Was Hahnemann driven out of Leipzig? The Leipzig practice and why Hahnemann moved to Köthen in 1821:[1] Patient Numbers and Polemics

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A MYTH STILL HAUNTS THE LITERATURE that in 1821 Hahnemann's opponents sought to expel the founder of homoeopathy from Leipzig with 'police backing'.[2] The intention is to create an impression that the doctors and pharmacists, in association with the authorities, wished to drive Hahnemann out and that they acted without regard to seemliness and morality. It was a myth to which Samuel Hahnemann himself contributed when writing to Dr Billig in February 1821, when he was still in Leipzig: 'You will have gathered from the public comment made about me by the Saxon doctors ... how much my mode of healing, together with its author, is persecuted by this country [Saxony]. Now that persecution has reached a head, and I should have to hold the beneficent art as well as my own life very cheap to stay here any longer and not seek sanctuary abroad.'[3]

Yet there is no proof whatsoever for the claim that Hahnemann was to have been forced to leave Leipzig. The allegation stems from Richard Haehl (1873–1932) who wrote that the pharmacists had tried 'in helpless spite and anger ... to drive the man they hated so much out of the city by appealing to the authority of the police.'[4] Haehl was stressing simply the legal wrangle known in medical history as the 'dispensing dispute' (*Dispensierstreit*). In December 1819 the pharmacists of Leipzig had

approached the authorities because they feared for their privileges. Under Saxon law, all doctors (whether homoeopaths or allopaths) were forbidden to manufacture and dispense drugs themselves. After a certain amount of 'toing and froing', therefore, the city of Leipzig and the government of Saxony decided that no exception should be made in Hahnemann's case. In other words, with the pharmacists' submission and the authorities' decisions, Hahnemann was being treated like all other doctors. Thus, it is a gross misrepresentation of the facts to infer, as Haehl does, that anyone sought to remove Hahnemann from Leipzig with the help of the police.

As there is no question of expulsion, could there have been some form of persecution? Again, this view does not stand up to reality. Briefly, it can be stated that:

1. By 1821 there had as yet been no open confrontations within the homoeopathic milieu and hence no difficulties.
2. No official pressure from the universities can be ascertained.
3. Only in one case, namely the 'dispensing dispute', did the authorities decide against Hahnemann, and given the legal situation the verdict is not surprising.
4. Thirteen Leipzig doctors did publish an appeal against Hahnemann in the *Leipziger Tagblatt* in February 1819. However, it would be wrong to infer that the medical profession was solidly against Hahnemann. There were some 60 doctors in Leipzig, but only 13 signed the article. Moreover, until 1821, critical discussions of homoeopathy remained in single figures.
5. In turning to the authorities in the 'dispensing dispute', the pharmacists were insisting on a right conferred upon them by statute. For most of them, the central concern was not the eradication of homoeopathy.[4]

Therefore, in the period to 1821, although the critics did indeed increase in number, there was no anti-Hahnemann campaign by groups acting in unison. Instead, it was mainly individuals who spoke out against homoeopathy. Thus why, if that was so, did Hahnemann leave Leipzig in June 1821 and move to Köthen?

The Ban on Dispensing

RESEARCH IN THIS AREA has harboured the persistent opinion that Hahnemann left Leipzig because of the ban on dispensing. As he was unable to manufacture and dispense his remedies himself, he felt that a basic

principle of homoeopathy was no longer being complied with. This view was first suggested by Hahnemann himself. When he was already living in Köthen, he wrote retrospectively: 'Simply because of the sovereign's letter of freedom allowing me to prepare and issue my remedies myself, I loaded 12 wagons with equipment and spent 600 talers moving from Leipzig to this wretched hole.'[5] But what was the real truth? The pharmacists' submission of 16 December 1819 bears three signatures, those of pharmacists Heinrich Adolph Täschner, Carl August Rohde and Friedrich Gottlob Bärwinkel.[6] Their reasons for making the submission were as follows. In the first place, the facts of the case were clearly governed by legislation; Hahnemann did not have the right to issue his medicines direct to patients. Secondly, the pharmacists stressed that they felt their honour to have been wounded by Hahnemann's accusation of incompetence. And thirdly, quite apart from the legal situation, Hahnemann's self-dispensing challenged the existing medicinal situation for, had other doctors followed his example, the whole pharmaceutical profession would gradually have found its livelihood undermined.

