



GERHARD HENRIK ARMAUER HANSEN

1841—1912

Armauer Hansen was born in Bergen, Norway, on 29 July, 1841. The family had fifteen children, ten of whom were boys. Hansen graduated in medicine in 1866, at the age of twenty-five, from the University at Christiania passing his degree examination with honors. He then worked for one year as assistant physician at the Rikshospitalet (National Hospital) in Oslo and after that worked as a medical officer for a fishing company of the Lofoten Islands, an archipelago inside the Arctic Circle.

Hansen did not take well to the routine health care work of the fishing industry, far from the scientific centers, and he soon returned to Bergen. Here the Lungegaarden Hospital for the care of leprosy patients was under the direction of Danielssen, a world renowned leprologist. In 1868 Hansen began his work under Danielssen, caring for leprosy patients and engaging in research on the nature of the disease. He studied skin, nerve and visceral lesions exhaustively and a year after beginning his work at St. Jørgen Hospital he was awarded a royal gold medal for his first paper on leprosy.

Hansen came to believe that leprosy must have an infectious causal agent and he disagreed with the theory of hereditary causation which Danielssen held to tenaciously. In about 1871 Hansen began to notice tiny little rods in unstained tissue specimens and in due course he found that they could be better visualized if treated with dilute osmic acid. He found these rods in all infiltrated nodular lesions in his patients and by 1873 he proposed that the rods were bacilli and the cause of leprosy. That same year, on January 7, he married the daughter of Danielssen. In 1875 he was promoted to the rank of Chief of the Leprosy Service, a position which he held for thirty-seven years.

Hansen was also an eminent zoologist and in 1894 he succeeded his father-in-law as president of the Bergen Museum of Natural History. For many years he maintained a study at the museum where he engaged in wide-ranging zoologic studies largely involving mollusks. Following his death on February 12, 1912 his funeral ceremonies took place in this museum and his ashes were kept there in a specially created bronze urn.

The commemorative photograph here presented is believed to have been taken at about the time that he discovered *Mycobacterium leprae*, the cause of leprosy—a bacillus that also is known as "Hansen's bacillus."