubbery at his left and the dead leaves rattled in nearby trees. A newspaper came scurrying down the walk, tossed first to one side and then the other by the cold wind that was blowing from the lake.

At his right stood a small, unoccupied building and in front of him, beyond the wide stretch of sandy beach, the bottle green water of the lake stretched out to meet the distant horizon. Nature had painted a beautiful picture here, but it held no charm for Slats, for he was cold, hungry and homeless.

Somewhere in the distance, a deep toned bell struck five times and Slats moved uneasily on the bench. It was getting colder, too cold to stay there long, but where could he go, what could he do? The jail or workhouse loomed near for him. The paper rattled at his feet, where it had lodged, and he stooped to pick it up. It was a sheet from the afternoon edition of the *Times*. He was about to thrust it in his pocket, when his eye caught the following: “WANTED—Dr. Paul H. Sexton desires a male subject for an experiment. The applicant must be strong and healthy and one upon whom nobody depends. Such person will be amply paid for his services. Apply at once at Dr. Sexton’s Laboratory, 1416 Miller Drive.”

Slats read the notice twice. Then half

aloud he said, "Well, that fits my case pretty well. I have no family, friends or relatives that I know of. I am penniless, luck's against me and I'm facing the jail, workhouse or penitentiary. Why not? It couldn't be worse. I'll try; perhaps no subject has been found yet. I wonder where the place is? I'd better be moving; it's getting dark."

Digging his hands deeper in the side pockets of the long coat, he started to get on his feet, when there came a crunching of gravel at his side and a pleasant voice said, "Rather cool to be warming a park bench isn't it, my friend?"

Slats turned and faced the speaker. Forcing a sickly smile, he replied, "Rather. But what's a fellow to do when he has no home, money or friends and is stranded in a strange place? I guess I've endured this thing about as long as I can. I have always heard there was a limit to everything and I think I've about reached mine."

The stranger whistled softly as he studied the man on the bench. Then he said, "My friend, you are a young man yet. You should not get discouraged. It may not be as dark as it seems. Surely it can't be as bad as you think?"

"I don't see how it could be worse," Slats replied, as a shiver passed over his frame and he changed his position on the bench as a keen, icy wind swept in from the lake.

"How would you like to have a nice, warm meal, good clothes on your back and money in your pockets, enough to last you all winter, if reasonably used? But, by the way, what's your name and where are you from? I may be able to do something for you along the line I just mentioned."

"My name—well, where I came from they called me Slats Nelson. That's as good as any I guess. It's the only one I know or can remember. Sometimes it seems there was another, I don't know. I am from everywhere and nowhere. If you are looking for somebody

to do something, I'm your man. I'm ready to do anything for a bite to eat and a place to sleep. I believe I could even commit murder."

THE stranger smiled. "Well I hope you'll never be called on to do anything that bad. I believe you're the very man I'm looking for. Here read this," and he held out a paper with a heavy blue line drawn around a short article.

Slats glanced at the marked notice. "Why I was just going there when you came up. Do you know this Dr. Sexton? And have you any idea what he wants? The wind blew a bit of the newspaper against my feet when I first sat down here. See, here it is," and he removed the paper from his pocket. "Could you direct me to Miller Drive?"

"Yes, I know where it is and I know what the doctor wants to do if he can find a subject, for I am Dr. Sexton. I was just returning from a call and was taking a short cut through the park. My place is only three blocks from here and if you can go with me I shall see to it that you get at least a good supper and a night's lodging, even if you decide not to go through with the experiment after it has been explained to you."

"I UNDERSTAND the proposition thoroughly," replied Slats, as he assumed a more comfortable position in the huge arm chair, "and am ready for the experiment."

Dr. Sexton smiled. "I was confident that you were my man the moment I saw you on the bench in the park. Good, I like your nerve. I can't see where there will be any danger attached to the experiment, but you never can tell."

"Nerve—why, I'm telling you, doctor, it has been nerve and nothing else that has kept me on my feet for weeks. I'm ready for anything, I don't care what. I'm getting desperate. As far as I know there is no one

else in the world who will care a whoop if it kills me or not and I assure you I am not in the least afraid. My life for a long time has been one of misery. I am ready any time you are.”

Dr. Sexton reached for the telephone. “Very well, Slats, I shall call those who witnessed the experiment on my collie. They will be here in a short time, possibly within the hour, at which time we shall proceed with the test.”

It was a strange procession that filed down the long hall to the doctor’s laboratory—an enthusiastic doctor, a tall, slender young man who walked calmly and indifferently, at his side, and a number of scientists, anxiety and expectation written in every feature and movement.

In the room, Slats stretched himself full length on the long, upholstered table and bared his left arm. Dr. Sexton walked hurriedly across the floor to the little wall safe and returned to the side of his subject. In one hand he carried a small bottle and in the other a hypodermic syringe case. Setting both on a convenient stand, he turned and faced his audience.

