

New York Woman Haled to Court as a Magician in Allentown, Penn.—
Big Modern Communities Where Spells and Incantations
Are Used Daily for Every Ill That Flesh Is Heir To.

hours. Not, of course, for witchcraft; she was charged with some prosaic modern offense such as refusing to pay her room rent. It was necessary to get her out of Allentown and back to New York, where she is now and where she can weave her spells with impunity and even ride a broom if she can find a good steady nag of that kind, and the arrest served the purpose. It was enough; Mrs. Immerman took the hint and hastened back to this infidel and materialistic town, where, if there are people who believe in witchcraft, there is at least no great danger of getting arrested for practicing it.

Kistler is serious-minded and sincere. He says he has had 1,300 patients in the last year, and counts himself a success-

ful practitioner. An Allentown man of prominence, asked if Kistler exaggerated in his statement, replied that he thought the witch doctor probably understated rather than overstated the number of his patients.

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writing tauschens and peddling their to people in the neighborhood. Tauschens are engrossed baptismal certificates.

Having bought himself and his family free, he branched out as a witch doctor, and twenty years later he printed his book of magic, which he called "The Long-Hidden Friend," and which was pretty much such a book as the wizards of the "Arabian Nights" used to examine when they wanted to bring a genie out of the bowels of the earth to rub a magic lamp for them or release an imprisoned princess from a jar somewhere in Cathay.

This, then, is the book of spells whereon the "hex" doctors of Eastern Pennsylvania found their practice; whereby they relieve cattle of diseases—for it is very

a genuine physician. He was almost seventy years old; he was the star hexer of his community; generation after generation had grown up around him, consulting him when their children were sick or their wives in labor or their cattle suffering from necromancy; never had he made a mistake. Thus outraged, he brought suit, in all good faith, against The North American for libel and produced his patients as witnesses.

The revelations made on the witness stand were astounding. Good, sensible, matter-of-fact people went into the chair by the score and testified about charms, spells, and incantations as tranquilly as if they had been talking about shipping lists or bills of lading. And they all seemed to wonder why it was necessary

ing it about her when its birth approaches she can be assured of a painless and successful issue.

Copies of this letter are scattered all about Eastern Pennsylvania, and you can get any number of testimonials to its efficacy.

Dr. Edwin M. Fogel of Gogelsville, Penn., a Professor in the University of Pennsylvania, has made a study of folklore and strange superstitions, and in talking to a New York TIMES reporter about the matter yesterday, he said:

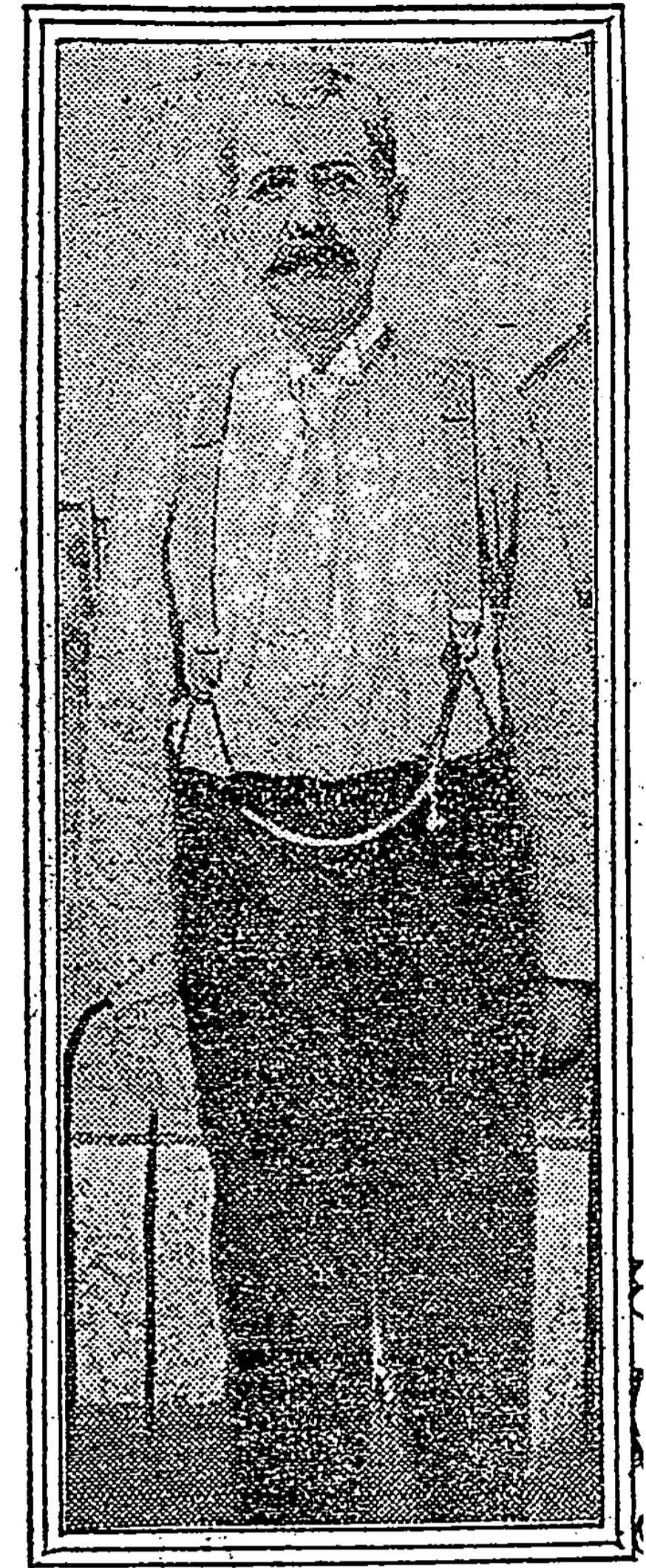
"I have made a collection of 2,500 of these superstitions, and at least 90 per cent. of them are of Germanic origin. Not long ago I visited a rich farmer in Lancaster County, whose cattle had been affected by one of the diseases to which