Conversely, there is nothing to suggest that the pharmacists intended their submission to affect homoeopathy, the use of which is not attacked in the text. On the contrary, Täschner and his colleagues stated explicitly that they were concerned only about their rights, not about how Hahnemann practised medicine. Moreover, there is evidence of several cases in Saxony in which pharmacists also complained about allopathic doctors for dispensing drugs without authority.[7] In other words, there was nothing unusual about the submission of the Leipzig pharmacists, and it can certainly not be regarded per se as an attack on homoeopathy. In addition, Hahnemann always talked about the ban on dispensing as a matter of life or death. If it was upheld, he warned, not only his practice but homoeopathy itself was doomed to extinction. However, if the legal situation is examined more closely, it is clear that the regulations govern only the issuing of medication, not its manufacture. Therefore, even after the imposition of the ban on dispensing, Hahnemann might well have been able to continue manufacturing his own drugs. He would merely have had to distribute them through pharmacies. Thus, there is really no reason for evoking the possible ruin of homoeopathy. The inevitable conclusion is that the 'dispensing dispute', for Hahnemann as for others, was in some way a means to an end. Hahnemann's concern was with occupational independence in terms of professionalising the practice of medicine and of controlling all the building blocks of the homoeopathic market.

Thus, a detailed analysis of the 'dispensing dispute' of 1819–21 has

the effect of qualifying two assertions. First, Leipzig's pharmacists cannot all be put together as opponents of homoeopathy. They were much more concerned with preserving a privilege that they saw as morally, legally, and economically threatened by Hahnemann. Secondly, under the legislation in force, Hahnemann would still have been able to produce his own medication. For these reasons, the imposition of the ban on dispensing cannot be regarded as the sole (possibly not even the main) cause of Hahnemann's leaving Leipzig.

Hahnemann's Waning Prestige

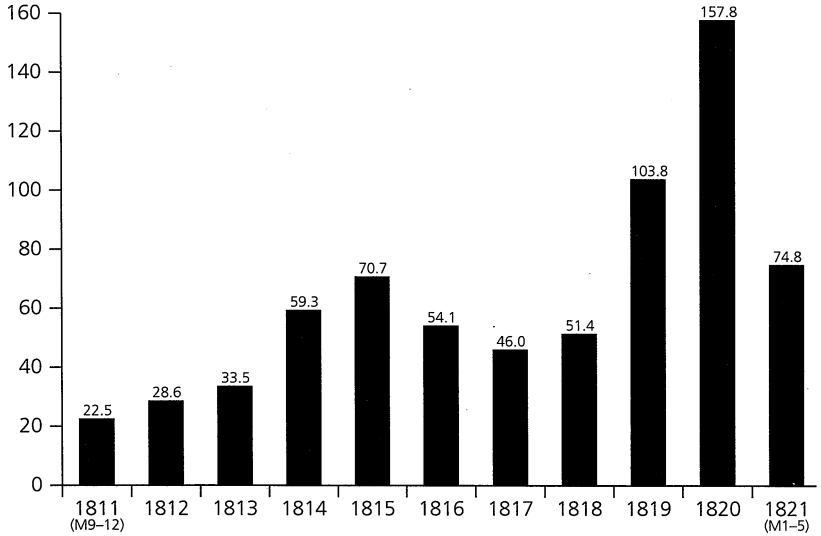
A SECOND CAUSE IS TO BE SEEN in Hahnemann's waning prestige. This loss of reputation had its origin in the failed treatment of Prince Karl Philipp von Schwarzenberg (1771–1820). The victor of Leipzig's 'Battle of the Nations' in 1813, Schwarzenberg had come to the city in April 1820 to consult Dr Hahnemann. Treating this famous nobleman gave a considerable boost to Hahnemann's reputation and brought him a huge influx of aristocratic patients. However, for whatever reasons, Hahnemann was unable to help the prince, who died in Leipzig on 15 October of the same year. As a result, not only Hahnemann's practice but also homoeopathy as a method of healing suffered a substantial reverse. This loss of reputation as a result of the unsuccessful treatment of the prince undoubtedly made Hahnemann reconsider his position in Leipzig.

