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*Untold Tales*

***XXVII-How Nero Bacchus Dalmazzo Went Foolish  
and Later Got a Swat on the Port Side of the Cranium.***

A man may drink himself to within half a block of the morgue and yet pull himself together and lead a long life of sobriety and usefulness; he may play the races until his false teeth are in hock and yet reform and become wealthy; he may experiment with gambling systems until his hair falls out and yet die with money in the bank; he may labor strenuously as a reformer for a score of years and yet spend his declining years as the star pew-holder in a family entrance hotel, and he may lead a life of crime from his earliest youth and yet die happy and innocent and certain of salvation-but if ever he acquires the medico-religious fad he is lost, for there is no cure for it and no hope for its victims.

This is well known today, but despite this fact there are innumerable suckers waiting to be bitten, and the profession of biting them is a lucrative one. Invent a new religion and see for yourself. Thousands of ready believers will flock to your standard and the rake off will make you rich. Devise a new form of mental healing or psycho-doxological occultism and wait for the rush. After it begins you need no longer work. Your net profit on each individual sucker will be more than you could make by manual or mental labor in three weeks, and the sucker crop will be so large that you will become well weary of harvesting it.

If this is true today, what much have been the case in ancient Rome 2000 years ago? At that time, as every writer on grafting sets forth and every intelligent grafter knows, the science of grafting reaches its greatest height. Today a sucker is born every minute. Then one was born every eight seconds. Ninety-nine per cent, of the Romans of the time were come-ons. The remaining 1 per cent, were grafters. The former worked. The latter profited.

History records the names of numerous Roman come-ons whom the grafters of the time regarded as particularly easy marks.

One of these was the celebrated J. Cato Presto, who is said to have bought so many gold bricks that he actually built a house of them. Another was Graccus Permanganate, a retired brewer, who, believing that he had been cured of alcoholism by a pseudo-psychologist, spent his entire fortune in founding a home for pseudo-psychologists, and afterward suffered a relapse and died in horrible agony, with six large purple snakes entwined about him.

But perhaps the most, notable victim of the whole lot was the wealthy Nero Bacchus Dalmazzo, who lived during the reign of the Emperor Claudius VI. A. D. 157-214.

Dalmazzo was the only son of the eminent army contractor, Bacchus Virtuoso Dalmazzo, and upon his father's death, in the year 173 A. D., he came into a fortune estimated at 6,000,000 denarii. For seven years thereafter he lived the life of a normal human being of the time. Thrice a day he partook of a meal, and between meals he drank each day three quarts of ale, two

cocktails, a highball and a whisky straight. Also he attended the theater, played the races, chewed tobacco and occasionally gambled for the chips, and once in a while, like all gentlemen of the time, he returned home in the evening upon a stretcher, smelling strongly of champagne.

Dalmazzo led this sort of life for seven years, and then suddenly a change came over him. One night he attended a lecture upon applied hypnotism. The lecturer was an eminent practitioner whose portrait was a regular feature of the advertising supplements of the magazines. He offered, for 6 denarii down and 3 denarii a week, to teach mental healing, psychological introspection and inward meditation. Dalmazzo, curious to know what these phrases meant, invested 6 denarii and began the course.

In three weeks he had the fad for fair, and thereafter he was foolish.

Before a year had elapsed Dalmazzo had joined 17 societies of psychic research and had become a vegetarian, a faith curist, a fellow of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nirvannists, a scientific Buddhist, a cold water curist, a brother of Sacred Ox, a mental telepathist, a layer on of hands and in general an all around sucker.

He believed that it was unhealthful, irreligious and blasphemous to eat spare ribs, he believed that broken bones could be set by reciting the seventh verse of the sixteenth chapter of Caesar's Commentaries; he believed that he could communicate with the dead, the drunk and the imprisoned by describing a reverse parabola in the air with his clenched fist: he believed that there was an order of philosophy whose votaries were not subject colds in the head; he believed that measles was a state of mind instead of a disease; he held that sin was contagious and that hay fever was not; he believed that by sending five denarii to a gentle man in Pompeii with long whiskers he might obtain a secret whereby he could stave off old age: he believed that Ethiopians had souls like human beings; he believed that it was his duty to contribute 1000 denarii a year toward the support of a venerable sage in Athens who claimed to be able to explain the difference between Zoroaster and Zendavesta.

To cut a long story short, he was the star believer of the then known world in every sort of incomprehensible doctrine and creed-religious and medical-in existence at the time. Various enterprising grafters, knowing his strong faith and liberality invented new religious and new methods of curing new diseases in order to profit by his bar, and as soon as he heard of them he subscribed to their ingenious dope dreams and provided them with free board, lodging and washing. Dalmazzo's friends for awhile endeavored strenuously to show him the error of his ways, but, as has been stated before, the man who acquires the medico-religious foolishness is gone for all time, and soon they gave up all hope for him and abandoned him to his fate.

Early in the year 180 A. D a grafter named Julius Piccolo, who had failed as a three-card operator and as a tipster and tout, determined to raise the wind by securing a hold upon Dalmazzo's bar. So he announced that he had discovered a method of inoculating against paresis by means of a new science called neoconthrampolocity and sent one of his circulars to Dalmazzo. The latter at once had himself inoculated, and as a reward for the discovery presented Piccolo with a house and lot in Catohurst, a suburb of Rome.

The success of this graft stirred the entire grafting fraternity, and before long a score of sages placed on the market a score of mental and neoconthrampolositous vaccines for a score of diseases. Dalmazzo was inoculated for all of them, and then there set in an era of wonderful discoveries in the same line.

In the six months Dalmazzo had been inoculated against 3450 different maladies at the end of the year he had been inoculated against every disease mentioned in the pharmacopoeia.

Then various enterprising hypnotists and others began inventing new diseases in order to get in on the ground floor, and in three months more Dalmazzo enthusiastically announced to his friends that he was immortal. He was protected against every malady known and every malady unknown. He was protected by the sheltering arms of neo-conthramposity, pseudo-psychology, scientific Buddhism, cold waterism, mental telepathy mesmerism, psychic introspection, pronco-psychoinfinitasimality and telepha-probo-nopublicocontraltocoloradomadurocity. He could never die. He was safe.

That afternoon a breeze appeared from the sou'sou'west and blew a loose brick from the roof of the Forum. The brick struck Dalmazzo on the port side of the cranium, and his funeral took place two days later from his late residence, 734 Juno avenue. The Grand Exalted Sirloin of the Brothers of the Sacred Ox officiated, and delegations were present from the Vegetarian League, the Cold Water Club, the Mental Telepathy Society and Local Union No. 7 of the Grand and Amalgamated Order of Journeymen Grafters.

Moral: Nowadays they have a coroner's inquest.