that the rabbit was sacred to the god, Dona, or Thor.

The value of the number three crops up over and over again in all these charms. Nine, for instance, is a multiple of three, and the witch doctors of Pennsylvania, when consulted about a sick child, generally instruct the mother to let no one speak to it for nine days, or to repeat the charm daily for nine days, or to strew salt on the bed nine times.

An illuminating bit of testimony in Hageman's libel suit against The North American was that of a young woman named Lizzie Winter, who lived in Reading and had consulted Hageman about a sick child of hers.

"He gave me," she testified, "a piece of canvas, and told me to pin it on the



Sir John Kloss, to Whom Mrs. Immerman Went for the Kneipp Cure.

In the twentieth century, more than two hundred years after the last witch was tried at Salem, a prosaic New York dressmaker was haled into court in a large, prosperous and up-to-date American city and charged with being a witch.

This thing happened in Allentown, Penn., a couple of weeks ago; and what makes the case more remarkable is that it was not an incident and sporadic instance of superstition, but apparently a symptom of a state of mind which is almost universal in Eastern Pennsylvania. Neither the witch herself nor the people who caused her arrest seemed to see anything unusual about the proceedings brought against her. None of her neighbors did; and yet the community in which she lived was not a back-country district, but a busy and populous neighborhood in a big, wide-awake, and thoroughly modern city.

The woman was Meta Immerman, a New York dressmaker who had gone to Allentown to start a sort of Kneipp sanitarium. She believed in various theories of the kind which the frivolous-minded term "crank." Some of them had to do with diet; one of them was the belief that you could cure most of your bodily ills by going barefoot when the dew was on the grass.

That of itself would have been enough to convict her of witchcraft in the eyes of her new neighbors at Allentown. The very idea of such a thing suggested the weaving of spells. So, the first time Meta was seen walking barefoot in early morning her case was prominently discussed.

However, she did not leave her neighbors with merely this evidence. She carried a little pocket electric light, and sometimes on dark nights she would pull this out and use it—say for some such purpose as to read the number on the street door of some house she was looking for.

So there were now two counts in the indictment, and the evidence was almost overwhelming.

1. She wore spells by walking barefooted through the grass at dawn.

2. She cast spells by throwing a witch light on houses at dead of night.

And now, to cap the climax, the unconscious dressmaker one morning walked through the grass with her shoes in her hand. Her reason simply was that she had no convenient place to put them down; but this did not come out until her terrified neighbors had had her haled to court as a witch, and the amazed Mrs. Immerman was frantically protesting her innocence.

She was lodging with the family of George Kipp of South Thirteenth Street. A young couple by the name of Sober also lived in the house. It was the male Sober, John by name, who brought things to a crisis. He was seized one night with what he subsequently called "a terrible pain in my stomach."

