

Technology outstrips writers' imagination. Except when it doesn't

by Lev Tsitrin

JAROSLAV HASEK
THE GOOD
SOLDIER SVEJK

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THE GOOD SOLDIER SVEJK

AND HIS FORTUNES IN THE WORLD WAR

IN A NEW AND UNABRIDGED TRANSLATION
BY CECIL PARROTT
WITH THE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS
BY JOSEF LADA




HEINEMANN

The [Good Soldier Svejk](#) the protagonist finds himself, for a short while, as a patient a mental institution, one of his fellow-patients being a pregnant gentleman who kept inviting others to a christening.

The book was written a century ago; yet what a change a hundred years make! One has to admit that Hasek anticipated

future well when satirizing patriotism as a form of insanity – which is how it is being perceived in certain circles today (Svejk got instantly diagnosed as insane when, upon entering the room in which draft commission sat, he greeted the portrait of the emperor with, “Long live the Emperor! We shall prevail!”). But as to the pregnant gentleman, Hasek was not particularly prescient. To be sure, gentlemen still don’t bear babies – but saying so is no longer polite. In Hasek’s time, it was uncontroversial that such gentleman belonged in a mental institution. Nowadays, this is not clear at all, and doctors would be much more cautious with a diagnosis, I’d guess, given that certain gentlemen see themselves as ladies, and compete against ladies in sports. This progress, unanticipated by Hasek, did not yet reach its fruition in christening of babies born of such gentlemen, but it did affect the medical – and certainly, the teaching, and the journalistic, professions. The doctor who consigned the pregnant gentleman to a mental institution would be, nowadays, likely sued out of his license, and universally shunned as a bigot.

Apparently, Hasek relied too much on what yet another, very old book said: “male and female He created them.” Not so fast! At least, not in sports!

Like other good writers, there are turns of events that Hasek did not imagine, proving yet again the limits to artistic imagination.

That shows the power of progress.

Or does it?