HANS ANDERSEN AND JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON

OLE SECHER

SUMMARY

In the summer of 1847 Hans Andersen and J. Y. Simpson met in Edinburgh. Simpson arranged a dinner in his home in honour of Andersen, who has given a description of this dinner in The Fairy Tale of My Life. Simpson entertained his guests by having them inhale ether. From Andersen's writings and correspondence it is possible to name most of the guests present. Simpson also used chloroform in the same way, and probably never thought of this as a dangerous practice.

For his time Hans Andersen (in Denmark better known as H. C. Andersen) had travelled extensively. He undertook, in all, twenty-nine journeys abroad. During all his travelling he kept a diary, and during his whole life he maintained an extensive correspondence with friends and a considerable number of the people he met. A great number of his letters and the letters he received still exist, and have been published. He also wrote an autobiography: Mit Livs Eventyr, 1855 (The Fairy Tale of My Life).

In 1847 he went to England and Scotland, and during his visit to Scotland he met James Young Simpson. The following, which has been extracted from the above mentioned books, is the story about the meeting of these two world-famous men.

Hans Andersen (1805-75) left Copenhagen on May 13, 1847, and his tour went through Fyn (the island where his hometown, Odense, is located), where he visited friends. From there he went to Germany and Holland. In each place he stayed some time, and was lionized. He then travelled to England, arriving in London on June 23. Here he was again received in the best circles. Among others he met Charles Dickens (1812-70), and they immediately became friends. In London Hans Andersen also met "the old Hambro" (Joseph Hambro, 1770-1848), whom he knew from Copenhagen, but with whom he had never talked before (Bredsdorff, 1954).

Joseph Hambro, who was Danish, had started as street vendor in Copenhagen, selling laces and other small merchandise. Subsequently he acquired his own milliner's shop, expanded, and made trade contacts in the Danish islands in the West Indies—the Virgin Islands—and established a banking firm.

In 1821 he negotiated a loan for Denmark in England, and as a result he was elected Hofraad (court adviser) by King Frederik VI. In time his son, Carl Joachim Hambro (1807-77), became a partner in his father's firm, but emigrated to England in 1839, where his father followed him in 1840, possibly because, as a Jew, he could not be elected to the Stenderforsamlingen (the House of Representatives). In London Carl Joachim opened a banking firm, which, thanks to his father's connec-
dons, grew rapidly. In 1850, at the end of the three-year war between Denmark and Germany, Carl Joachim procured another English loan for Denmark, and was duly elected as Baron in 1851 by King Frederik VII for services rendered (Dahl and Engelstoft, 1920–26; Secher, 1971).

During Andersen's stay in London Joseph Hambro helped him and took over his economic problems with his English publisher, Richard Bentley (1794–1871), because he did not know much about money. Andersen also stayed some time in Carl Joachim's country home, Barnsbury, in Kilburn (Bredsdorff, 1954).

When Andersen was in London, Joseph Hambro received a letter from his son in Scotland, asking him to persuade Andersen to come to Scotland and visit the family and some of his admirers there.

Carl Joachim had travelled to Scotland with his family because his wife, Caroline Marie Hambro, née Gostenhofer (1810–52), was sick and needed some sea-bathing. For this reason he had rented a house for the summer, Lixmount House, in the suburb of Trinity, Leith, near Edinburgh.

Andersen was convinced that he should go to Edinburgh, and he and Joseph Hambro left London by train on August 10, arriving in Edinburgh on the 11th, after having stayed overnight in York. In Edinburgh they were received by Carl Joachim at the station and they went to Lixmount House.

He was very well received in Edinburgh, meeting many of the literati there, and was celebrated at several dinners.

For instance on the 11th he visited Miss Rigby, and was invited for dinner on the 18th. Miss Elizabeth Rigby (1809–93) was an author and collaborator on the literary journal The Quarterly Review. She later became Lady Eastlake, when she married Sir C. E. Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy. Her father, Edward Rigby (1747–1821), was a famous London obstetrician (K. Bryn Thomas, 1972, personal communication).

