



# **Beyond Avogadro's Number**

**Hahnemann's Private Battle  
which Lead to the Discovery  
of Homeopathy**

**Allan Bonsall**

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Lead to Discovery of Homeopathy

*by*

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**BEYOND AVOGADRO'S NUMBER**

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# Foreword

The life of Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann, the man credited with creating the medical philosophy of homeopathy, is well documented. Equally well documented is his ambitious struggle to bring his system of medicine into being. This book tells the story of Samuel Hahnemann's fight with the physicians of the old school and the apothecaries who held royal monopolies over the making and dispensing of medicines.

It is difficult to feel comfortable in defining this story as fiction because so much of it is based on fact. But it cannot be classified a biography of the life of Samuel Hahnemann because the story deliberately, and without apology, introduces fictitious characters and unproven events. To call it a "biopic", which seems to be the favoured term of the moviemakers, conjures a sense of commercialisation that is so out of keeping with the principles of the man that it cannot be used without all loss of credibility.

Neither is it a story about homeopathy.

Perhaps the book can best be described as a fictionalised biography. It endeavours to tell the story of Hahnemann's fight with the apothecaries in such a way that brings it to life. It is the story of one man's fight against the established code, a code that existed not because it was proven right but because it had the luxury of historical precedent.

# Acknowledgements

The writing of *Beyond Avogadro's Number* had a unique genesis and cannot be allowed to pass without acknowledging the people who inspired me to even attempt it.

At the outset I have to confess that my own demons drew me to homeopathy. For the better part of three decades I worked in the high pressure business of advertising, climbing, for better or worse, to the top of the corporate ladder. For most of those years I struggled with depression, finding little, if any, help in either the drugs or the psychiatry that was offered. In the end, that struggle cost me a career, a marriage and nearly my health. I say nearly because, although my career and my marriage were gone, my health was saved by homeopathy.

Without doubt the catalyst to my writing *Beyond Avogadro's Number* was George Christinson. George is Principal of the Academy of Homeopathic Medicine in Brisbane and the healer who brought me blessed relief from what was going on inside my head. Unbeknownst to me, Elizabeth Wighton, a student at the Academy and owner of an on-line bookshop *Similibooks*, had just donated a range of books on Samuel Hahnemann to the Academy's library. It was from these resources that I was able to piece together those parts of Hahnemann's story that emerge through the telling of this tale.

Since that beginning, Elizabeth and George have been towers of confidence whenever the demons looked set to return.

Another homeopath played a key role. Glenys Black and her husband, Peter, are old friends. Glenys has recently graduated as a homeopath. Whilst she was studying, Peter and I often indulged ourselves in the less rigorous pastime of tennis. On one such occasion I tore a muscle in my left quad. The injury kept me away from the courts for nearly a month, and when I finally returned it was only to have the damage recur. This time Peter was having nothing to do with my intentions to seek medical help and insisted that we go to his home for coffee, and a free consultation with Glen.

I'm still not sure what homeopathic remedy Glen gave me, but half an hour later the pain had gone and I was walking comfortably. The next weekend I was playing tennis without any discomfort. As far as homeopathy was concerned, I was hooked, and the more I read about Hahnemann, the more I became intrigued by his fight to establish his modality.

It was also Glenys Black who saw the potential in the name for the book, ringing me early one morning with the suggestion of *Beyond Avogadro's Number*.

Homeopathy often requires people to demonstrate a considerable leap of faith. The critics point to the dilution of remedies, specifically that when a substance has been diluted a thousand times it cannot possibly contain any of the original matter. In the early 1800s Amadeo Avogadro calculated a value, what has since become known as Avogadro's Number or Constant, for the number of atoms or molecules in a gram mole of any substance. A "mole" is defined in the International System of Units (SI) as Avogadro's number of particles of any kind of substance.

I refer to Avogadro's number in the book and was taken to task on this point by the late Julian Winston, esteemed historian, author and homeopath (not to mention slide guitarist), for referring to Avogadro at a time when, historically, Hahnemann may not have heard or known of the theory. I checked my facts

and discovered that Avogadro's number came into being in 1811, whilst my reference in the book took place after 1813.