That was enough. All the suspicious circumstances in Mrs. Immerman's case flashed at once to the minds of the Sobers and the Kipps. Then a new and still more damning thing was remembered, which was that Miss Immerman lived on nuts and raw eggs. She did, as a matter of fact, and so do a large number of the curious people who worry about the ailments of their stomachs. One of these nut-devourers is Senator La Follette. However, the Kipps and the Sobers did not know that. It was obvious to them that she was living on a witch's diet.

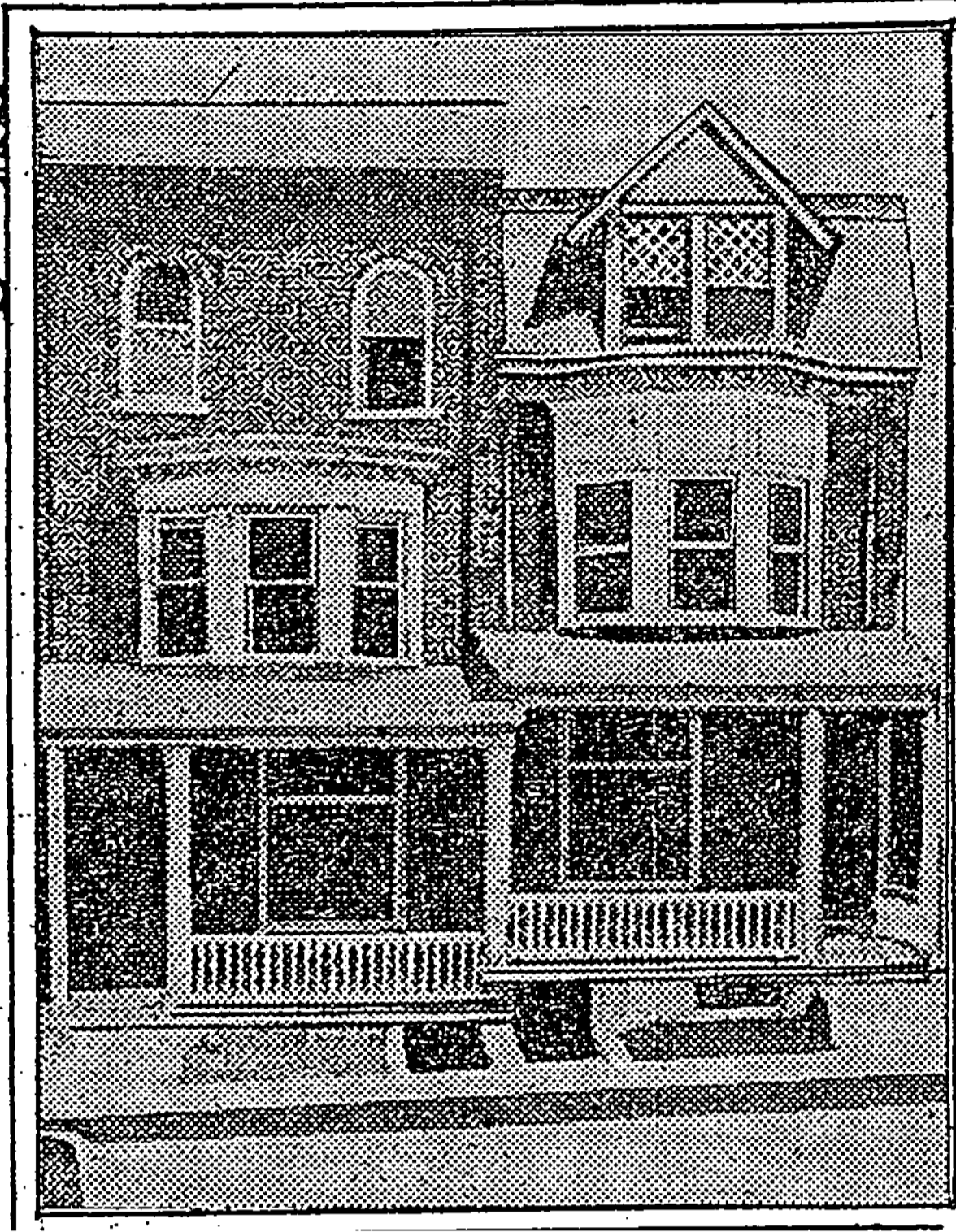
They did not proceed to extremities at once. Kipp relied on a charm he had put over Sober's door to keep witches away. Apparently no one with whom the symptoms were so severe for him to wait for results. His wife advised him to lose no time, but to go and see a witch doctor right away.

