

# HANS ANDERSEN CELEBRATION

FOR over a century the stories of Hans Christian Andersen have delighted the children, and adults, too, of every nation. Who has not heard of the Snow Queen, the Marsh King, or the Ice Maiden? Who does not remember the tale of the soldier and the tinder box and the dogs with eyes like mill-wheels? Who has not travelled to Lap-land with Kay and Gerda and the rein- deer, flown on the storms of the northern night with the Fellow-Traveller and the Princess, and gazed on the lovely Elise as she sat weaving the stinging nettles into shirts for her eleven brothers on her way to execution?

In recent years Denmark has cele- brated the birthday of her famous author of fairy tales by a world-wide radio broadcast from his childhood home in the narrow idyllic Hans Jensen Street in the Danish town of Odense. Each year the leader of a different nation sends greetings to Denmark, and cele- brated actors or actresses read some of Andersen's stories in their own language. In 1950 Vincent Auriol, President of France, sent a message, and the stories were read in French. In 1951 Harry Truman, President of the United States, sent his greetings to be broadcast. And in 1952 listeners heard the voice of King Gustav Adolf of Sweden.

This year the Hans Andersen Cele- bration at Odense, broadcast over Radio Denmark on April 2, was marked by greetings from Sir Winston Churchill, and the stories were read by Margaret Rutherford, the British stage and film actress. The programme was to have been beamed to the different countries of the Commonwealth on shortwave, but because of reception problems a tape recording was flown out to New Zealand instead. This actuality record- ing will be broadcast in a link of the YA stations at 4.0 p.m. on Sunday, May 23.

The broadcast opens with the voice of a Danish announcer speaking from the Hans Andersen house in Odense, where the programme originated. The opening announcement is followed by a Danish children's choir singing verses from Poul Schierbeck's "In Denmark I Was Born," the words of which are by

Hans Andersen. Following this the greeting from Sir Winston Churchill is read by the British Ambassador to Den- mark, Sir Eric Berthoud. Sir Winston says, in part, "The English-speaking world have taken the great Danish poet and story-teller to their heart. . . His tales have delighted and touched the imagination of generations of children and won a special place in their affec- tion."

Margaret Rutherford then reads two of Andersen's favourite tales, *Little Ida's Flowers* and *The Darning Needle*, and they are beautifully spoken by her. Finally, the choir sings J. C. Gebauer's "Yonder Where the Road is Turning," also set to words by Hans Andersen.

Hans Andersen was born in 1805, and was the son of a shoemaker. "Our little room, which was almost filled with the shoemaker's bench, the bed, and my crib, was the abode of my childhood," he once wrote. "The walls were covered with pictures, and over the work-bench was a cupboard containing books and songs. . . I was the only child, and was extremely spoiled." The folk-tales of his little Danish village, which he heard all around him when he was a child, he re- membered and adapted in later years to make some of his first published stories, though later he drew more heavily on his imagination to invent tales that were entirely his own.

As a child he played with his puppet theatre and peepshow, and his greatest happiness was to collect brightly- coloured pieces of cloth and silk and cut and sew them into strange shapes. His mother wanted him to be a tailor, but his ambition was to be an actor, and with this aim he decided to go to Copenhagen, which he thought was "the greatest city in the world." "What wilt thou do there?" he remembered his mother asked him. "I will become famous," he replied. At fourteen he left his native island of Funen for the island of Zealand, where the capital stands. "As

soon as I set foot on Zealand," he records, "I stepped behind a shield which stood on the shore, and falling on my knees, besought of God to help and guide me aright."

His experiences when he first arrived in Copenhagen in 1819 were bitter. He wanted to be an opera singer and ballet dancer, and with this in mind gained an interview with the celebrated dancer Madame Schall, singing and dancing for her the role of Cinderella which he had lately seen performed in Odense. He made such an ungainly spectacle that she thought he was a lunatic, and he was subsequently snubbed at the theatres and came close to starvation.

Later he was befriended by two musicians, Christoph Weyse and Siboni, and the poet Frederik Guldberg be- came his patron, entering him as a dancing pupil at the Royal Theatre.

Although Andersen's eccen- tricity of behaviour and great egotism antagonised many of those who tried to help him, he had no lack of patrons in his early years.

When Guldberg dropped him he was taken up by Jonas Collin, the director of the Royal Theatre, who re- mained his friend throughout his life. King Frederick VI became interested in him and sent him to two grammar schools, where he remained until 1827—in his own opinion the darkest and most bitter years of his life.

So he began the career which made him one of the most celebrated liter- ary figures of his time and a national hero. He became a great traveller, and was a familiar figure with his battered travelling bags, including one specially designed to hold his top-hat, a large black umbrella which he always carried furled in his hand, and a strong length of rope with a grappling hook on the end of it, which he kept handy in his hotel room so that he could escape by it from the window in case of fire.