How Patient Numbers Developed

A THIRD CAUSE, namely the way in which patient numbers developed, needs to be examined. Hitherto, Hahnemann's Leipzig practice has been described always as flourishing; a steady growth in patient numbers has been assumed. Besides the quantitative significance of Hahnemann's patient body (in Leipzig he treated a total of around 2,200 people), the qualitative aspect of individual patients ought not to be overlooked.[8] However, analysis of the medical journals from 1811 to 1821 inevitably qualifies, in certain respects, this picture of an uniformly flourishing practice.

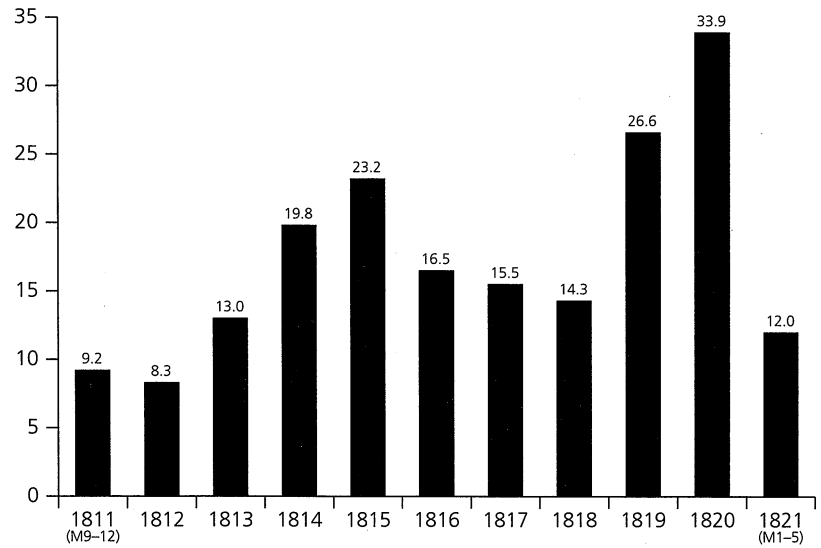
Figures 1 and 2 show that, in fact, patient numbers fluctuated substantially between 1811 and 1821. In Hahnemann's first year in Leipzig the practice was very poorly frequented. Subsequently, numbers did indeed increase steadily until 1815. In the next three years, however (1816–18), the practice suffered a definite setback. Public attention appears to have declined in this period, a circumstance that found expression in the numbers

Figure 1. Patients per month in annual averages 1811–21



M9–12 = September to December only.
M1–5 = January to May only.

Figure 2. New patients per month in annual averages 1811–21



M9–12 = September to December only.
M1–5 = January to May only.

