

The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Svejk During the World War, Book One

Jaroslav Hasek



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The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Svejk During the World War, Book One Jaroslav Hasek Some writers so capture the soul and spirit of a people that they are identified with them forever after. In England, it was Charles Dickens, in the United States, it was Mark Twain. For the Slavic nations, and to some extent for all Central Europeans, it is the Czech writer, Jaroslav Hasek.

Hasek's most important work was centered around a Czech soldier's experiences in World War One. It's actual title is The Fateful Adventures of The Good Soldier Svejk during the World War, but it is known by tens of millions of Central Europeans as simply, The Good Soldier Svejk. This monumental, humorous work is acknowledged as "... one of the greatest masterpieces of satirical writing" by no less a standard and exalted reference than the Encyclopedia Britannica.

The book's central character is a quintessential, working-class citizen-soldier, often abused by the fates and the forces of the Austrian empire. In both civilian and military life, Svejk lives by his wits. His chief ploy is to appear witless to those in authority. In fact, he is fond of pointing out that he has been certified to be an imbecile by an official military medical commission. Consequently, he reasons, he cannot be held responsible for his sometimes questionable actions because he's a certified nitwit!

Yet, Svejk is not a coward, nor is he indolent. He is drafted back into the army as cannon fodder to die for an Emperor he despises. His method of subverting the Austrian Empire is to carry out his orders to an absurd conclusion. His is an inspired resistance. He holds the foreign authorities, and their Czech fellow travelers, accountable for their ridiculous platitudes and pseudo-patriotic blather.

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