

A VISIT TO THE FRONT

open hearse, a cheap wooden coffin, a shabby black pall, and behind it a woman in mourning, leading a blind boy dressed in obviously new blacks, in whose uplifted pallid face there was the rapt expression and the placid smile peculiar to the blind, at long intervals blinking his sightless eyes in the glaring sun. Then the friends and mourners—hobbling old men, bent old women, and young wives and girls, and little children, but not one man of middle age, not one for whom war has any use.

The pathos of all that hopeless poverty, of those squalid obscure lives, ending futilely in that last and shabbiest scene of all, touched me with its poignant sadness, as the waste, the destruction, and desolation had filled me with its despair. The monstrous folly of it all, and then the moral indignity heaped upon these innocent, inoffensive people, sinking under their dumb sorrow, conquered, broken, passed under the yoke. . . .

A little boy was plucking at my sleeve:

"Un sou, Monsieur!" he begged. *"Pour manger, s'il vous plaît!"*

It was one of those moments in which the ghastly spectacle of this our common life, suddenly revealed stark and hideous, by some such commonplace, and insignificant scene, becomes intolerable, and in an overwhelming depression I found myself exclaiming to one of the young German officers:

"Mon Dieu! que la vie est abominable et triste!"

And he replied, with a laugh, and ready wit:

"Mais les funérailles sont toujours gaies!"