Fortunately, one of the best witch doctors in Allentown lived right across the street, George Kistler by name, and Sober at once consulted him. "No," said Sober afterward, "he didn't give me any medicine. He just closed his eyes and asked me if I felt as though somebody was clutching at my sides. That was just how I felt, and I told him so, and he closed his eyes again and seemed to go into a trance. Then he said: 'Young man, some woman has cast a spell over you.' I said, 'Do you mean a witch?' He closed his eyes again, and said that was just how people were bewitched.

"I came home and told my wife, and she said right away it must be Miss Immerman. Then I knew when it was that she had cast the spell. She had asked me to help carry her trunk to the third floor. Of course, I obliged her, and as I took it up the stairs she kept her eyes fastened on me steadily, instead of looking at the trunk. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but now I know that it was then she was casting the spell."

Kistler, the "pow-wow" doctor, never charged Mrs. Immerman with witchcraft; it seems that "hex" doctors never give names. They simply diagnose the case as any other doctor would do, and discover the bewitching from the symptoms. So Kistler had merely diagnosed the case as one of witchcraft, and it was the Sobers who settled on Mrs. Immerman as the witch.

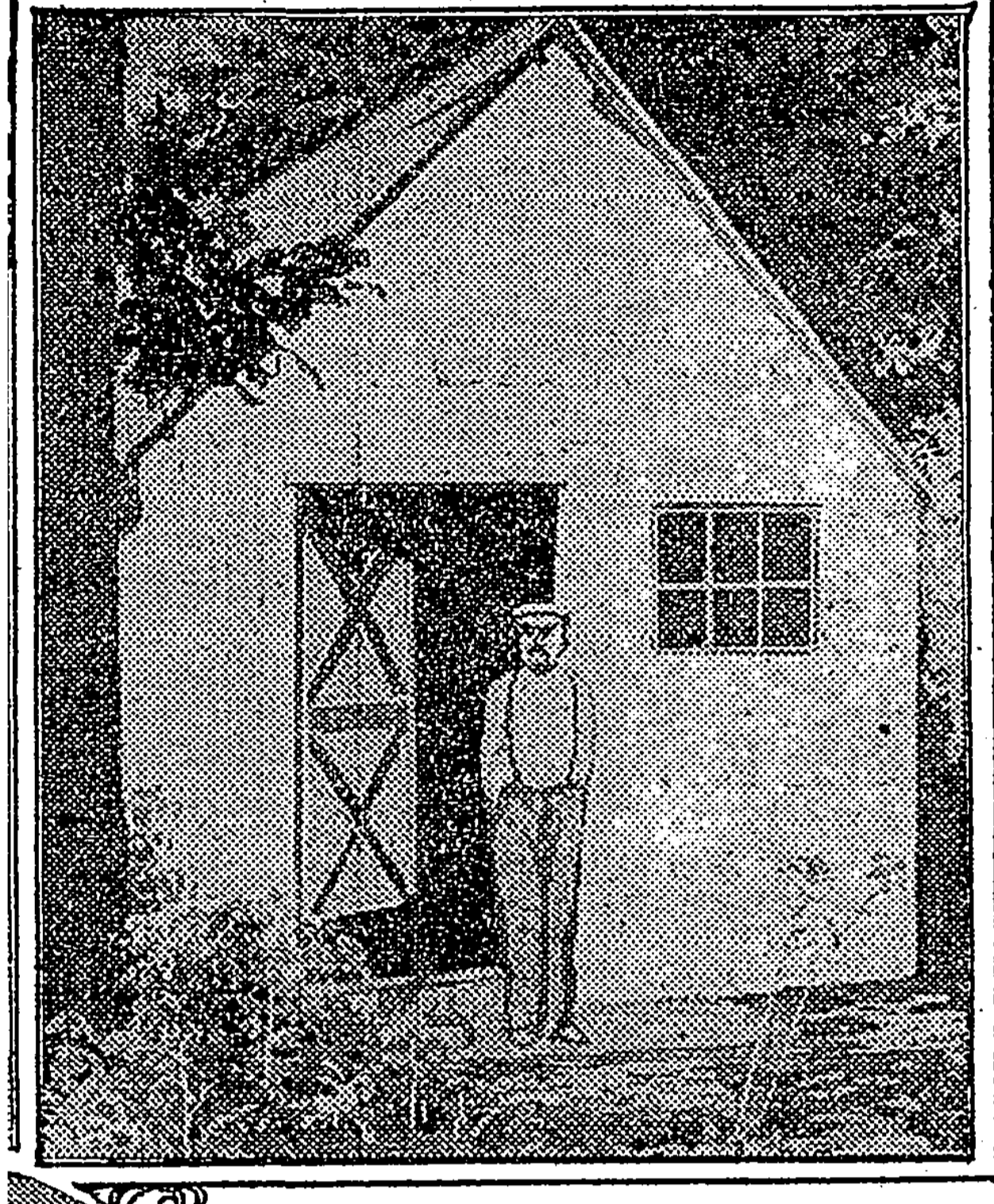
And they had her arrested, and she served a jail sentence of forty-eight