I met Julian only a few months before his sad passing. It was at a Slide Guitar Music Festival in Brisbane, and Elizabeth Wighton took me along to meet him. After he had played, and I must acknowledge he did so with a style and energy that left many of his compatriots in his shadow, we met and discussed my manuscript. Reluctantly he agreed to read it, reluctantly because he had been burned before by sensationalised and badly-written attempts to do something similar. At this time, Julian's fight with the cancer that would ultimately take his life had begun to take its toll, yet I received his response in a long email only a few weeks later. His opening remarks, I'm assured, were rare praise indeed, but he tempered his comments by pointing out some of the classic blunders I had made. Given that now they are, in the main, corrected, I think I can be excused from going into too much detail.

What Julian said by way of praise, and his detailed comments about the historical facts of the manuscript, were a great fillip and gave me the confidence to take this to the next step. To that end it would be remiss of me not to thank Stephen Thompson, editor extraordinaire, and the man who pushed the right buttons to get this thing published. As an outcome, if I can encourage one person to trial homeopathy for their own well-being then the effort will have been worthwhile.

And finally, to my dearest Jann, without whose support this journey would never have begun.

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# 19

‘**F**rau Haller, I assure you that you only need take the amount I pre-scribed. Because Doctor Keller insists on prescribing horse tablets does not make the practice obligatory. It certainly doesn’t for me.’

Frau Haller inspected the small phial in her hand. She peeked at Samuel from under her bonnet. ‘Please don’t misunderstand me, Doctor Hahnemann, we are grateful that you treat us and don’t charge for your medicine but it seems so, so strange.’

‘I don’t see what is strange about it. Haven’t your family responded to my treatment? It is these others that are fools ...’ Samuel bit off the retort, as Frau Haller’s hand flew to her mouth.

‘Please, trust me,’ Samuel said, his anger under control. ‘I assure you, you have no need to ingest huge quantities of medicine for your ailment. Within a few days it will be gone.’

Samuel smiled wearily as the gentle lady hurriedly crossed to the door. Samuel caught up to her. ‘Good day, Frau Haller. Remember: six drops before your evening meal, then a further six drops when you rise for breakfast.’

The woman nodded as she slipped gratefully through the door.

Samuel heard the passage door open behind him. Johanna stood in the doorway to the kitchen.

‘Samuel, I insist that you take a break. You have already seen five patients this morning. I am warning you, your lunch will spoil if it is forced to sit on the stove another minute.’

Before Samuel could answer, Johanna turned and left. Sadly he walked back to the room where he received his patients.

How he wished the light would return to her eyes. Johanna hadn't been the same since the death of little Ernst. Samuel cursed, ‘Damn that man!’

That the driver had died from internal bleeding gave Samuel no comfort or consolation for the shattered health of his dearest Elise. Frederika was a blessed child, but Samuel suspected their new baby would never replace Johanna's beloved Ernst. Perhaps if their seventh had been another boy? Perhaps.

For the thousandth time he rued the offer of a place at Pyrmont. Had he not wavered to the lure of financial gain Ernst might still be alive.

Impatiently, Samuel got to his feet and smacked his clenched fist against his leg. ‘It is more than four years, for the love of God, two of them here in Königslutter. How much longer will you drive yourself insane with guilt?’

Samuel walked out of his study into the small sitting area set up for the use of his patients. He tidied the sitting area and returned to his study to put away his notes. Then he would do as his dear wife bid.

The knock was barely loud enough to catch his ear. He stopped mid-stride, wondering if he had mistaken the noise for something else. The second knock was firmer but still barely loud enough to disturb him. He crossed to the outer door and threw it open before the timid creature could flee.

The girl in the doorway stood no more than five feet tall, a heavy cloak struggled to conceal her slimness. Unlike her figure her raven hair was revealed, the hood pulled back carelessly from her face. A clear brow sloped to a pert nose, the porcelain white of her skin delicately set off her beauty. A scar, a jagged crescent perhaps an inch long, ran from the corner of her eye to the high plane of her cheekbone. And her eyes were the most brilliant

green Samuel had ever seen.

