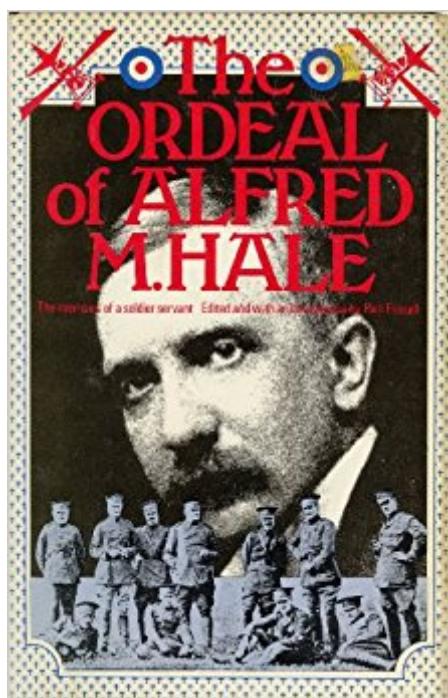


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The Ordeal Of Alfred M. Hale: The Memoirs Of A Soldier Servant



Synopsis

In Alfred Hale's quaintly titled "A Note on the War 1914-1918, Paul Fussell has brought to light a hitherto unknown work of extraordinary merit. Hale was a minor musician of gentle birth and independent means, endowed with a degree of physical ineptitude which rendered him totally unsuited for any form of martial employment. But it was his tragedy that this did not prevent him from being caught, at the age of forty, in the all-embracing clutches of Lord Derby's recruiting scheme, and ending up as a batman in the Royal Flying Corps. Two years after his demobilization, Hale purged his soul of the humiliation he had undergone by committing his experiences to paper, and thereby bequeathed to posterity a remarkable military memoir. If at times he wallows in self pity, he does it in so Pooteresque a fashion that one is forced to laugh with, rather than at, him. Moreover, his ability to rise above his degradation and see in the horror of his situation some redeeming feature is quite outstanding. His observation of his fellow men is as acute as it is devastating. The smile of the Colonel on an Inspection Parade, as he exchanges some patronizing pleasantries with a private soldier in the ranks, transmitting itself along the line of sycophantic subordinates until it finally creases the Sergeant-Major's moustache, is but one example of the little gems among myriad moments of life at the nadir of the military hierarchy. This is a book that is at once artlessly naive yet full of art, full of self pity but asking none, and it exposes, albeit unintentionally, the breakdown of a social structure which had hitherto been taken entirely for granted. Mr Hale certainly deserves to take his place among the literary 'heroes' of the First World War.

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