STORIES OF THE NEWS.

XIV.

The Witch Doctress of Baxter Street.

Cabbage Leaves, Incantations and Odds and Ends for Poor Madeline's Hip Disease.

Her Only Diploma Was Superstitious Ignorance and Her Patient Grew Sick Unto Death.

THE "SORCERESS" NOW AWAITING TRIAL IN SPECIAL SESSIONS.

Angela Zugarella, aged seventy-five years, of No. 128 Baxter street, has just been arrested at the instance of the County Medical Society, and charged in the Tombs Police Court with practising medicine without a diploma. She was held in the sum of $100 bail, and Carmine Tomosello, who keeps a saloon in the building where the old woman lives with her daughters, appeared in court and wrote himself down as security upon her bond. She is to appear at Special Sessions for trial in a few days. That is the news of it, briefly, barely told.

There is no brazen sign of M. D. upon the door of Dr. Zugarella's home. You could not see to read it if there were. The hallway is murky. The stairs are winding and uncanny.

And you may stumble up and down there, and knock at many doors and put your questions, and there will be shaking of heads and "no 'stan'," is your only answer.

The noises come faintly from the street and from the area. Children are jabbering at their play—poor, dirty, little children—old-clo' men and hucksters are wrangling and jangling over their trades, and the strident voices of women clattering forever in foreign tongues away along into the dark hours of the night. Board of Health wagons go up and down, and sturdy scavengers work vainly away trying to keep clean the crowded, wretched, misery-marked streets of Little Italy.

And that is Angela Zugarella, that weird, weazen-faced, little, shrunken, old woman, who walks like a cat there, for all her shoes are coarse and heavy. The plain brown skirt—short, after the Italian fashion—which swishes about her ankles as she creeps along, is new and fine compared with the greasy, worn-out fineries of the other women. Over her head, and drawn close with a thin, bony hand, is an old, time-faded red shawl. A face, thin and sharp, and furrowed with wrinkles, peers out. Two eyes, black as jet, wild, wandering eyes, sunken deep, are arched by black brows.

It is a ghastly face, all the paler for the coal-black hair which is parted over the low forehead and combed straight back across the seamed temples.

No wonder the children part from the sidewalks to let her go by. No wonder they are mute till she is out of reach. Because if a word were said ill of old Mother Lugarella she could hear it, even if it were said in a whisper and she were blocks away.

All up and down those dirty purlieus the old woman is known. She has doctored and doctored, and with her lotions and her potions and her incantations has charmed away from those half-fed, half-clad bodies ills for which the sufferers knew no more definite name than "sick." At least they think so.

II.

THE SORCERESS'S PRETTY PATIENT AND HER FAMILY.

Four years ago Antonio Tafre came from the little town of Basilica, in Italy. A big strong-limbed, square-jawed, swarthy man, with a hard-featured, hard-working wife and a pretty daughter and a son or so. Gaining by industry a stout push-cart for his possession, Antonio went to peddling potatoes. Then he established an ice-cream factory of his own and in the summer times sold the refreshment to the children all up and down the east side.

The old woman was not idle meantime. Every other day saw her stubbornly pushing her way through the crowd, which somehow is always in the streets in the tenement-house district. On her head always was a giant bundle. The old woman's waist is big, and her back is straight and strong, and the muscles in her neck stand out from that everlasting lugging of heavy weights upon her head.

Night and day, night and day, with that monotonous persistence which is the life story of the very poor, she stitched away at the coarse garments she had brought home from the tailor's shop.

There were just two little rooms in the place on the second floor of a Mulberry street tenement that the Tafres called home—two cramped little rooms, where they cooked and slept and sewed and kept boarders. The big bed, a lofty affair, under which was the little trundle-bed, stood close against the stove, which was parlor stove and cook-stove all in one.

And there the old woman struggled along, trying to keep house and sew. She had a helper in the pretty daughter, Madeline, quite tall, and strong like her father, fine featured, great eyed.

Madeline was only a child. But she had nimble fingers, and she kept her needle flying almost as fast as did her old mother. They say now, looking back on it, that Madeline could earn then, at sewing, fully 20 cents a day. As for school, that was for rich folks.

ANGELA ZURGARELLA.
The Witch Doctress of Baxter street.

Madeline was a very intelligent girl, though. She had a soft temper then, they say, and a fine, quiet way about her, which wasn't met with every day in the girls who talk and laugh and loiter gossiping over the railings of areaways in Mulberry street.

