

Allan Bonsall

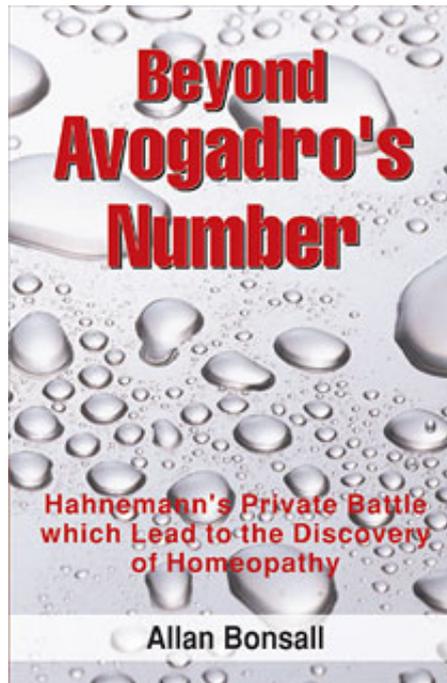
Beyond Avogadro's Number

Leseprobe

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von [Allan Bonsall](#)

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It still intrigues me, my good doctor, what brought you to write the article in the first place?'

Samuel peered at the Duke of Gotha. 'I'm sorry your grace, it has been a long and tiring journey and I still don't think I have my wits fully about me. But I, er, I must point out that the editor of *Der Anzeiger*, Councillor Becker, put his own name to the article.'

'Come now, my good doctor. Let's not begin our friendship on a lie. Herr Becker is not only a good friend of yours, he is also a good friend of mine.' The duke shook his head, smiling indulgently as he lumbered to his feet.

He was a large man, well into his middle years and still fit from his hunting, although he favoured his right leg. 'Please excuse my apparent inconvenience.' A rueful grin spread across his face. 'I fell from my mount this morning when it became excited by the first deer of the season.' Beside him the fire burned heartily, the fresh scent of newly cut logs pleasantly pervading the room. Spring had well and truly arrived, but the warmth of the days still struggled to keep the cold away from the mountains as evening fell. His hand engulfed the small bell resting on the mantle above the hearth. Almost immediately a liveried servant appeared at the door.

'Some refreshment, Doctor Hahnemann, I understand you are partial to a light beer.'

'Thank you, your grace, a beer would be welcome. I am somewhat parched.'

The duke nodded at the servant. 'I think I will enjoy some of the whisky our last guests brought.'

The servant bowed briefly and left. The duke busied himself with the fire before turning back to his guest. 'I am sure you will find Georghenthal a beautiful place.'

'I have no doubt, your grace. Please, forgive my rudeness. Yes, I did write the article you refer to, but asked Herr Becker to put it under his name lest my detractors saw fit to bombard the paper with letters attacking me rather than the thoughts expressed.'

'Is that not somewhat self-indulgent, my friend?' The duke's eyebrows rose a fraction.

'Perhaps, but accurate, I can assure you. I think too many of the good doctors of Saxony have either too much time on their hands or are fearful that their barbarous practices will be spurned by their unsuspecting patients and they will lose their livelihood.' Samuel's eyes had narrowed to slits, his efforts at being civil on the subject sorely testing him. 'The article would have been seen as no different to my previous attack on their more damning practice of venesection. There is no question that their bloodletting caused the death of Emperor Leopold.'

'Please, my good doctor, please calm yourself,' the duke said, surprised at the sudden passion in his guest's voice.

The servant appeared carrying a silver salver. On the tray stood a tankard of beer and a crystal glass half filled with whisky. Beside the tumbler sat a small glass jug of water.

'Ah, refreshments,' the duke said, grateful for the intrusion. The servant placed the tankard on a small table beside Samuel. The duke took the moment to digest the surprising measure of dislike Hahnemann had for his fellow doctors. 'Enjoy, my friend,' the duke said, tipping a dash of water into his glass and raising it to his guest. 'Here's to your continuing good health.'

'And to you, your grace, for your kind hospitality.'

The duke smiled over the rim of his glass. 'Oh, I have no doubt that you will earn your board and keep, as well as the fees you propose to charge your patients. But, please, continue. Do you seriously believe that people will accept you can cure the insane?'

'It will take time,' Samuel said, 'but ultimately, yes, I do, your grace. These patients are ill, mentally ill, but they are treated like wild animals. Our institutions chain them and beat them and put them on public display for the amusement of the people. There is no respect for them as human beings so they simply become objects of abuse.' Samuel suppressed a yawn, shuddering at the images in his mind.

The duke remained silent, equally well-versed in the apparent hopelessness of the insane. His lips pursed tightly in agreement. He lifted his drink, but spoke before taking a sip. 'It has been a long day for you, my friend, perhaps you should rest. We can resume our discussions tomorrow when you have slept.'