His gift for fantasy first appeared in the volume *A Journey on Foot from Holman's Canal to the East Point of Amager*, which attracted attention and was followed by a farce and a book of



Photo by courtesy of the Danish Legation

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

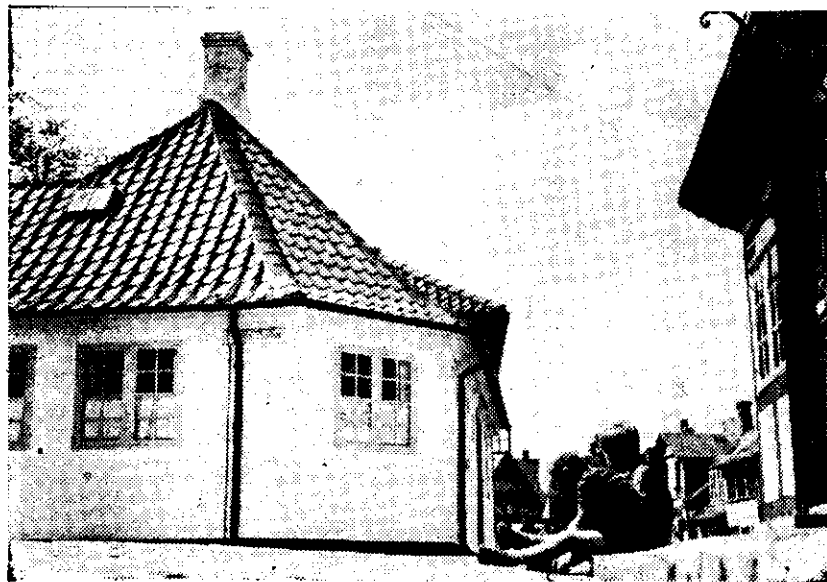
poems. A few years later his novel, *The Improvisatore*, was a great success, and his struggles to establish himself were virtually ended. His first few fairy tales, however, were practically unnoticed, and he continued to write novels and travel books. His ambition was to excel as a novelist and dramatist, and he disdained for a long time the fairy stories in which his true genius lay.

Hans Andersen reckoned in later life that he had written 156 stories, and the first of them were published in a tiny volume in 1835. It contained *The Tin- der Box*, *Little Claus and Big Claus*, *The Princess on the Pea*, and *Little Ida's Flowers*. The first three were fairy tales he had heard in his childhood, but the last one was his own invention. It is this story, and the later-written *The Darning Needle*, which listeners will hear read by Margaret Rutherford in the broadcast.

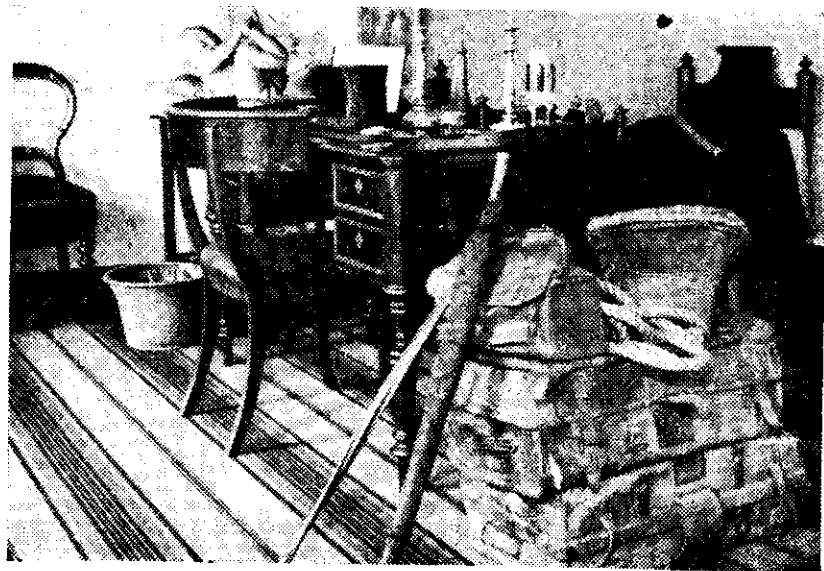
In 1847 he made a triumphant visit to England, and Charles Dickens saw him off from Ramsgate pier. His travels resulted in such books as *In Sweden* and *In Spain*, and his novels included *O.T.* and *Only a Fiddler*. Fortunately, he continued to write fairy tales, and fresh volumes of them appeared regu- larly until 1872. He died three years later.



Margaret Rutherford



HANS ANDERSEN'S HOUSE, from which the broadcast was made



THE author's writing desk and effects

Photos by courtesy of the Danish Legation

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 14, 1954.