She never had a chance to get out into the open air much. There must be a good many pairs of little trousers finished to bring in that 20 cents a day. But there were roses in her cheeks just the same, and she was plump.

Mrs. McKenna, the wife of the man who owns the tenement, used to speak about what a nice, pretty, industrious girl Madeline was. And the young fellows who stood about the corners in the neighborhood and talked the Sicilian dialect and smoked very short, very black pipes, used to look after her as she went down the street and say that it wouldn't be but a little while now before Madeline would be looking for a husband. She had only gotten along to thirteen, but, then, girls marry young in Italy, and in Little Italy, too.

III.

MADELINE GREW VERY SICK.

Old man Tafre came home one night—oh, a year and more ago, tired with shoving his old go-cart over the rough city pavements. Madeline wasn't working. She sat in a chair in the corner by the narrow-paned window, which looked out upon the court.

She was pale, and the old man asked her what she had quit sewing for. She told him in Italian that she was tired, and that there was an awful pain in her back and hip, and that she believed she had sewed too much, perhaps, already. After that she didn't get out of the rooms much. There was hardly anything she could do—that pain was so terrible. It was settling into her hip, and by and by they saw signs of something forming on the side of her right limb.

The color was going out of Madeline's cheeks very fast now. The old woman worked away harder than ever. But they brought out the little trundle bed and put it over in the corner, there, for Madeline. And there she lay.

By and by the oldest son brought home a wife, a buxom, square-shouldered, good-looking creature, with black hair, who took up the work where little Madeline had left off. This addition to the family circle of the Tafres—and of course there was another healthy addition afterwards—did not bring about a corresponding enlargement of their living apartments. They were still crowded into the two little rooms. And then, a little later on, the other son brought home a spouse too—a pert, red-cheeked, full-lipped miss of fifteen, who spoke English as fast as you please and Italian a good deal faster.

She was a regular little wheel-horse to work, though, was this child-wife, and the housekeeping fell to her. She did it, and the marketing, and a hundred other things besides. But with all her English she stuck to the pinks, and blues, and purples, and gay finery of her native land.

She was for having something done for her sister-in-law, and she never stopped talking about it. A regular, real, sure-enough physician the Tafres couldn't afford. Lord! It was about as much as they could do to get food enough to keep the bodies and souls of them all together.

But one day Angela Maria di Lei, a gossip of theirs, told them they ought to have old Mother Zugarella see Madeline, that she could cure her with stuff that she boiled up and mixed up and poured down your throat and rubbed all over you. And she had cured no end of people, and that besides having this medicine, which was the most marvellous restorer in the whole world, the old woman said things, when she was cooking it, which not a soul of those who ever heard it could understand, for part of it was a language nobody else ever was heard to speak, and some part of it sounded like Italian, but, goodness! it meant nothing.

But the old woman—Angela di Lei said another woman had told her, having heard it from her cousin, who was sick—rolled her eyes around and didn't seem to see anything while she was saying those prayers. It was impossible to find out who she was praying for, but every one whom she doctored got well, and that was enough.

THE WITCH DOCTRESS CAME.

So nearly a year ago, little, dried-up, eerie-looking old Angela Zugarella, doctor, witch or what not, climbed the dark stairs which led into the Tafre tenement. In her sharp old voice she asked a lot of questions, and the poor, ignorant folk whose [illegible] there suffering, amid the sordid surroundings, listened and marvelled as the sorceress told them great stories of how, if they would only have Madeline take something that she would give her and use a magic plaster she would prepare, and never go near any other doctor, she would make her fat again, oh, so fat as she never was. And she would come then to the house every day until Madeline was cured, and it would only cost 50 cents a visit.

And they all made up their minds that the child should not miss this chance of health just for the saving of a little money. If she got well, then she could work.

So they crossed the old healer's palms with a good half dollar every day, and she set about the doctoring. When none but the old mother was there to see she heated water in the great kettle on the little stove. Most of it she poured out into the family's one washtub, to bathe the patient's back and limbs. Then into what remained in the kettle she put a part of a candle and some salt and herbs, and wine, and oil.

The Tafres say that she put into that compound things they never saw before. She brought them there in a bundle under her shawl. And all the time, as she emptied them, "eye of newt and toe of frog," into the kettle she stirred and stirred, and crooned and mumbled ever softly to herself.

