

Baltimore Sunday Herald
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Untold Tales

IV.—How G. Nero Allegretto Put the Carthaginian Oheab on Julius W. Glycyrrhizicus

“If you have the ready coin,” Glycyrrhizicus was wont to declare, “everything’ll come your way.”

Most people believed him, for there were few men better able to speak with authority. For 20 years (A.D. 121-141) he had been the acknowledged king-boss of the Whig party in the city of Rome. Like all men of industry and ingenuity, he had made money in politics. Each year his profits were enormous and each year he spent a large part of them in repairing and extending his fences. Upon the coin thus expended he made a second profit of 250 percent, and in this way it came to be a saying in Rome that Glycyrrhizicus’ money-making machine was operated by a perpetual motion motor.

Another of Glycyrrhizicus’ maxims was to the effect that all newspapers are venal.

“The word reporter,” he would say, “is a synonym for ‘grafter.’ Some reporters can be bought for a schooner of half and half. Others demand a 15-cent drink! Still others want cold denarii, and a few hold out for a pretty good sized pot. But the majority of them are cheap, and all of them are purchasable.”

In this, also, Glycyrrhizicus knew whereof he spoke, for, in the course of his political career he very frequently had need of the newspaper men’s friendship. Once, for instance, a contractor from whom he had sweated triple the customary commission on a cobblestone contract, squealed on him, and he narrowly escaped exposure. The reporters who landed the story accepted his liquor and remained silent. Another time he kept his toga clear of a scandal which resulted in the imprisonment of two of his henchmen by the simple process of giving the newspaper men an excursion down the Tiber on his private steam yacht.

Thus he came to pride himself upon the fact that he knew how to handle the journalists, and even the most envious of his rivals were compelled to admit that his pride was justifiable. But the fastest rule ever proclaimed will not work every day in the year, and eventually, in the course of time, Glycyrrhizicus encountered a local brief writer who put the Carthaginian oheab on him.

The name of the black-haired wretch was G. Nero Allegretto. Before entering the newspaper business he had been a bally-ho man with a circus playing the Thessalian backwoods circuit. Successively rising to be ticket-shover, boss canvasman, head con man and press agent, he finally received an offer of a place on the Naples Times-Democrat. Then he came to Rome to gather municipal news for the Rome Argus.

It was after he had labored in the last named position for about a year that he crossed the path of Glycyrrhizicus. The Paving Sand Trust had received a contract for 2000 galley-loads of

No. 2 Sicilian coast paving sand. The price was enormous and Allegretto, being a keen-witted young man, came to the conclusion that something was doing.

So he bought a pair of noiseless sole gum shoes and began sleuthing. In a week by dint of extreme ingenuity, he learned positively that Glycyrrhizicus was to receive a commission of 7-1/2 percent on the contract price. Also, he learned that the money was to be paid in cash at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the festival of Ceres. So far, so good.

But how was he to prove it? Allegretto was a gentleman of resource. He had been a ballyho man and a ticket-shover. He knew a thing or two, and was not afraid to take big odds.

"Wait," he said to himself, "until two hours before the coin is to exchange hands."

It was good advice, and he took it. Patiently he waited. Also, he bought a phonograph.

At 10 A.M. of the day after the festival of Ceres he entered the telephone booth at the Argus office and called up the exchange.

"What number, please?" asked the hello girl.

"Tiber, 2537-m," answered Allegretto.

It was Glycyrrhizicus' office number.

In a moment there was an answer.

"This is Iggiggiggi," said Allegretto, disguising his voice. Iggiggiggi was the treasurer of the Paving Sand Trust.

"Ah," said Glycyrrhizicus.

"How do you want the coin?" said the fake Iggiggiggi.

"Ten thou," answered the unsuspecting Glycyrrhizicus. "In hundreds, and ten thou in fives and tens."

"Hey?" bawled the cunning Allegretto, connecting the phonograph to the receiver.

"The thou," yelled Glycyrrhizicus, "in hundreds—," the phonograph recorded it faithfully.

"Hey?" bellowed Allegretto.

"Ten thou," shrieked Glycyrrhizicus, "in hundreds, and ten thou in fives and tens!"