Figure 3. Patients and consultations in 1820

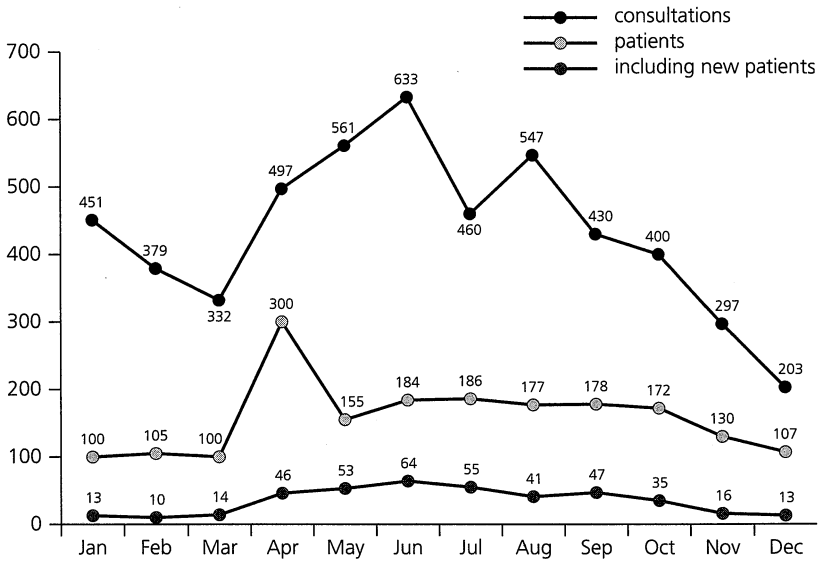
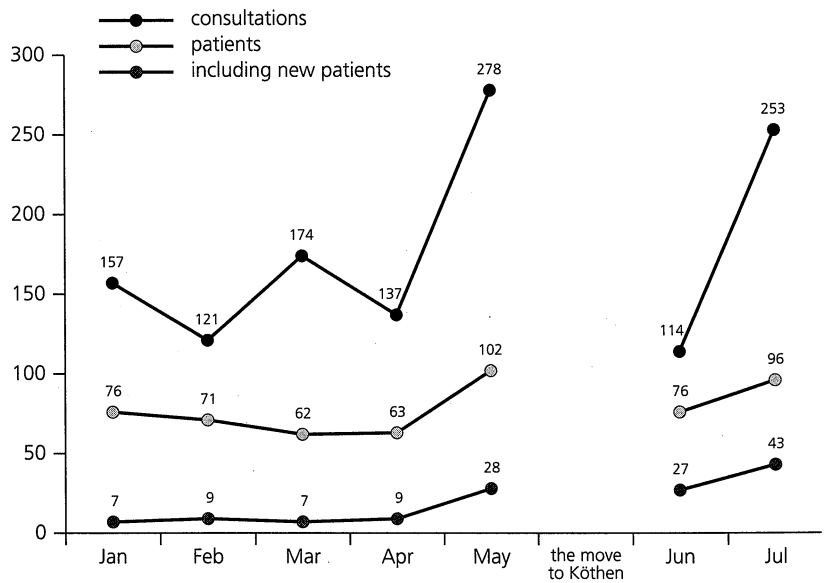


Figure 4. Patients and consultations in 1821



of patients attending. Hahnemann may even have been aware of this connection and later have sought publicity very deliberately with his harsh replies to attacks by opponents. The years 1819 and 1820 constitute the highpoint of Hahnemann's practice, with numbers rapidly doubling, almost quadrupling in comparison with 1811. It cannot be by chance that the same period saw the treatment of Schwarzenberg as well as the attacks of the doctors and of pharmacists. However, Schwarzenberg's death and perhaps also public expressions of hostility led to a dramatic decline, with patient numbers returning to their 1815 level and consultation numbers slumping to their pre-1813 level. The year 1820 was the most dramatic in Hahnemann's Leipzig period, so far as the development of the practice was concerned. It was the year in which climax and decline followed very closely upon each other.

Contradictory findings make the situation difficult to assess at first. The dispute about self-dispensing and the initially negative judgement undoubtedly harmed Hahnemann's practice. On the other hand, March 1820 saw the beginning of Schwarzenberg's treatment, which brought Hahnemann an undreamt-of influx of patients. These conflicting developments explain why, while the number of consultations clearly rose again from March 1820, it did not pass the peak reached in September 1819. In other words, despite the 'Schwarzenberg effect', Hahnemann did not improve on his earlier number of consultations. The number of new patients also rose again considerably, though without, in the long run, exceeding the highpoint of September 1819.

However, following this apogee, from late 1820 all events began to work against Hahnemann. Schwarzenberg died in October, at the end of November the government of Saxony confirmed the ban on dispensing, and February 1821 saw publication of the Leipzig doctors' appeal against Hahnemann. With dizzying rapidity, numbers began to plunge. Of 633 consultations in June 1820, by February 1821 only 121 remained; the figure of 184 patients fell to a mere 71. Above all, hardly any new patients attended the practice. Hahnemann's medical activities returned almost to the level of his first months in Leipzig. Clearly, so massive a decline also had economic consequences for Hahnemann. Thus, it was not just the 'dispensing dispute' that persuaded Hahnemann to leave Leipzig. Of equal significance were the loss of popular confidence and the drop in income, both of which are reflected in the practice numbers. The very rapid decline in patient numbers from the end of 1820 must have acted as a warning signal to Hahnemann. If the trend had continued, economic problems could not have been ruled out. In Köthen, on the other hand, he could look

forward to the position of personal physician to the duke and, with it, access to a mainly aristocratic clientele.