Samuel stared at the intriguing woman before remembering his manners. 'I'm sorry, Fraulein, my rooms are closed, you will have to come back tomorrow.'

'Doctor Hahnemann?' The question hesitant.

'Yes!'

'Sir, I beg of you, please let me speak. I have walked here from near Helmstedt to seek your help.'

'I'm sorry but I have work that needs my attention. All my patients appreciate that I have to have rules to follow, otherwise nothing would ever get done.'

'I appreciate there must be onerous demands on your time, but I beg of you don't send me away without allowing me five minutes. Five minutes please, Doctor Hahnemann, then I will willingly leave you in peace.'

Samuel reassessed the young woman. She truly was just a slip of a girl, with no outward sign of illness or hurt, unless you considered the small scar.

'Fraulein, what can I offer in five ...?'

'Frau, Frau Wendt.'

'I'm sorry, madam.' Samuel blushed softly. 'I did not presume you old enough to be married.'

'My husband of four years was killed twelve months ago in the service of Prince Frederick.'

'I'm truly sorry, Frau Wendt, but I cannot alter my program on every compassionate tale I am told.' The woman's green eyes locked on his, determination etched into them. Sensing her resolve Samuel took a deep breath. 'All right, five minutes, but then I must take my leave and attend to my family and my other duties.'

Relief flooded Frau Wendt's face. Samuel sensed she was fighting to hold back tears. He pointed her towards the study.

'Doctor, I will come to the point without delay.' Frau Wendt brushed the back of her hand across her eyes as she sat in the visitor's chair. 'There is an outbreak of sickness near Helmstedt. I fear that my four children may have been exposed

to it so I have isolated them from the rest of the children in the village.'

'You have done what?' Samuel's voice rose with incredulity.

Frau Wendt blinked in surprise. 'Isolated them, sir. Isn't that what you would have done?'

'Well, yes, I believe so. But where did you determine the rules of quarantine? And, in particular, how they apply to a fever?'

The woman forgot her tears for the moment. 'In the first instance, on the battlefield of Valmy.'

'Valmy? The defeat of Brunswick?'

The young woman nodded.

'But how, for Heaven's sake, would you encounter disease during a bloody battle?' Samuel scratched his head, dumbfounded.

'There had been an outbreak of smallpox in a village near where the French engaged the duke's army. Before the battle, Brunswick sent his surgeons to inspect the extent of the outbreak. I was a novice. Our order had been sent to care for the sick.'

'You were sent with ... but I still don't understand, a novice does not normally learn the rules of quarantine. Most doctors don't truly understand them.' Samuel could not keep the surprise from his voice.

'For that I am grateful to my late husband, who was one of Brunswick's surgeons'

'I'm sorry?' Samuel gave up any pretence at patience. 'In one breath you tell me you are a novice, in the next a widow. Which is it?'

Frau Wendt bit her lip. 'Doctor Hahnemann, the story of my life is of no importance, but you asked when I had first seen the pox and, I am sure you would agree, the first time stays firmly pressed in your mind.'

Samuel recovered his composure and considered the woman with interest. 'Yes, it does. As a young woman I'm sure you found it particularly disturbing.'

The slight woman returned his gaze steadily. 'No more so

than the other ills that the nuns taught me to care for.'

Samuel nodded slowly. 'What do you believe is the malady that afflicts the children of Helmstedt?'

'I hope that it is scarlet fever.'

'You hope?' Surprise coloured Samuel's question.

'Yes. Again I saw the symptoms in France.'

'But you are not sure?'

'No, I am not. There has been talk of smallpox in the vicinity.'

'Smallpox?'

'Apparently a small outbreak occurred in a village a few miles from ours, on the road to Magdeburg.'

'I have heard nothing of this. How could we allow a disaster to brew on our doorstep without some sort of warning or intelligence? Please, carry on. Have you seen the symptoms in your own village?'

'Not as I understand the symptoms, no. But a friend asked me to look at her child.' The young woman saw the question in Samuel's eyes before he could ask it. 'My neighbours know of my training with the nuns. We have no doctor in our village, sir. When I visited the child she had a rash that had tiny bumps under the skin. The rash had already spread from the face to the neck, but the area around the mouth was clear. When I pressed the rash it blanched white.'

