

Herald and News Book Reviews



A CLOSEUP SHOWS the exquisite detail in the 16-inch-high mourner figures and their niches. In the empty space at the left is a card reading "Au Musée de Cleveland, Etats-Unis."



THIS IS THE GUARD ROOM in the Ducal Palace at Dijon, where likenesses of John the Fearless and his wife, foreground, and Philip the Bold, background, lie in funeral splendor. Beneath the two slabs, the famous mourners of Dijon grieve for their medieval masters in niches lining the bases. Originally there were 82 of the mourners, but today several are missing. At one point (indicated by arrow) visitors are informed that a missing statue is in the possession of the Cleveland Museum.

Missing Mourners Mourned

By FERNAND FAUBER

DIJON, France (AP)—Every year some 60,000 visitors file past the tombs of the dukes of Burgundy—Philip the Bold and John the Fearless—in Dijon's celebrated Ducal Palace.

The tombs are justly regarded as true masterpieces of Gothic art. To most Burgundians, they stand as symbols of a magnificent past. And yet, as any observant sight-seer is sure to note, there is something wrong with both mausoleums.

Carved figures of Philip and of John and his wife Margaret lie prone on huge slabs of black marble, hands joined in prayer, feet firmly set against the sides of benevolent lions, with angels bending over them. Beneath the two slabs, master carvers of the late 14th and early 15th centuries set a stage for an extraordinary procession of mourners.

These 16-inch-high alabaster statuettes were conceived to express human sorrow in every imaginable form under the white lacelike arcade surrounding the dukes' monuments. Each mourner is a perfect example of medieval statuary.

There are priests, monks, members of the ducal household, choir-boys—all demonstrating their grief

and pain most eloquently, some with eyes turned toward the heavens, others wiping their tears on their coat sleeves and some (jokingly said to be blowing their noses) drying their eyelids with their fingers.

Once there were 82 of these mourners. Today, several of the niches are empty. In the place of two a sign reading "Au Musée de Cleveland" draws attention to the fact that the occupants are now across the seas. Other signs inform visitors that two more monks are part of the collection of the late Leonard C. Hanna, also of Cleveland.

This reporter, having spent an afternoon overhearing comments from sightseers who read the signs aloud, can state without hesitation that reactions were, in the majority of cases, displeasure or surprise.

Why they are missing is a long story.

The dukes and their mourners first fell upon evil times during the French Revolution, when nobles in the flesh or in stone were unpopular. The monuments were dismantled, heads and hands sawed off the principals. The mourners were ordered set aside as "fairly good examples of the art of that period" by a special edict from a revolutionary committee.

Twenty-five years later first attempts at restoration began. The dukes and the duchess were reassembled successfully but mourners of the two separate monuments were intermingled and—most importantly—13 were missing.

After World War II, the director of the Dijon Museum decided to put each mourner in the spot where the carvers had intended him, and to make every effort to fill the vacant niches with the original statuettes or, failing that, with plaster duplicates.

To the joy and delight of Dijon, an Englishman returned as a donation one of the 10 mourners who had migrated through art channels. Other owners, two of them museums, followed suit and a total of five mourners returned home eight remained absentees.

Of these, three have disappeared without a trace. One of the other five is in Beaune, France, owned by a man who has said he may some day give it back. The remaining four are in Cleveland.

French officials are very careful to avoid any comment that could be interpreted as criticism aimed at American collectors who, they point out, purchased the Dijon statuettes on the open market

and paid considerable sums for them.

Various proposals seem to have been made to William M. Milliken, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and to Leonard C. Hanna, Milliken's view appears to be that his trustees, while sympathetic with Dijon's predicament, are in no position to exchange the mourners for other pieces of Burgundian art.

It is quite natural that Cleveland should look upon the mourners as one of its finest art treasures. It is equally normal that Frenchmen reading the little signs in empty niches should express annoyance and say that "with money you can do anything."

As things stand, the Dijon mourners seem to be mourning not for their dukes but for their wandering brethren in Ohio.

