

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN (by David Vouros)

Hans Christian Andersen was born on April 2, 1805 in Odense on Fionia island in Denmark. He had a sister named Karen Marie Andersen and his parents were Hans Andersen and Ane Marie Andersdatter. His father who had received an elementary school education, introduced his son to literature, reading to him the *Arabian Nights*. But after a while, he ended up working as a shoe maker to run his family. Being unable to struggle with the poverty, he died very young, leaving his son Hans an orphan, with his mum as being his only support.

Hans was an extraordinary child with amazing imagination. He was quite often seen by people walking as a day-dreamer in the streets. He only cared about poems and books. He tried to learn his father's job but without any result. Andersen was sent to a local school for poor children where he received a basic education and had to support himself, working as an apprentice to a weaver and, later, to a tailor. But he didn't succeed in this field either. When he was with his friends, he used to read poems and sing.

At fourteen, having only 30 francs in his pocket, he moved to Copenhagen to seek employment as an actor. Having an excellent soprano voice, he was accepted into the Royal Danish Theatre, but after he had suddenly gone through a serious illness, he lost his voice. A colleague at the theatre told him that he considered Andersen a poet. Taking the suggestion seriously, Andersen began to focus on writing.

Jonas Collin, director of the Royal Danish Theatre, held great affection for Andersen and sent him to a grammar school in Slagelse, persuading King Frederick VI to pay part of the youth's education. Andersen had by then published his first story, "The Ghost at Palnatoke's Grave" (1822). Though not a stellar pupil, he also attended school at Elsinore until 1827.

In 1827, he published some poems and then some great works, which gave him worldwide fame. After he had become quite famous, he started travelling. He visited Germany, France, England, Greece, Italy, Turkey and Middle East.

In early 1872, at age 67, Andersen fell out of his bed and was severely hurt; he never fully recovered from the resultant injuries. Soon afterward, he started to show signs of liver cancer.

He died on 4 August 1875, in a house called *Rolighed* (literally: calmness), near Copenhagen, the home of his close friends, the banker Moritz Melchior and his wife. Shortly before his death, Andersen had consulted a composer about the music for his funeral, saying: "Most of the people who will walk after me will be children, so make the beat keep time with little steps."

At the time of his death, Andersen was internationally revered, and the Danish Government paid him an annual stipend as a "national treasure".

