

The Hammers

The seventh chapter of "Men, Women, and Ghosts" by Amy Lowell unfolds with a vivid contrast of quiet country life against the backdrop of historical turmoil and war. The narrative transitions from an idyllic, albeit abandoned, English estate where roses bloom amongst ruins, to the industrious sounds of shipbuilding in Frindsbury, Kent, in 1786. The detailed descriptions of ship construction alongside the lively tales of workers like Jem Wilson and Stephen Pibold breathe life into the otherwise mechanical process. The ship, celebrated and launched amidst fanfare, is a symbol of British pride and craftsmanship, destined for naval glory.

Transitioning to Paris in March 1814, the atmosphere changes dramatically. The city, under occupation, reflects a tense blend of daily life and the dismantling of Napoleon's empire. Martin, the parfumeur, reluctantly removes symbols of the empire from his shop under the new regime's orders, signifying a broader cultural and political shift. Despite the subdued occupation, there's a resilient pulse in the Parisians' disdain for their occupiers, underscoring the enduring spirit beneath the surface compliance.

By April 1814, the narrative mourns the physical erasure of Napoleon's victories from the triumphal arch of the Place du Carrousel. The scene is charged with emotion, illustrating the public's silent protest through the eyes of the old Grenadier and the despairing crowd. This act of removing inscriptions is a metaphor for the wider attempt to erase the impact of Napoleon's rule from France's memory, met with resistance and sorrow from the populace.

Finally, in June 1815, the focus shifts to Croissy, Ile-de-France, where a farrier, a blacksmith, and a retired Sergeant reminisce about past glories and current disillusionments post-Waterloo. Their conversation reveals a deep-seated nostalgia for the Napoleonic era and a disdain for the present state of affairs, reflecting broader societal sentiments of loss and change. The unexpected arrival of an urgent message, hinting at Napoleon's final efforts to escape, adds a layer of immediacy and suspense, highlighting the ongoing turmoil and the rapid pace of historical events.

This chapter, through its varied settings and characters, illustrates the immediate and lingering impacts of war and political upheaval on both grand and personal scales. The narrative threads connect the loss of individual identities and the grandeur of past triumphs to the present's uncertainty, captured through evocative imagery and the lasting echoes of lost glory.