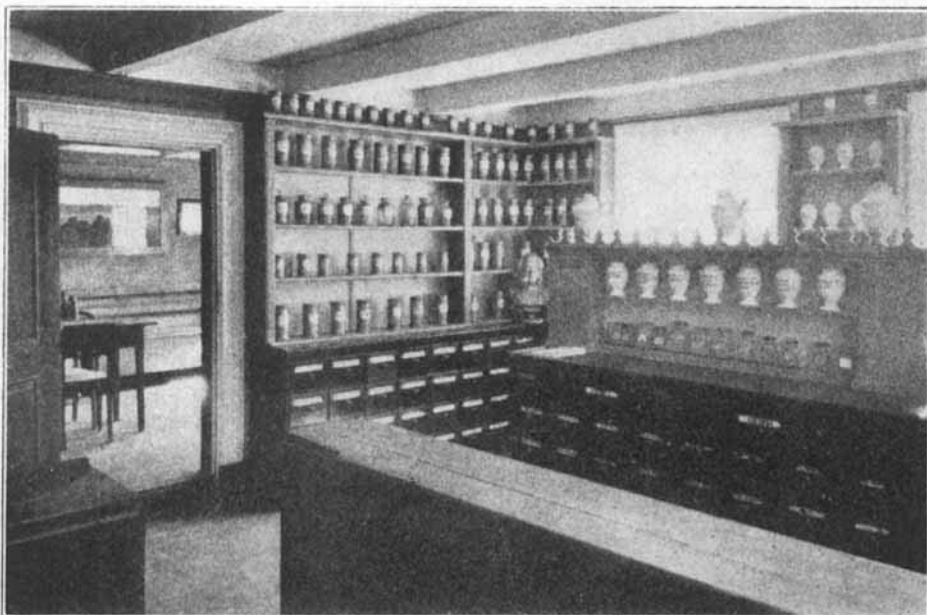


HENRIK IBSEN—PHARMACIST.*

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Most critics would probably agree that the dramatist next in rank after Shakespeare was the great Norwegian poet, Henrik Ibsen. It is of interest to pharmacists, particularly to those in this section of the United States where there are so many of Norse descent, that Ibsen was apprenticed to a pharmacist in Grimstead, Norway, and spent from his fifteenth to his twenty-first year in a drug store.

Henrik Ibsen was born March 20, 1828, at Skien, Norway. There was some admixture of Danish and German blood in his ancestry. His family belonged to the petty aristocracy of clergymen, sea captains, professional men and small land-



Courtesy of the American-Scandinavian Foundation.

Fig. 1.—The Ibsen Museum—The Apothecary's Shop—Grimstead, Norway.

holders. His father was early impoverished and at the age of fifteen he had to earn his own living. He originally had intended to study medicine but began as an apothecary's assistant in Grimstead where he remained for six years. The building where he worked is now an Ibsen Museum. The shop is not unlike many European shops, with narrow counters, rows of shelves and drawers reaching to the ceiling and filled with labeled bottles. On the prescription desk are scales, mortar and pestle. Many of the prescriptions he copied and filled and notes he made are preserved under a glass case and here are preserved the poet's spectacles and inkwell. The drawer is shown in which he wrote the date 15/4/1850, the day before he left Grimstead for Christiania to prepare for entrance into the medical school of the University.

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, Madison meeting, 1933.

There is a little room in the shop where he lived, so that at night he would be available in case it were necessary to prepare an emergency prescription. Here he did most of the miscellaneous reading and studying that formed the basis of his education for he was unable to carry out his ambition to study medicine or even



Fig. 2.—Ibsen Bust, Como Park, St. Paul, Minn.

enter the University. A paper dated September 3, 1850, and found here showed that he failed in his entrance examinations in Greek and mathematics and his general standing was low. While here at Grimstead he made some friendships with young men who exerted some influence over his early career and he also had a love affair with a servant girl, a woman ten years older than himself, by whom he had an illegitimate child. Here, too, he wrote his first play "Cataline."

Although when he left Skien, April 16, 1850, he severed his connection with pharmacy, Ibsen's general interest in medical subjects is shown in a number of his works, notably in two of his dramas, "Brand" and "An Enemy of the People." In the former syphilis forms the central theme; and in the latter a physician, Dr. Stockman, draws attention to the fact that certain natural springs of medicinal waters to which the town owes its fame and prosperity are infected and harmful;

as a result, he is declared to be a public enemy by his fellow townsmen and driven from the community.

Ibsen died May 23, 1906, at Christiania known to the whole world as one of the greatest figures in all modern literature.

It must be remembered that two other great literary men, John Keats and O. Henry, were trained in pharmacy and the great name of Dante was inscribed in the list of apothecaries of Florence.

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