“Gentlemen, and fellow scientists: Very unexpectedly, I might say accidentally, a subject has presented himself for the test. This evening, while returning from a call, I met this man in the park. He was cold, hungry, and friendless, a stranger in our town. Understand, I did not take advantage of his condition and lure him here. He had seen my advertisement and was planning to come, when I happened along. Even now, at the last moment, he may refuse if he so desires. And if he goes into the experiment, he does so of his own free will. What do you say, Nelson?”

“All I have to say, Dr. Sexton, is, go on with the experiment; I am ready.”

“Very well, you hear, gentlemen. Now just a few words more. Nelson has authorized me to say to you that for a period of several years he has led the life of a crook. He had no

hesitancy in telling me. At first his intention was to try the experiment for the money there is in it. But since he has heard what we expect it to do, he has decided to take the test for the good of the experiment and hoping it will make an entire change in his life. He is tired of being hunted day and night like the wild animal, always in fear, always in danger. Nelson has agreed to remain in this city a reasonable length of time and will report to me daily. He has made but one request, that he be placed under the influence of a sleep drug before the test is made. He asks this, not because he is afraid, but because if there is any merit in the serum, he will wake up a real man rid of all bad characteristics, and will remember nothing of his previous self.”

IN a few minutes Nelson was sleeping Dr. Sexton opened the case and removed the syringe and a small bottle of colorless liquid. He stepped to the side of the unconscious man, thrust the needle through the cork, lifted the bared arm and injected *Elimino* deep into the flesh. Almost instantly a change could be noticed. There was a long drawn sigh, followed by a quivering of the body. The head rolled from side to side and a slight moan escaped the lips. The fluid was working rapidly. The face began to present a different appearance; the drawn, shifty, hunted look was disappearing like a mist before the morning sun. The physical man was undergoing a wonderful change.

The scientists crowded around the table. Dr. Sexton stood calmly at Nelson’s side, finger on wrist. The seconds ticked rapidly away. The room was still as death. Anxiety and anticipation was written on every face. What would the experiment develop?

Nelson’s eyelids twitched and then fluttered open. A pair of keen gray eyes looked wonderingly up into the faces surrounding him and then wandered over the room. Slowly, he raised himself to a sitting

position and passed one hand over his face. "Where am I and what is wrong?" he muttered. "I don't understand." And before anybody could reply, "Oh yes, I remember now. It was two balls and two strikes. The third was a wicked inshoot, too high, and I dodged it. I heard a crash, it must have hit my head and I knew no more. I suppose this must be a hospital? Are the folks here? I will go right down to them, for I feel all right now."

The men surrounding the table stepped back in amazement. What did it mean? What was the man talking about? Was his brain still clouded? Had the drug failed? Had it deprived Nelson of his reason?

Dr. Sexton turned and gazed speechlessly at the subject who was climbing down from the table. The man must not leave the room in his present condition, as the doctor saw it, so he said, soothingly, "Sit in this chair a moment, Nelson," and shoved one toward him. "I will give you something to quiet your nerves. You are rather shaken, as yet. I am Dr. Sexton and these men are physicians and scientists. This is my laboratory, not a hospital. Don't you remember coming here with me?"

Nelson, with a puzzled look, sat down. "Why I feel all right now, doctor. Never felt better in my life. No, I don't remember ever seeing you before. Why was I brought here? Why wasn't I taken to the hospital if the ball hit me? I can't feel any sore place on my head but I wish you would send for the folks. They'll be worried about me."

All this time the doctors and scientists assembled in the room had been silent spectators of the strange development of the experiment. They were dumfounded. What would the end be? And then young Dr. Parker remembered.

Back in his home town, a certain

young man, Cal Porter, son of a prominent manufacturer, was a star player on the college team. He recalled that on a certain day, a young man had been struck by a pitched ball and apparently badly injured. He had been rushed to the hospital with a supposed fractured skull. During a temporary absence of nurses and doctors he had revived and escaped from the institution. Since his disappearance, no word had been received from him. All this Dr. Parker recalled, for he had been an intern in the hospital at the time.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed, elbowing his way to the young man's side, "it's Cal Porter. Where on earth have you been all these five years? Your folks have scoured the country for you and finally had to give you up as lost."

The young man gazed into Dr. Parker's face with surprise. "I don't understand you," he said. "You must be mistaken. My name is Cal Porter, all right, but I was struck on the head by a ball this afternoon. I must have been unconscious, as I don't remember what happened afterward. What do you mean by five years?"

Explanations followed, and Porter discovered that five years of his life had slipped away, perhaps forever, into the unknown shadows of a deep, clouded past.

Some time later he rejoined his folks in another state and took up the thread of life where it had dropped that afternoon five years ago.

Dr. Sexton is preparing to offer his wonderful discovery to the government to be used—if accepted and he believes it will be—as it deems best. For proof of its marvelous qualities, he will cite at least one case, that of Cal Porter, which will give ample proof of his assertions that Slat Nelson was eliminated forever.