'The rash was red of course?'

Frau Wendt crossed her arms. 'Of course. Surely that question was unnecessary'

Samuel ignored the rebuke. 'And the child's throat?'

'The throat was also reddened, and the poor child's temperature was over 100. Oh, and the glands were badly swollen.'

'Did you see white specks on the tongue or at the back of the throat?'

'Yellowish more than white. The tongue was becoming furred.'

Samuel considered the information a while then said, 'Your

observations are very precise, madam, you do your training credit.' Frau Wendt's stiffened arms relaxed a fraction at the unexpected compliment. 'What symptoms have your own children shown?'

'When I left them this morning one of the twins had already developed a rash, like a flush from too much time in the sun.'

'And there was no sign in the other three?' Samuel's smile was gentle, the bristle gone from his demeanour.

Frau Wendt shook her head and dropped her hands to her lap.

'What age are your children?'

'I had the twins last, a boy and a girl.' A tear glistened in the woman's eye. She wiped it with the back of her hand. 'My eldest daughter is nearly five, her brother is three,' Frau Wendt corrected herself with a smile. 'Three and a half. He is very determined that I shouldn't forget the half. The twins are nearly two. Their father was killed before they could celebrate their first birthday.'

'How do you think the child contracted the disease? The neighbour's child?'

Frau Wendt nodded. 'I had asked her to care for the twins whilst I cared for another child who had broken an arm. When I returned I noticed that the girl had a slight rash on her throat, but I paid scant attention to it, what with the twins crying for their dinner and all.'

Madam, I am impressed with your resourcefulness. The people of your village are indeed fortunate to have you. I presume you fear an outbreak of this disease.'

'Yes, my neighbour's daughter is welcome in many homes because of her generous and caring manner.' A smile appeared briefly on the woman's lips. 'Perhaps in this case the good folk may not be so appreciative of her generosity.'

Samuel returned the smile, delighting in the woman's quick wit. 'Why did you come to me, Frau Wendt? Doctor Keller has been here much longer than I.'

'I had heard your name from my husband, when we lived

in Magdeburg. He once attended a lecture at the hospital given by Professor Christian Hufeland, the Chair of Medicine at the University of Jena. My husband told me later what had occurred. Apparently a doctor asked him a question about you.' A blush crept up the throat of the beautiful woman. 'It was not very complimentary.'

'They very rarely are?' Samuel smiled.

'According to my husband, Professor Hufeland praised your writings. He called you a refreshing catalyst of change, and that the medical world needed more like you, people who were prepared to challenge methods that were doomed to the past'

'I am grateful to Christian. We do not agree on all things and I am sure he sometimes thinks I go too far. But he never refuses to publish me when I am trying to establish a new theory. You have read his journal?'

Frau Wendt smiled. 'Yes, many issues, although not since my husband died.' She smiled sadly. 'I must be honest and admit to having been nervous about approaching you. I was ready to flee from your door if I could find the excuse.'

'Madam, I assure you I am more than approachable.' Samuel playfully added, 'Perhaps I'm a little crusty when I'm pining for my lunch.' He got to his feet. 'I am confident that what you describe is scarlet fever, but if there is smallpox in the vicinity I think it prudent that we take no chances. I will arrange a carriage. This afternoon I will return with you to your village and inspect the children.'

'Did you isolate your twin from the rest, Frau Wendt? Where?' Samuel followed the wave of the woman's arm around the single room. His heart ached at the memory of his family's similar struggle in Stotteritz.

'The best I could hope for was to keep them from the other children in the village. I have kept their eating and drinking utensils separate from my own and have washed everything thoroughly in hot water.'

'I am impressed, Frau Wendt. I have pushed for these concepts until I'm blue in the face. I'm delighted to find someone

with the same common sense.'

Frau Wendt blushed at the praise, covering her embarrassment by turning to collect something from the kitchen table where her eldest daughter was sitting. The three youngest children were confined to their cots.