Fourthly, in addition to the legal reasons, the loss of prestige, and economic difficulties, there were other motives including the fruitlessness of Hahnemann's teaching work at Leipzig University. After he had been awarded the *Venia legendi* in 1812 and began to give lectures on homoeopathy, a number of pupils joined Hahnemann who were to be of decisive importance for the further spread of the new approach to medicine. Examples would be Franz Hartmann (1796–1853) and Gustav Wilhelm Gross (1794–1847). However, the number of students Hahnemann was able to attract through the university was always limited; it never rose above a dozen. It was particularly in the years 1813–16 that pupils came to him. After that, attendance at his lectures declined steadily, and from approximately 1816 there was no further increase in his circle of pupils as a result of his university teaching. His work there became increasingly unattractive to Hahnemann and gave no further boost to the homoeopathic cause.

Medical Criticism of Hahnemann

A FIFTH REASON FOR HAHNEMANN'S LEAVING LEIPZIG can be identified as the attacks by doctors that, conspicuously and incontestably, increased from 1819. Hahnemann had been virtually unmolested before then. It may be concluded that, until 1819, homoeopathy was too little known to receive attention, let alone cause concern, among the relevant groups. The massive rise in patient numbers, the growing circle of followers even outside Leipzig and, from 1820, the increasing reputation enjoyed by Hahnemann as a result of his treating Schwarzenberg may have brought about this change of perception. Although the critical voices may have increased from 1815, not a single person went so far as to drive Hahnemann out of the city.

The appeal against Hahnemann, in particular, published by 13 Leipzig doctors on 29 January 1821 led to a massive confrontation between the two opposing camps. Here, for the only time, was a concerted campaign by doctors against Hahnemann and against homoeopathy. In 1844, Hartmann reported that the manuscript of the article was circulated among Leipzig's doctors with an invitation to sign. The fact that only 13 out of approximately 60 doctors (i.e. less than 25 per cent of the medical profession) felt able to do so hardly suggested universal aversion to Hahnemann among the profession. Moreover, the report of the hitherto 'allopathic' Dr Moritz Müller, who even before the publication of the

doctors' appeal had written a defence of Hahnemann in the *Leipziger Tageblatt* on 24 January 1821, also shows that not all doctors blindly railed against homoeopathy. Thus the pressure increased, but by no means the entire Leipzig medical profession had taken against Hahnemann.

Examining the attitude of 'allopathic' doctors to homoeopathy between 1810 and about 1832, the following points appear relevant.

1. Altogether, the number of doctors who adopted homoeopathy was far greater than the number of those who attacked homoeopathy in print.
2. With one or two exceptions, the anti-homoeopathic authors showed a clear desire to understand homoeopathy. Only a few wrote with a preconceived negative opinion.
3. There was disapproval on both sides.
4. Often it was not homoeopathy as a method of healing that formed the object of criticism but Hahnemann's excessive and, sometimes, rather undiplomatically expressed demand that the whole of medicine be remodelled in accordance with the homoeopathic principle. To that extent, attacks by doctors were, at most, a further reason for Hahnemann to leave Leipzig though they are unlikely to have been decisive.
5. It can be argued that more important than the quantity of the attacks was the quality of what was said. It was not that the number of attacks increased. They became more bitter, focusing more on personal criticism. The clash between homoeopathy and its opponents was becoming more serious and vehement. Above all, the article by the 13 doctors and the reply show how the dispute was gradually escalating and the gulf between the 'allopathic' doctors and Hahnemann in Leipzig was steadily widening.

Hahnemann himself was partly responsible for this for only rarely did he adopt a diplomatic approach; his usual stance was that of an unyielding dogmatist. Even the strict 'Hahnemannian', Franz Hartmann, could not help reproaching the 'master', writing of Hahnemann's lectures: 'He might have made his doctrine easier for doctors and medical students to accept if he had discussed the main points of his organon more dispassionately than was the case in his lectures. Unfortunately, these were not calculated to gain friends and supporters for his doctrine, because at every conceivable opportunity he poured forth a stream of abuse against the old medicine and its adherents.'[9] Thus, as time went on, Hahnemann stepped up his attacks and calumnies upon medicine as a whole. He was the one who called a halt to objective discussion with the medical profession. The question of who

changed the tone might be debated at length but the fact is, from 1819, that tone became increasingly rough. Gradually, Hahnemann came to realise that, by confronting the medical profession, he was doing homoeopathy more harm than good. In addition, he was inclined increasingly to defuse the situation by moving somewhere else. Indeed, in Köthen there were hardly any personal clashes between Hahnemann and the 'allopaths'.