The Kipp Home.



Mrs. George Kipp and Her Children.



The Kloss Hut Near Bethlehem Where the Kneipp Cure Was Practiced.

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Now, the really astonishing thing about all this is that it did not take place in an ignorant country district. It happened in a big city, thoroughly up-to-the-minute in every respect.

Allentown has a population of 60,000, but it has a much more bustling and worldly air than most cities of that size. It has an air of wide-awake haste and an aroma of prosperity and importance. It looks more like a metropolis than many a city four times its size.

It is almost Chicagoesque in its general atmosphere of knowingsness and up-to-dateness. The cities that occur to your mind for comparison as you walk the streets of Allentown are Buffalo and Rochester. These streets are wide, with a width to shame a New York, well paved with asphalt, with automobiles and trolley cars, and lined with alert, well-dressed business men and smartly clothed women.

So it is no "jay" community in which, in the twentieth century, a single witch doctor can get, at a moderate estimate, 1,300 cases in a year.

But Allentown is not alone in its belief in necromancy. All Eastern Pennsylvania is full of it. There have been more cases in Reading than in Allentown, for instance. Berks County is the banner witch county of the State, and Allentown is in Lehigh County. Northampton County crowds them both pretty close.

These are among the regions populated by what are mistakenly called the "Pennsylvania Dutch," by which term is meant the descendants of the courageous Germans who emigrated, mostly for conscience's sake, to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Outside of Pennsylvania there is an idea that they are an ignorant lot, something like the mountaineers of Kentucky, and that when a "witchcraft" case comes out of their region it is to be attributed to the fact that it is an un-American community.

No more serious mistake could be made. The Pennsylvania Germans are a fine type of citizenry, and a majority of Pennsylvania's Governors have come from their ranks. There are ignorant people among them, but their ignorance is neither so general nor so general as that of other clean-strain American communities of eighteenth century descent, such, for instance, as Eastern Kentucky and North Carolina.

So the source of the witchcraft delusion will have to be looked for a little further, and, in fact, the belief in witches, spells, and spirits is not confined, even in Eastern Pennsylvania, to the German-descended Americans. A man named Smith is just as likely to believe in charms and incantations as a man named Schmidt.

The charms which they use in Eastern Pennsylvania are all taken from "Hohman's book" or every "pow-wow" or "hex" doctor uses the Hohman formulae. They are not fakirs. Most of them believe as sincerely in their powers as do the people who consult them, and have a positive reverence for Hohman's spells.

Hohman's book is a book of magic. It is almost impossible to find a copy, since no "hex" doctor will admit that he uses it, but the Journal of American Folk Lore published it in full a few years ago, a copy of it having been discovered by a folk-lore student in Berks County.

Hohman himself was a sincere believer in witchcraft. He lived and died in the belief that he was a great conjurer, and apparently no one with whom he came in contact ever doubted it. His full name was John George Hohman, and he was a Prussian immigrant who came to Pennsylvania in 1769, with his wife and child. They were bound out to a farmer named Fretz, and Hohman bought his liberty by

seldom that a cow gets sick in the ordinary way, she almost always suffers from a spell—whereby they soothe the pains of childbirth, cure rickets, banish colic from the innards of infants, and perform many other wonderful deeds.