On August 16 Carl Joachim gave a dinner in honour of Andersen, where Mrs Catherine Crowe, née Stevens (1800–76), was present, and Andersen sat next to her. James Young Simpson (1811–70) and his wife, Jessie Simpson, née Grindlay* (1812–70), were probably present at this dinner. He was kind to Andersen, who mentions that he “met the famous Dr Simpson”, and that he showed him round the old part of Edinburgh. Simpson was Mrs Hambro’s doctor, and very friendly with the family (Andersen, 1951).

Simpson was known to Andersen as “the famous Dr Simpson”, because he had begun to build his international reputation shortly after his election as Professor of Midwifery at the University of Edinburgh in 1840, at the age of 29.

When he heard about Robert Liston's (1794–1847) successful amputation of a patient's leg at the University College Hospital, London, on December 21, where Dr Peter Squire probably administered the ether, he went to London “during the Christ-
was something unpleasant about it, and I said so, recognizing at the same time that it was a wonderful and blessed invention to use in painful operations, but not to play with; it was wrong to do it; it was almost like tempting God; a worthy old gentleman took my part and said the same; by asserting what I did, I seemed to have won his heart. [Andersen, 1954; Secher, 1971.]

Andersen also made the following entry in his diary:

August the 17th: Dinner at Dr Simpson where Mrs Crowe and another poet drank ether. I had the feeling of being among two insane who laughed with open eyes; I found it outstanding for operation, but not to be used to tempt God. [Andersen, 1951; Secher, 1971.]

It is interesting that Simpson performed “ether frolics” to entertain his guests, and I have not seen this mentioned before. Probably this was not the first or last time he did this, and he may never have thought of it as being dangerous.

Among the persons Andersen met in Edinburgh was also Simpson’s sister-in-law, Miss Grindlay. In a letter to his friend Edvard Collin (1808-86), in Copenhagen, dated August 15, he says: “Here is a rich Miss, who makes proposals to me. Hambro says she probably wants to be Mistress Andersen, but I do not want so, she is too old” (Bredsdorff, 1954).

At Simpson’s dinner Andersen met another Dr Moir, Dr David Macbeth Moir (1798-1851), who was a practitioner in Musselburgh, to the south-east of Edinburgh. He was an important member of the circle around the literary journal Blackwood’s Magazine. He himself wrote poems under the name “Delta”. In a letter dated “Musselburgh, the 18th August”, to Andersen, he expresses his pleasure at having met him and having shaken his hand on the previous day. He accompanied his letter with a private print: Domestic Verses by Delta, 1843, not published (Bredsdorff, 1954).

In his diary for August 19, morning, Andersen notes: “Sent a letter to Dr Moir in Musselburgh”. The same day he mentioned:

...was at the Doctors Amanuensis and saw some daguerreotypes, he had taken on a journey in Palestine. Said goodbye to Dr Simpson, where I had to write on several sheets and on one for Miss Ross...
honour, because he felt too tired, after his hectic life in Edinburgh.

Hans Andersen left Edinburgh on August 19 to make a tour with the Hambro family to the Scottish highlands and “Walter Scott’s country”. He left the family in Dumbarton on August 23 and went to Glasgow and London, after having stayed overnight in Edinburgh.

On August 31 he left England, and the last who wished him goodbye at Ramsgate was Charles Dickens. Andersen went home, through Germany, and arrived back in Copenhagen on September 23.

This is the end of the story of Hans Andersen’s meeting with J. Y. Simpson; they never met again, but indirectly, through the correspondence with the Hambro family, they had some connection. Unfortunately all the letters Andersen wrote to the Hambros have disappeared, but from the letters he received there is some information of interest.

When Andersen left the Hambro family they went to Kilmun, in the Firth of Clyde, where they had rented a house. The first letter Andersen received from C. J. Hambro is dated Kilmun, August 25, wherein there are greetings to him from Simpson, who obviously visited the family there (Bredsdorff, 1954).

The next day, August 26, Hambro wrote a new letter in which he said:

The Doctor’s sister-in-law asked twice, if it was true, that there were greetings for her in the letter. You have a lot on your conscience from that angel. The Yellow woman, who sang at the Doctor’s, was here with her sister and a whole group, who was here for the Doctor’s sake, who unfortunately is sick. [Bredsdorff, 1954.]