Samuel held the back of his hand to the young girl's forehead. 'There doesn't appear to be any fever. Nor does there appear to be any fever in the other two. Yet the twin is well advanced in her incubation. I have no doubt that she has scarlet fever, but your other children intrigue me. The second twin and your son are flushed around the neck but neither seems to have come down with the fever.' Samuel turned to the eldest. 'As for your eldest, she has absolutely no signs of the disease. Absolutely none!' Samuel smiled at the small girl. 'What is your name?'

'Madeleine,' the little girl said sheepishly, a hesitant smile brightening her face.

'What a pretty name. I have five little girls of my own. The oldest is now grown to a beautiful girl of fifteen, the youngest is only one.'

'What are their names?'

'The eldest is Henrietta and the youngest is Frederika. Between them are Wilhelmina, Amalie and Caroline.' As Samuel talked he inspected the girl's throat and pressed the glands at the side of her neck. To Frau Wendt he said, 'You have no boys?'

'Yes, I do. My second eldest is a boy. His name is Friedrich. I'm afraid he has a hard life, always having to compete with five girls for his mother's and father's attention.' Samuel smiled as the little girl laughed.

'It puzzles me that Madeleine shows no symptoms of the disease at all. Does she have some special diet that distinguishes her from the other children?'

Frau Wendt shook her head slowly. 'She likes carrots more than the others.' Madeleine and her mother exchanged smiles. 'Apart from that I can think of nothing.'

'Has she had some other complaint that the smaller children did not suffer from?'



'No, nothing that comes to mind, not in the past few months. The smaller children have had sniffles, colds, but Madeleine also caught them.'

'Mama,' the young girl pulled at her mother's dress, 'do my sore fingers count?'

Samuel asked, 'What was the matter with your fingers?'

'They were very sore and swollen.'

Samuel looked to Frau Wendt for more information.

'The joints in her fingers became inflamed when she was playing a few days ago. I wasn't sure what it could be. She complained of catching her fingers when she fell, but there were also scratches and I was fearful a nettle might have stung her. I gave her some belladonna, and I've been giving her small amounts each day since. The swelling and the inflammation have almost gone.'

'How many days?'

'Why?' Frau Wendt appeared bemused. 'The inflammation is all but gone and it was caused, I am sure, by the girl's fall.'

'How many days?'

Frau Wendt bit back her surprise at Samuel's abrupt manner. 'At least three, perhaps four.'

'Before you saw the symptoms emerging in the twin?'

'Yes, well before.'

'In Königsutter you said that you had read Hufeland's journal?' Samuel raised an eyebrow at the beautiful woman. Frau Wendt nodded. 'Did you ever read any of my articles or essays?'

'Yes, quite a number. I have also been fortunate to see some copies of Herr Becker's *Der Anzeiger*.'

'Madam, I had no idea your reading of my work had been so extensive.'

Frau Wendt crossed to a small cupboard. She returned to the table with two heavy volumes. 'It is, in part, thanks to your writings that I am able to help so many of my neighbours.'

Samuel opened the front cover of the first book. He knew the words off by heart. The first edition of his *Pharmaceutical Lexicon* had been well received and was already considered an

essential standard reference. The reviews, particularly the review in Hufeland's *Journal of Pharmacy*, had been glowing. With a pang of guilt he thought back to his desk where the final pages of the latest edition waited his attention.

Beneath the Lexicon was a copy of Cullen's *Materia Medica*.

Samuel turned the pages of the thick volume, pleased to find them well-thumbed. He looked up. In an article I wrote a year or two back I discussed the curative powers of drugs.' He waved a hand in dismissal. 'The lengthy title of it was somewhat pretentious, but the essence of what I now believe was written there.'

'I have some memory of your theories, Doctor Hahnemann,' Frau Wendt shrugged her shoulders.

'I have a suspicion that the belladonna you have been giving Madeleine may have something to do with the reason why she has not contracted the scarlet fever.'

'The belladonna? But belladonna has never been used to treat scarlet fever.'

'If we are to truly understand the effect that drugs or medicines have on the sick we must have the patience to first experiment with the drug on the human body when it is at its full power.'