The greatest "pow-wow" doctor who ever lived in Eastern Pennsylvania was named Hageman. He died about three years ago in Reading, where, despite the fact that it is a full-fledged modern city of 100,000 population, he had been able to live a prosperous and successful life of seventy-six years weaving spells and making incantations at a good round figure per charm. This man had a reputation which extended far beyond the fine twentieth century city he lived in, and people came from far-away counties to consult him.

In 1900 The Philadelphia North American sent a young woman of ability and cleverness to see "Dr." Hageman. Her name was Alice Rix. She trumped up a story to the effect that a relative of hers was sick, and asked Hageman to treat the case. He did so by giving her a charm, and Miss Rix wrote an account of her experiences with him. In the course of it she gave this pen-picture of the "pow-wow," which will give a pretty vivid idea of the kind of man who exorcises evil spirits in one of the greatest States of the Union twenty centuries after the beginning of the Christian era.

"He is a gross, grizzled, dirty old man, huge of head and face and jaw and hanging chin, with a monstrous body, long, thick arms, and short thick legs of the bear, with big, fat, greasy hands, like suet puddings boiled in bags; with squat, square feet; a mouth open over a single row of brown and broken teeth; with bright, blue, questioning, kindly eyes full of spots of innocence; and a field of fifth, like forget-me-nots dropped on a dirt heap."

Hageman did not understand much of this description, but his soul was outraged by Miss Rix's allegations that he was not

to bring them there; why there should be any question of the existence of such things. A blank amazement was manifested by almost all of them when the lawyers asked if they believed in such things.

"Haven't we a God in heaven?" demanded one of them, a woman named Lavinia Babst and living in a central part of the big town of Reading. She was speaking to The North American's lawyer, ex-Judge Gordon, who had expressed or intimated some doubt of the reality of witchcraft. "Do you believe in a church? Aren't they the three words?"

"What words do you mean?" replied Judge Gordon.

"God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost," she answered. These are the three words which either begin or end nearly all the incantations used in her section of the country. "Do you believe in them?"

"Are these words the beneficial part of the charm?" parried Gordon.

"It is part of it," she said, "and if you don't believe in such things you don't believe in church and you don't believe in God."

After two or three days of this sort of testimony The North American was triumphantly vindicated. The attorneys for verdict for the defendant, explaining that they had not known when they undertook the case what Hageman had been doing. And the poor old man, himself as sincerely convinced as any of his patients that he was a conjurer, went back to Reading sorely puzzled, and wondering how it could be that a court of law could decide against things taught in the Bible. He went on practicing, with no diminution of his success, and died some five years later, mourned by all the witch-believers in Berks County and many another county.

There is a widespread belief in Eastern Pennsylvania in the efficacy of "Magdeburg." That is a short word for "the magic letter of Jesus Christ." It is as strange a delusion as ever existed, but like all the Pennsylvania delusions it is not peculiar to Pennsylvania. It was, in fact, brought over from Germany.

The legend is, in brief, that a letter written by the second person in the Trinity was dropped from heaven and hovered over the baptismal font at the church of Magdeburg, Germany. It was a letter designed by the Saviour for the relief of women in labor. Whoever can obtain a copy of it must give it to his wife, if a child is expected, and by keep-

cattle are subject. However, he was firmly convinced that they had been bewitched, and he consulted a "hex" doctor.

"The 'hex' doctor agreed with him as to the cause of the trouble, and told him to place a broom in front of his door. 'The first person,' said the doctor, 'who picks it up is the witch who has troubled your cattle.' You know, of course, that no witch will ever step over a broom, any more than she will cross running water."

"He followed instructions. The next day a woman, a neighbor, came to visit the family. She found the broom laid across the step, and of course picked it up; no good housewife could find a broom laid in such a negligent fashion without having her housewifely instincts affronted. That settled it; to them she was the witch, and nothing could have changed their opinion."

Every now and then there crops up in the newspapers a story about an "endless chain of prayer," a letter which is sent to three persons, each of whom must copy it and send it to three others, on penalty of a curse. It is a Germanic superstition of the same kind as the belief in the "Magdeburg" letter of Christ.

The charms given, both for protection against witches and for relief from sickness, nearly always begin with the letters "I. N. R. I.," which mean "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The incantations in both cases generally have salt as an ingredient. If, for instance, your child is sick, you must strew salt on its bed "in the shape of the child."