In a letter dated October 13, Lixmound, Trinity, Hambro wrote:

Your greetings for Miss Grindlay I delivered with pleasure; she is now in Liverpool, but I am sure, you have a lot to blame yourself for concerning the heart of the dear Lady. The Lady who breathed ether, Mrs Lindell, wrote me a humble solicitant letter to get your signature. My wife sends her best and most hearty greetings for you – Simpson also, he is just here to have lunch with us today. [Bredsdorff, 1954.]

From this correspondence and the former information, it is possible to identify most of the people present at Simpson’s dinner party on August 17, 1847: Dr J. Y. Simpson and Mrs Jessie Simpson. Hans Andersen, who sang, “I sang” (Diary). C. J. Hambro. (His wife was sick and probably not present.) Joseph Hambro had most likely also been present. Mrs Crowe and Mr Crowe (?). Mrs Crowe had ether. Mrs Lindell and Mr Lindell (?). Mrs Lindell was the other authoress who had ether.

Dr D. Macbeth Moir and Mrs Moir (?). Dr John Moir. From the invitation he must have been single. Miss Grindlay, the sister-in-law of Simpson. “The Yellow Lady”, who sang Scottish songs. “The elderly Gentleman” who agreed with Andersen. Miss Rigby, the authoress (?).

Thus it is possible that there may have been sixteen people present, perhaps more, perhaps less.

The correspondence between Andersen and Hambro became less frequent after this.

On November 4, 1847, Simpson made his famous experiments in his living-room with chloroform, where he himself and his two assistants, Dr George Keith and Dr James Matthews Duncan, were anaesthetized. He also tried it on a niece of his wife, Miss Agnes Petrie, the first woman to receive chloroform (Shepherd, 1969). Probably the following day he tried it on patients, and on November 10 he spoke in the Medico-Chirurgical Society in Edinburgh on his first experiences (Duncum, 1947; Keys, 1945).

Saxtorph had also, on December 18, 1847, written the first article in Denmark on chloroform. In this he mentioned Simpson’s communication to the Medico-Chirurgical Society and the first patients in whom chloroform was used for minor surgery. He also gave a more detailed description of the first case, when Simpson used it for a delivery, which was normal. Most likely he also had this information directly from Simpson.

Simpson was no doubt even more enthusiastic in his advocacy of chloroform than he had been about ether.

On January 5, 1848, C. J. Hambro wrote to Hans Andersen from Barnsbury, in Kilburn, saying:

We have just had a visit by Dr Simpson. He has discovered a new form for anaesthesia in chloroform. He put two girls and our parrot to sleep, and one could have done what one wanted with them; nothing would they have felt. During painful operations there will be many who will bless him, but I fully agree with your viewpoint you once expressed, that this is too sacred to play with. [Bredsdorff, 1954.]

This is probably not the only occasion on which Simpson played with chloroform, knowing that he did the same with ether. At least it is interesting and, as mentioned before, it almost certainly did not appear to him that this was dangerous; but he must have stopped it when the first recorded death under chloroform took place in Newcastle on January 28, 1848. The patient was the 15-year-old Hannah Greener, who was to have a toe-nail removed (Duncum, 1947; Keys, 1945).
The correspondence between Hans Andersen and Carl Joachim Hambro faded out, and there is no more information about Simpson.

On Andersen's next visit to England in 1857, after an invitation by Charles Dickens, he visited C. J. Hambro again, but they never renewed an extensive exchange of letters (Andersen, 1951; Bredsdorff, 1954).

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REFERENCES


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SOMMAIRE

HANS ANDERSEN UND JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

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RESUMEN
Hans Andersen y J. Y. Simpson se encontraron en Edimburgo en el verano del año 1847. Simpson organizó una cena en su casa en honor de Andersen, quien ha dado una descripción de esta cena en "El cuento de hadas de mi vida". Simpson entretuvo a sus huéspedes dejándoles inhalar éter. Es posible conocer el nombre de la mayoría de estos huéspedes mediante los escritos y correspondencia de Andersen. Simpson también utilizó el cloroformo de la misma manera y probablemente jamás pensó que tuviera peligros.