And so this weird sister, fit for the sisterhood which read the fates to Cawdor on the heath, kept in her Sicilian way repeating:

Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

AND STILL THE POOR PATIENT GREW WORSE.

And the toil and trouble did double for the Tafres, and poor little Madeline lying there in the corner grew whiter and thinner and her voice grew weaker and more tremulous and the great pain that was gnawing at her hip there and making her writhe with the suffering grew greater, and still in faith she watched, day after day, the old hag over the stove and listened to the vague, strange prayers, and submitted to the bathings and rubbings in those strange lotions and slept at night with great plasters upon her hip made of cabbage leaves and soap and odds and ends of everything under heaven.

Still the half dollars kept tumbling into the old woman's purse and she kept promising and promising and promising that by and by Madeline should be all well.

Six months went away. The child had shrunk to a shadow. The old woman's magic was not so much of a magic after all. Maybe the old woman suspected that they were beginning to doubt her powers. Maybe they told her outright that they wouldn't pay so much, for she cut down the rate to 25 cents a visit. For two months more she practised her impositions upon them at that price.

But it couldn't last always. Madeline would die pretty soon if the thing kept on. One day Mrs. McKenna went up to see her and shrank back with a cry at sight of the pale face and withered form that lay in the corner there.

That ended it. Mrs. McKenna sent off post haste for her own physician, Dr. A. Lenora White, of No. 129 West Forty-fifth street. The pain-racked body of little patient, pale Madeline had at last fallen into wise, kind, patient hands.

The witch doctress came no more to the Tafres household.

But it was late, very late, the doctor said. Helpless, unable to move, the child lay there with an enormous abcess on her hip. The family, who cannot so much as write their names, what should they know of such things?

The witch-like woman who peddled the soap plasters and made Madeline swallow such terrible stuffs had told them in the pauses of her incantations that all would be well. And didn't she know more than they?

Well, the surgeons came, with their awful instruments, and there was a smell of ether in the dark hallways at No. 118 Mulberry street. And there were daily visitings, and there were drainage tubes—strange things, of which the brawny father and the stern, swart mother knew nothing.

And there was a voice raised in the Co[unty] Medical Society, and a lawyer—Willia[m] Purrington—was drawing up papers [in his] Wall street office, and Dr. Angela Zug[arella] might well have been singing: "Th[e deluge] after me."

VII.

THE WITCH DOCTRESS IN COURT.

Stoical, speechless, vigilant, wat[ched] the Court, the crowd, the clerks, the b[rass-]buttoned officers who gloomed above the mite of a wicked old imposter st[ood in] court and wondered what would be [done] with her. Her daughters, women like [their] mother, with hard lines in their faces, [were] there with her. Led away to the cell[s the] old woman went without a murmur, al[most] passively, but walking erect for all [her] seventy-five years. Her little old [black] eyes flashed contempt in the matron's [room] of the prison at a hearty-looking, [red-]headed woman, who had been arrest[ed at] the age of thirty-four, and who we[pt and] sobbed and could not be comforted.

Then when the sun was getting lo[w they] led old Angela out of the prison. [She] "knew no touch of the pen" appare[ntly,] for the policeman had to hold her [hand] upon it when the mark was made that [stood] at law for her signature to the bond. [Her] daughter was waiting, and together [they] went away from the grim prison portal[s and] off up into the winding ways which le[d the] pilgrims into the noise and jargon a[nd old] clo'es and bad smells of Baxter street.

The women folks are still sewing aw[ay] in the close, dingy back room in the [Tafre] tenement. The plump babies cry no[w and] then, but are quiet, after the fash[ion of] babies, when some one gives them a p[...]. The child-wife bustles about her h[ouse]work. Though the family talk is loud, sometimes angry, there is silence wh[en the] girl-doctor's bright, cheery face com[es to] the door.

But Madeline lies on her couch—no[w a] clean a one—very still. Her voice, wea[kened] by suffering, softens the discordant Si[cilian] dialect into that music which is the [...] possession of the tongue of Dante. An[d the] pale face and the great, hollow, hu[ngry] Southern eyes are not of this world.

Capt. Murphy's Friends Mourn[...]

Capt. Michael Murphy, who was [trans]ferred from the West Thirty-seventh [street station] to the Tremont station by the Police [Com]missioners on Monday last, has left b[ehind] a number of friends who are going [...] to move the powers that be for his [...]. They have decided to petition the Co[mmis]sioners to give them back their old Ca[ptain].