

The Pagliano-Aunt from Heiden (AR, Switzerland)

Can faith heal? Or is there medicinal cause and health effect? The answer to this is difficult, because already in the Bible it can be read that faith can move mountains. But there it is about mountains and not about health.



Here now is a special story from the land of the Swiss: Petronella d'Acierno-Mabellini (1877-1962) lived in Seebach in the canton of Zurich from 1920. Her parents came from Monteforte near Naples, although it is unclear whether her mother emigrated from Switzerland to Italy or from Italy to Switzerland. It is also not important. Not much is known about her youth, only that the relationship with her stepfather was not good and that he, therefore, takes her to an aunt in Lisbon. The aunt is fond of travelling and takes Petronella on a trip to Abyssinia. She learns Arabic, her gift for the healing arts is recognized and she intensifies her knowledge in it; because of her talent, she goes in and out to the Emperor Menelik. In 1896, her aunt and Petronella return to Naples; Petronella must now learn Italian. She becomes engaged and travels to Switzerland with her fiancé Vincenzo

Martino d'Acierno, where they marry in 1898 and she gives birth to their first child in the same year. A new child is born every year or so - nine in all, including two miscarriages. Martino, who later called himself Martin, had various affairs with Swiss women, and in 1905 the couple separated, with Martin returning to her again and again to father another child. The last time this happened was in 1916 when a son refused his father access to Petronella's apartment at Schärenmoosstrasse 57.



Petronella lives in the city of Zurich as a housekeeper and janitor, besides working as a temp in the cigarette production at Turmac. She now gives health advice to various sick people; after she also cures her Turmac boss of a serious illness, many sick people now come to her for help. Some of the old Seebacher could still remember Petronella and her flock of children decades ago. Her treatment room is the sidewalk in front of the Turmac company. The influx is growing, her secret remedy is the **Pagliano**

syrup: a laxative that "resulted in a very abrupt onset of diarrhoea, which was unsurpassed in suddenness and irresistibility. Only after the intestines had been thoroughly cleansed of all harmful substances did she begin to advise her clients, usually banning coffee, smoking and alcohol and then prescribing a **healthy diet** and lifestyle. The counselling sessions are simple-minded: "Booze less – smoke less" or, "Eat less ..." She does not issue bills, and a small cash register may serve better-off citizens, poor people she serves and advises free of charge.



The pharmacist Schalch in Örlikon always has enough Pagliano in stock, however, some buy the remedy directly from him and it may happen that Schalch cannot deliver. The remedy comes from Barcelona, but is produced according to a recipe of Ernesto Pagliano, Naples, in Barcelona at Laboratorios Quimicos-Farmacéuticos J. Uriach & Co. SA. It consists "of senna, tree resin, jalapeno root, plum jam (!), agar-agar, etc. The laxative effect was mainly achieved by the senna". The Swiss Heilmittelkontrolle withdraws the approval of the rabid remedy. Moreover: little by little the news of healing success reached the local council, the competing doctors and finally the tax office. Hundreds of Seebach customers leave their mark! In 1926 comes what must come: any further healing activity is forbidden to Petronella in the canton of Zurich.



Bes.: Frau P. D'Acerno, Naturärztin
Telephon No. 59

Her pharmacist Schalch finds her the Neubad Inn in Heiden in the canton of Appenzell. Here Petronella builds up a new livelihood: numerous old customers book a

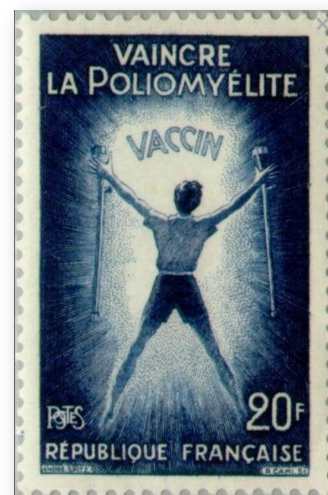
trip to Heiden and stay at the Neubad. It should be noted that Petronella never treats acute patients herself, but refers them to doctors and hospitals. Here in Heiden, different cantonal laws apply than in Zurich, and

she is able to operate a kind of sanatorium within her framework: Two sons are cooks, two daughters organize the overnight stays. Petronella has only one treatment room, where several people are usually present as patients. Another daughter runs the inn and now younger "patients" also come to the guest room to consume hop juice here. All her daughters are very dapper. The Neubad becomes too small, and in 1930 Petronella's family is able to take over the **Pension Turm**. Here there are massages by son Michelangelo; wraps, cupping, water treatments and exercise by the three daughters Grazia, Esther and Irma.

At the time of the polio epidemics around 1950, disabled people come in droves - and after treatment - according to the station manager Jakob Hohl - go home again without crutches. Petronella runs the spa until 1956, then she retires and treats only a few patients at the Gasthof Pöstli - in 1962 she closes her eyes forever - now called Pagliano-Aunt.

In retrospect, Petronella did not cheat anyone and caused no harm to anyone. She has always been fondly remembered by the inhabitants of Heiden. An exhibition in the Appenzell Folklore Museum in 2005 showed four well-known natural healers of the canton, Petronella was among them.

A story is told in Heiden with a smile: the Pagliano aunt had sent a patient to Dr. Niederer, a doctor in Heiden, who asked him where he had been treated elsewhere for so long. The patient confessed that he had been treated by Petronella and the doctor continued to ask what nonsense she had told him. Now the patient said: "Yes, ebe, that I should go to you! [Yes, just that I should come to you for treatment!]"



Who was the inventor of the laxative that the inventor called scioppo [syrup]? **Girolamo Pagliano** was born in Genoa in 1801, he had a certain penchant for opera and staged himself less successfully on the boards that meant the world. But from 1838 he makes enormous profits with his medicine, can afford a noble villa in Florence, in which he has a small stage built in. Now he is called "il professore", and his friend Carlo Collodi writes about him "*Who Girolamo Pagliano was, it is useless to repeat it here: by now all the bowels of Europe know it by heart!*" 1881, only eighty years old, the bon vivant dies in Florence.

Weiterführende Literatur:

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