

JONATHAN SWIFT

(1667 - 1745)

The greatest satirist Jonathan Swift was born on November, 30 in 1667 in Dublin. His father died early and Jonathan was brought by his prosperous uncle. He studied theology and later became a clergyman. His favourite subjects were not theology, but literature, history, languages. Swift read much and soon took his Master of Art Degree at Oxford University. He worked as a vicar and a clergyman in different towns of Ireland. In 1709 he returned to England and edited a newspaper. He became one of the leading political figures in England although he occupied no official post in the government.

Swift's enemies as well as his friends were afraid of him. They decided to send him as far away from London as it was possible. He went to Dublin as the Dean of the Cathedral. Living in Dublin he became involved in the struggle of the Irish people and became their leader.

Swift's literary work was closely connected with his political activity. He was famous for his political pamphlets. It was his novel GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, however, that brought him fame and immortality.

GULLIVER 'S TRAVELS

This novel is the summit of the writer's work, one of the best in world literature. It is one of the books loved by children; however the author did not mean to amuse children. It was an exposure of all the evils and the vices of the society.

The book consists of four independent parts that tell about the adventures of Gulliver, a ship surgeon. The first part is the story of Lemuel's voyage to the land of LILLIPUT. The second is an account of Gulliver's adventures in Brobclingnag, a country inhabited by giants. The third part tells of Gulliver's voyage to Laputa, a flying island and to some other islands. In the fourth part Gulliver finds himself in the country of intelligent horses and ugly-looking human beings.

The land of Lilliput is a satirical symbol of the England of Swift's time. The author laughs at the shallow interests of the Lilliputians. Swift ridicules the English court. The Lilliputians have two political parties. It is the direct hint to the parties of Britain. A war breaks out between Lilliput and the neighbouring country and it reminds the reader very much of the numerous wars waged by Britain against France and Spain.

In the country of giants Gulliver himself is no more than a Lilliput. Brobdingnag is to some extent Swift's ideal of what a state should be. The laws of the country are just; they guarantee freedom and welfare to all the citizens. The king of the country is modest, kind and wise. He wants his people to be happy.

The third part of the novel is again a bitter satire on the English society. It is a symbol of the English ruling circles, which are hostile to the common people that oppress Ireland and other countries.

Swift's satire reaches its climax in the chapters dealing with science. The citizens of Laputa are very fond of astronomy and mathematics. Even bread, meat, and cheese are cut in the form of cones, cylinders, parallelograms. But the Laputans cannot apply their knowledge of mathematics to practical use.

In the fourth voyage Gulliver finds himself in a land ruled by intelligent and virtuous horses that are completely ignorant of such vice as stealing, lying, and love of money. The rest of the population is greedy, envious, deceitful and malicious. Gulliver admires the simple modest way of the horses and is disgusted with the others, who remind him very much his countrymen.

Swift's realism was different from Defoe's. Defoe presented extreme precise picture of bourgeois life. Swift used his favourite weapon-laugh to mock at bourgeois reality.

Swift's art had a great effect on the further development, of English and European literature.