The superstition about the number three, which is certainly much older than the Christian religion, figures in all these things. Multiples of three are magic numbers. The great value of a toad's foot is the number of its points. Five is another magic number. There is no numeral value to a rabbit's foot, and the value of that charm arises from the fact



Mrs. John Sober, the Bride.



John Sober, Who Charged That Mrs. Immerman Bewitched Him.



"Dr." Charles Kistler, the Pow-Wow Doctor.

neerer than thou hast: this I reckon to thee, Fire, for a penance, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost; and ends, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, help us out of this stress of fire and protect this land from plague and pestilence.'

Hohman's story, which he gives in a foot-note in his book of magic, is that in 1714—the last day of June," he laboriously and conscientiously mentions—six gipsies were condemned to be hung in Königsberg, Prussia. The seventh, a man of eighty, was to be beheaded. As he was brought out for execution a great fire broke out. The old gipsy was loosed and brought to the fire, where he repeated the incantation, "and he subdued the fire in one half of one quarter of an hour; for which he was pardoned and set free. This was known in the palace of Prussia, and in the General Superintendent of Königsberg, and has openly been put to the proof. It was first tested in Königsberg by Alexander Banman in 1715. Whoever has this formula written in the house is safe from danger of conflagration or thunderstorm; likewise for a pregnant woman is it good: mass cannot injure her or her child; it protects likewise against plague and pestilence. When one repeats the formula he must go around the fire three times."

Again the magic number.

It is also possible to catch a thief by magic. Hohman describes this as a charm "to hold a thief fixed, that he cannot move." If you find a thief in your house, and you wish to hold him spellbound, you must say:

"O Peter, O Peter! Take from God the power; may I find, I cannot bind, with the band of Jesus' hand, that robbars all, great and small, that none can go no step more, neither backward nor before, till I then with my eyes perceptive, till I then with my tongue relieve, till first they count my every stone, 'twixt heaven and earth a drop of rain, each leaf of tree and blade of grass; this pray I to my foe for mass. Here you must make three crosses, and then say the Creed and Paternoster three times."

Hohman says ingeniously that this "is the best charm for this purpose in the book," and surely it can never have been proved a failure; for few thieves would be apt to wait until the charm was said.

Most of the incantations are shorter, however, and many of them even more unutterably gibberish. If, for instance, you are menaced by a witch, you can drive her off or make her powerless by saying—three times, of course:

"Dullir, ir, ur.
Pontio is over Pontio.
After which you must make a cross—three times, of course.

You can turn a bad dog into a good one by an incantation. It is not good for hunting purposes, all you have to do is to say—three times, of course:

"Hound, hold thy mouth to the ground. Me God made, thee he suffers, hound, but you must not let the dog see you do it, and you must be careful to make the crosses in his direction and not away from him.

If you want to be a good marksman there is a simple way. You take the heart of a wild mouse and put a little of it between the ball and the powder, and you will hit all you wish." You must use "the three first names"—this expression always means the names Father, Son and Holy Ghost—when you begin to load, and you must not finish the words until you are through loading.

If you wish to make your baby through the testing period without pain, it can easily be done. You have merely to boil the brain of a rabbit—the animal sacred to Thor—and rub the gums of the child with it.

Other children's diseases can be cured in a much easier way. You just say—three times, of course:

"Mary, the holy, went over the land; She had three worms in her hand; One was white, another black, and the third was red."

Then you strike the child, and after that you strike him one blow, then two blows, then three blows.

But if you ask Pennsylvanians about the superstitions in their State, they bristle up. "Isn't Pennsylvania, it's American; in fact, it's world-wide," they say. "Don't you have clairvoyants in New York? Isn't there a heavy sale for dream books there?" The Rev. J. W. Early, a Lutheran Minister of Reading, wrote on this subject in 1904:

"If you suppose the use of it (witchcraft) is confined to irregular practitioners in Berks County, you are grievously mistaken. The practice of its mysterious formulae is carried on to a very large extent even beyond the limits of Pennsylvania, possibly the larger part of the country east of the Mississippi, and perhaps even beyond."

Still, the frank, candid, unashamed way in which they admit it in Berks, Lancaster, Northampton and Lehigh Counties, and the way in which they open their eyes in astonishment when you question the truth of witchcraft, is something not often matched in other communities.

Elsewhere people hide it. Probably the Rev. J. W. Early is right for all that. Are we—after all—civilized?