

THE CHURCH IN LILLIPUT

Perhaps in childhood you read Jonathan Swift's book, **Gulliver's Travels**. What is now a fascinating children's story was originally intended as a satirical critique of the petty politics of Europe and England. In the story, normal sized Lemuel Gulliver was shipwrecked and woke to find himself on the sandy beach of the kingdom of Lilliput. The inhabitants of this kingdom were remarkable for their small, match-like size. Whilst Gulliver was unconscious, the tiny folk of Lilliput had bound him with their thread like ropes and pegs, attempting to bring him under their control.

In the author's parable, the Lilliputians are "little men marked by moral pettiness, trivializing pretense and obsession with pompous 'points of honor'" (S. Fields). They sought to control the giant in their midst and force him to act in accordance with their will. The burning issue that dominated the thinking of the Lilliputians was the proper way to break an egg. Should one crack the large end or the small end of the egg? Endless wars were fought over this profoundly foolish question.

In the religion of Christ we too have our Lilliputians. The church is like Gulliver, a great body of people whose outreach is greater than any social, ethnic or national group. Its identity is greater than any single preacher, school or clique of men. Like Gulliver, the church is no threat to others. She seeks only to do them good. But there are "little men" in our midst whose vision of Christianity is pinched and narrow. They feel they alone have a proper understanding of truth, that they alone know what is best for the church. None but those of their circle can be entrusted to lead the way. Although they are few in number, they presume to speak for the whole church. They seek to bind their ideas and opinions on the great brotherhood of Christians. They seek to impose their way by intimidation. By carefully monitoring the affairs of brethren and congregations they gather up scraps of information with which they can accuse those who refuse to conform to their dictates. With shrill voice and pointed finger they brand a brother a liberal or false teacher whose only crime may well be to ignore their demands. When elders do not adopt their agenda they pronounce them and their congregation unfaithful and work to tarnish their reputation and standing among the brethren. Good works that they do not appreciate, understand or control are often the subject of attack. Their toxic pens spread the accusations far and wide. Conform or be destroyed say the Lilliputians. The egg must be opened this way and no other! Sad to say they do have some negative influence upon the church. Some, fearing the wrath of the Lilliputians, refrain from undertaking or supporting some good works, or from speaking out on some matter. Others, despising the pretensions of the little folk, choose the opposite extreme of liberalism. This they do just to demonstrate their unwillingness to be controlled by Lilliputians.

Lilliputians live and die, leaving nothing positive or constructive behind them. History will show they exhausted their talent and energy trying to bind and impose their will upon the church and their fellow Christians and how they quarreled over insignificant questions. Gulliver looked with pity on the poor little folk of Lilliput. They did not realize how foolish their efforts really were. So today we must pity those Lilliputians among us who make war over the "egg-issue" and devote themselves to restraining others from doing good in the name of Jesus. JHW