Then Allegretto rang off. The phonograph cylinder was full of little dents. Allegretto looked at them and smiled.

Then he called up Iggiggiggi.

"This," he said, disguising his voice again, "is Glycyrrhizicus."

"How do you want the money?" asked Iggiggiggi.

"Hey?" answered the fake Glycyrrhizicus, connecting the phonograph again.

"How do you want the money?" bawled Iggiggiggi. The phonograph ground it into the wax.

"Ten thou," answered the fake Glycyrrhizicus, "in hundreds, and ten thou--," and he rang off.

Allegretto waited two days.

"The jays, he said, "will think that they were talking to each other."

And it was even so. The money was paid. The deed was done. The net, as the country correspondents say, was slowly enwrapping Glycyrrhizicus in its meshes.

On the afternoon of the second day Allegretto called at Glycyrrhizicus' office. Under his arm was the phonograph. Glycyrrhizicus hypocritically said that he was glad to see him.

"Two days ago," said Allegretto, calmly, "you received 20,000 denarii from the Paving Sand Trust. Am I right?"

"You are a liar!" said Glycyrrhizicus, boldly.

Allegretto unwrapped the phonograph and turned the key.
“Ten thou,” it squeaked faintly, “in hundreds, and ten thou”
Glycyrrhizicus fell in a swoon,
“Confess,” said Allegretto, “and you will be recommended to the mercy of the court.”
“Rascal!” shrieked Glycyrrhizicus.
Allegretto lighted a cigarette. The phonograph was still buzzing. Glycyrrhizicus did not notice it.
“Name your price,” he gasped.
“You confess?” asked Allegretto.
“How much do you want?” wailed Glycyrrhizicus, bursting into tears. “I am a poor man. I have a family to support.
“Half,” said Allegretto.
Glycyrrhizicus grabbed a stylus and his checkbook. For a moment he wrote furiously. Then he handed this to Allegretto.

d.10,000

FORUM NATIONAL BANK

Pay to the order of G. Nero Allegretto. Ten thousand denarril

J.W. GLYCYRRHIZICUS.

Allegretto took the paper and departed, and Glycyrrhizicus breathed a sigh of relief. But the loss of the money sorely troubled him and he became moody and sullen. For the rest of the day he sat in his office and endeavored to evolve a scheme for getting it back. Then he went home and sat pondering far into the night. Once he undressed, and went to bed, but he could not sleep. So he arose again and sat at the window and thought and thought and thought.

Sunrise saw him still sitting and still thinking. Over the Temple of Bacchus the sky grew gray and among the eaves the sparrows began to twitter and play. And then, over all, rose the hum of the city—softly, at first, as if the whole town were turning over for its beauty sleep, and then gradually louder and louder. The street noises burst forth, one after another—the heavy plod of the policemen, the rattle of the milk wagons, the thunder of the street sweeping machines. By and by came the shrill yell of a newsboy. Glycyrrhizicus pricked up his ears. The boy passed beneath the window.

“Yayr’s de Argus, extree!” he yelled. “Full recount of de bribin’ in de san’ contrac’!”

Glycyrrhizicus slid down the lightning rod and bought a paper.

Across the front page were black, staring headlines. Glycyrrhizicus saw his own name in letters a foot high. Below it was a half-tone facsimile of his check, and across the page, in 50-point black caps, were the words:

“Ten thou in hundreds, and ten thou in tens and fives.”

Below was a picture of a phonograph and a rude likeness of Allegretto, labeled “The Argus’ Special Commissioner.”

For ten minutes Glycyrrhizicus stood transfixed. Then he burst into tears.

Suddenly a thought struck him.

“It’s all up!” he whispered hoarsely. “I am ruined—ruined! But I’ll stop payment on the check for my family’s sake!”

He dashed into an alley and waited until the bank should open. Then he sent a messenger boy with a note to the cashier. The boy returned 10 minutes later with a reply.

“Allegretto cashed the check,” it said, “yesterday afternoon.”

Two hours afterward a policeman ambling along the Tiber wharf front saw something floating in the water. He went out in a rowboat and towed it to the shore. It was the body of Julius W. Glycyrrhizicus, deceased.

Moral—in dealing with grafters, always remember that a really good graft works backward, as well as forward.