

Two Travellers in the Place Vendome

In a scene that blends solemnity with a touch of surreal majesty, a procession advances slowly along the road to Longwood, bearing the weight of an unusual cargo. The carriers, sixteen strong and neutral Chinamen, bear aloft four coffins destined for a singularly small but significant figure, with one coffin humorously repurposed from Captain Bennett's dining table. This moment, marked by a guttural call and the soft fall of feet upon the dusty road, evokes an atmosphere of regal reverence tinged with the irony of the deceased's grandiose accompaniment—four fine coffins for a "little dead man," underscoring a juxtaposition between the deceased's physical stature and his immense legacy.

As the narrative shifts, attention is drawn to a marble likeness of the Emperor, symbolizing a powerful figure brought low, not by defeat in battle, but by the constraints of the world against his boundless ambition. The sound of tapping drums out a rhythm, heralding the Emperor to his eternal throne, a throne marked not by the geographical conquests he once sought but by the enduring legacy of his spirit. The faded glories of his past are likened to the dim afterglow of a sunset, leaving behind the haunting melody of a wind-lyre in a twilight room—a metaphor for a life whose aspirations stretched beyond the tangible into the realm of dreams. Amidst this reflective commemoration, the once-treasured coins of his realm, now likened to the ephemeral baubles of a dream, are laid to rest with him, silently marking the futility of earthly treasures against the vast backdrop of history and destiny.

The scene transitions to the Place Vendome under the reign of Louis Philippe, where two travelers gaze up at a towering column crowned with the figure of a man. Their dialogue, imbued with a mixture of curiosity and bewilderment, explores the incongruity of this figure's prominent display. The column, spearing the sky, bears a small man whose stature seems at odds with the grandeur of his monument. The observers' musings on the figure's attire and posture, questioning the rationale behind his elevated position, introduce a layer of irony to the narrative. This juxtaposition between the figure's perceived insignificance and the monument's imposing presence encourages a reflection on the ways in which history commemorates its heroes, often elevating them to heights that challenge the viewers' perceptions of their true worth.

Through these vivid scenes, the chapter weaves a tapestry of reflection on glory, legacy, and the haunting beauty of ambitions that reach beyond the confines of mortality, juxtaposing the grandiose and the mundane to probe the essence of historical memory and the artifacts it leaves behind.