'I'm sorry, your grace, you must think me a hopeless case. Yes, I am tired, but I am also excited.' Samuel slapped his hands together, a light shining briefly in his eyes, 'For years I have been studying diseases of the most lingering and hopeless nature, and have long suspected that the mental is as important as the physical when it comes to understanding some of these ailments. I believe many diseases originate in the mind, or are significantly influenced by emotional causes. I am yet to provide overwhelming evidence but I am more and more of the opinion that emotional stress caused by anxiety and even exposure to fright is one of the most significant discoveries waiting for us to make.'

'But surely there are doctors who specialise in illnesses of the brain who apply their skills to the treatment of the insane?'

'Those with the right skills are few and far between. Frankly, I do not know of one doctor living today who I would entrust with my own health if I were to become ill from some malady of the brain.' Samuel paused. His hand briefly stroked the side of his face, 'With the exception of Pinel. But he resides in Paris,

so that isn't an option.'

The duke shook his head, his jowls shaking. 'Surely, doctor, you jest. This is the eighteenth century, for goodness sake; we aren't living in the dark ages. There must be someone, some doctor in all of Saxony who you would trust?'

A great weight seemed to descend on Samuel. 'We have far too many doctors who believe the cause of disease lies in the blood, so they drain as much as they can. When their bloodletting fails, they assault the body with large doses of medicines, although they have no understanding of the possible side-effects.'

The duke remained impassive, his face carefully composed, his arms crossed.

Ignoring the silent censure, Samuel continued. 'If the doctors haven't already killed the patient, they resort to using palliatives that effectively mask the disease by opposing it; in essence, persuading the patient that they weren't sick in the first place. Then, if everything that has transpired to this point is not enough, the doctor invents a name for the malady, preferably one with Greek origins so that the patient is suitably impressed and deems that the doctor clearly must know what he is doing. That, I'm afraid, your grace is the sum total of the way our doctors work.'

The duke regarded Samuel gravely. 'I have read some of your work, Doctor Hahnemann. I respect much of what you have said and I think I have some understanding of your position, but I find it almost beyond belief that the entire medical fraternity does not have some redeeming position to offer.' He leant forward in his chair. 'If what you say carries any weight, then perhaps I should be pleased by my own acumen in offering you this post.' The duke paused to weigh up his words before continuing. 'Or perhaps I should be fearful of your arrogance and what you might do.'

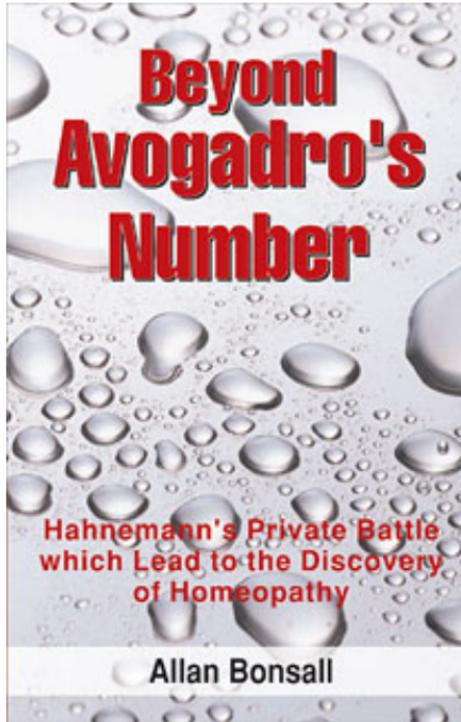
For a moment Samuel hesitated, unsure how to reply. Clearly his host was a much more astute and sensitive man than most, but then that should not surprise him. Everything he knew about the duke had pointed to it. His compassion and charity had earned him accolades through the press as a true father of

his people. Even the duke's invitation to take up this position came from his concern over the deplorable conditions many of his fellow nobles suffered in asylums.

'Your grace, I assure you that I will do everything in my power to bring health where there is sickness.' He paused to rally his thoughts. 'I can also assure you my pride shall have no bearing on that.'

Samuel got to his feet. 'Is our patient settled, your grace? I am eager to have the opportunity to meet him and begin his treatment.'

The duke followed, his leg causing him to grimace briefly. 'Herr Klockenbrmg is still to join us. He has been moved from Hanover and is currently interned in the asylum in Gotha. Tomorrow you should spend time settling into your new home. Then, if you feel up to it, I will arrange for you to return to Gotha and collect our guest. I cannot vouch for the condition in which you will find him. The last time I spoke with his good wife she was subdued. I am sure she is mortified by the conditions she finds her husband in whenever she visits. I will send word to the good lady that you have arrived. Perhaps you could spend some time with her in Gotha to reassure her of the good hands her husband is being delivered into, not to mention what treatment he will be receiving for her fees.'



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