Finally, there was a further reason, emanating from Köthen itself, for Hahnemann's decision to leave Leipzig, viz. ducal favour. In Köthen, Duke Ferdinand of Anhalt-Köthen explicitly granted Hahnemann the right to dispense medication, which placed him in a better legal position than other doctors. He was also appointed as the duke's personal physician. As a result of this protection, Hahnemann could be certain that, on the highest authority, he might practice as a doctor without legal let or hindrance and that, economically, he might take up a lucrative position. Hahnemann owed these privileges to the fact that Duke Ferdinand had great sympathy with homoeopathy. Indeed, he began treatment with Hahnemann in May 1821 before Hahnemann's move.[10]

Conclusion

ON 21 MARCH 1821 HAHNEMANN APPLIED for a residence permit for Köthen, and at the beginning of July he moved to that city. There were many reasons behind the move, but none of them can be used to confirm the picture of Hahnemann as a victim of persecution and expulsion. Instead, analysis of fluctuating patient numbers in his Leipzig practice indicates a worsening of his economic situation as an important factor in his decision to relocate. Hahnemann left Leipzig because he could improve his legal and economic position elsewhere and because, in Köthen, he could confidently expect greater medical prestige. In Leipzig, Hahnemann had achieved all that there was to achieve. By staying there, he was unable to put right the circumstances that did not suit him. Thus, his leaving the city was an entirely logical step.

Notes

1 For a more detailed and more extensive source-based analysis of the theories advanced here as well as for a more thorough bibliography, see Kathrin Schreiber, *Samuel Hahnemann in Leipzig. Förderer, Gegner, Patienten: Das soziale Netzwerk der Homöopathie zwischen 1811 und 1821* (medical dissertation, Dresden, 1997).

2 A recent example is Ernst H. Schmeer, 'Die "Vertreibung" Hahnemanns aus Leipzig. Eine Kolportage und ihre Berichtigung', *Allgemeine Homöopathische Zeitung* 234 (1989), columns 151–53.

3 Hahnemann in a letter to Dr Billig, dated 5 February 1821; quoted in Richard Haehl, *Samuel Hahnemann. Sein Leben und Schaffen auf Grund neu aufgefundener Akten, Urkunden, Briefe, Krankenberichte und unter Benutzung der gesamten in- und ausländischen homöopathischen Literatur* (2 vols, Leipzig, 1922), II 128 ff.

4 Haehl (ed.), *Samuel Hahnemann*, II, 127.

5 Quoted in Haehl (ed.), *Samuel Hahnemann*, II, 128.

6 A certain amount of biographical information about the three pharmacists is to be found in Michael Michalak, *Das homöopathische Arzneimittel. Von den Anfängen bis zur industriellen Fertigung* (Stuttgart, 1991), 56 ff., nn. 114–16.

7 In 1799, for example, pharmacist Gottfried Theer of Bitterfeld had complained of self-dispensing on the part of a Dr Carl Wilhelm Schmidten. The doctor was forbidden to issue medication, and the wording of the ban was virtually the same as that used in Hahnemann's case 20 years later, indicating that this was in fact a set formula (in this connection, see the 'rescript' of 25 October 1799 in C.G. Kühn (ed.), *Sammlung Königlich Sächsischer Medicinal-Gesetze* (Leipzig, 1809), 436 ff.).

8 For more precise details regarding qualitative aspects of Hahnemann's patient body, see Schreiber, *Samuel Hahnemann in Leipzig*.

9 Franz Hartmann, 'Aus Hahnemanns Leben', *Allgemeine Homöopathische Zeitung* 26 (1844), columns 129–33, 145–49, 161–68, 177–87, 194–203, 209–18, 225–36, especially 181 ff.

10 In a letter written in 1823 the duke explicitly thanks Hahnemann: 'By giving you my thanks for the medical assistance accorded to me this year as two years ago and assuring you of my complete satisfaction ...' (quoted in Haehl, *Samuel Hahnemann*, II, 129 ff.). As a further reason for the duke's sympathy, Haehl cites that fact that both he and Hahnemann were Freemasons.