'What you say is familiar to me. My husband and I often discussed your papers. If I recall correctly, your proposition was that an effective remedy will incite a kind of illness peculiar to itself.' Samuel waited as Frau Wendt searched her memory for the words. 'And the more acute or marked the illness that resulted, the more effective the medicine.'

'Again, I must compliment your recall. I argued that we should treat the disease to be cured with a remedy able to stimulate another, artificially produced, disease, as similar as possible to the one being treated. In this way the treated disease would be cured. Or *similia similibus*.'

'Likes with likes?'

'Correct, Frau Wendt. And in your daughter's case I am hopeful that she may be proof of the efficacy of belladonna in a

way that has not yet been considered.'

'To treat scarlet fever?'

'Perhaps in both treating it and preventing it.' Samuel took a deep breath, fearful to take the step he desired. 'I ...'

'Can it harm the children, Doctor Hahnemann?'

Samuel's heart was pounding. 'I'm not sure I understand your question.'

'In the past I have given the children belladonna to treat inflammation. If they are given it to prevent scarlet fever, can it harm them?'

'I ... I don't think ...' Samuel searched for the right words as doubt crept into Frau Wendt's eyes. 'I can assure you that the belladonna will have no ill-effect if it is used to treat scarlet fever in your children. My hesitation comes from my reluctance to experiment on others.'

Frau Wendt searched Samuel's eyes for a sign of doubt or hesitation. 'Sir, I don't think your confidence is born from recklessness. There is nothing else that I can think of that has set Madeleine apart. The only thing is the belladonna.' She placed an arm around her daughter's shoulders and hugged the girl to her. 'I am prepared to trust you, Doctor Hahnemann.'

Samuel narrowed his eyes. 'I assume you still have the belladonna you were using to treat Madeleine?' Frau Wendt nodded. 'If I treat Madeleine and the two children who are still to show all the outward signs, it will be as a prophylactic. The twin I will treat to see if it will also cure. But be aware, madam, that I will only give them the minutest part of a single grain.'

'Please don't treat me as a fool. How could such a small amount prevent anything, particularly something as virulent as scarlet fever?'

'I assure you I am not trifling with your intelligence. If you will trust me to treat them with belladonna then please trust me to prescribe the amounts that I believe will work.'

The cough woke Samuel from his uneasy sleep. A small lamp burned next to the stove, giving off a dusty light. From where he sat in the rocking chair he couldn't see the cots of the twins.

The two eldest children shared a small bed near the kitchen table. A rough curtain had been pulled to give some privacy to the bed where Frau Wendt had retired, exhausted. She must have woken some time during the night and covered him with a blanket. In the dim light he opened his fob watch, surprised that it was already past one in the morning. He stretched his legs, the movement causing the heavy volume of Cullen's *Medica* to slide forward. He grasped it from under the blanket to stop it from crashing to the floor.

Quietly, Samuel pulled the blanket to one side and lowered the book to the floor and crossed the room to where the four children slept. Leaning over the twin with scarlet fever, he placed the back of his hand on the child's forehead. It still burned but, fortunately, for the moment, the child slept. He turned to the second twin and again placed his hand on the child's forehead. As far as he could tell there was no change, there was certainly no temperature. After checking the temperatures of the other two children he returned to the rocking chair and pulled the blanket around him, grateful for the mild night.

Samuel woke with a start. His eyes flew open, unsure what had awakened him. Frau Wendt sat at the kitchen table holding one of the twins. In her hand was a small bottle.

Discretely, Samuel coughed. Frau Wendt turned in her chair, a gentle smile on her lips. Samuel pushed the blanket to one side and looked at his watch. It was close to five in the morning. He stood and crossed to Frau Wendt obtusely pleased to see that the child was the sick twin.

'Is there any change in the others?' His whisper was answered with a hesitant shake of the widow's head.

Samuel walked over to the small lamp, turned the wick up a fraction and then crossed to the male twin. Again there was no sign of a temperature, and the flush he could see in the light was no worse than it had been in the afternoon. His inspections of the others failed to show any sign of the fever.

'There is no sign as yet. Perhaps in another twelve hours or so,' Samuel whispered as he sat down at the kitchen table. He