Cleveland's Commentary

TOLEDO (AP)—Two days after it ran the story reproduced here in part, The Toledo Blade commented editorially:

"As far as art in general is concerned, the attitude of the Cleveland collectors is obviously justified."

"But 'The Missing Mourners of Dijon' present a different problem."

"Here we have one of the great art achievements of the 14th and 15th century which was blended into one fabric. Each mourner . . . (was) . . . a part of an exquisite whole."

"It is almost as though several petals had been plucked from an otherwise perfect rose."

"For this reason many people think that some arrangement should be made whereby the missing mourners at Cleveland could be returned to Dijon. . . ."

"But there is another reason, perhaps even more compelling."

"The United States is trying very hard to unite the peoples of the free world under its leadership to contain Soviet aggression. . . ."

"Wouldn't it be a splendid gesture of tremendous propaganda value, if Cleveland would restore those missing mourners to Dijon instead of leaving those empty niches as a constant source of irritation to the thousands of Frenchmen who visit the Ducal Palace every year?"

Literary Highlights

AN EPITAPH FOR DIXIE. By Harry Ashmore. Norton, \$4.50.

"The end result of Orval Faubus' manufactured crisis at Little Rock might well be, not to stay integration, but to speed it . . . after Little Rock, the nation moved closer to enactment of a genuine force bill than it had since the Reconstruction."

In the fall of 1957, when the bitter dispute over integration suddenly brought angry crowds and troops to a high school in Little Rock, Harry S. Ashmore was putting the finishing touches on a book about the South.

The startling events that he witnessed caused him to add some material to his story, but not to change its central thesis.

This is expressed in the title, "An Epitaph for Dixie"—meaning the transition taking place in the essential and typical characteristics of the Old South. He calls them its "peculiar institutions," and cites the three basic ones, an agrarian economy, the one-party political system, and legal segregation.

The events at Little Rock, as the passage quoted at the start shows, seem to fit perfectly into Ashmore's central theme.

Harry Ashmore is a Southerner, a native of Greenville, S. C. For years, he has been studying and writing about the problems of the South. He is now the executive editor of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock.

During the September crisis, the Gazette pulled no punches. It came out in solid opposition to Governor Faubus, and he in turn lost no opportunity to publicly castigate Ashmore and the newspaper.

"An Epitaph for Dixie" is devoted not only, nor even primarily, to the problem of segregation in the public schools.

Ashmore takes the long historical look, showing how slavery and the Reconstruction shaped the "peculiar institutions" of the South.

Then he points up the changes and explains their causes. The Supreme Court decision of 1954, ordering the South to desegregate "with all deliberate speed," dramatically marked a turning-point.

But before that, as Ashmore shows, the flow of new industry to the South, the shifts of population—and even the impact of the gasoline engine—were quietly working great changes.

At the moment, however, the paramount issue in Southern minds is desegregation, and Ashmore says:

"The prevailing mood is escapist; actuality is not yet at hand, and most Southerners still hope that somehow it will go away."

"This time around, even those who have mounted the barricades know, and privately concede, that the cause was lost before it was launched. . . . The battle cry is not 'On to Victory,' but 'Not in this generation.'"

Other observers, while not wholly disagreeing, might well say, "Not in this country."

For Southerners generally report today that the determination to resist integration solidified into rock-hardness as a result of the use of federal troops at Little Rock. It is reflected in many new state laws designed to delay integration or block it entirely.

"The South has always contended that given time it could work out its own problems," Ashmore writes. "Offered time by the Supreme Court, the Southern leaders for the most part have refused to use it to make even a tentative start toward accommodation."

Ashmore's work constitutes a fascinating study of America's greatest social struggle—whether you agree with him or not at all points. Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, and himself a widely-recognized commentator, calls it a "penetrating appraisal" and the "definitive work" on the New South.

"Will the New South be a better place than the old?" Ashmore asks. His conclusion:

"Materially, almost certainly. Spiritually, perhaps. Behind the facade of harsh words and extremist laws, there is already emerging the pattern in which the South will finally accommodate its dwindling Negro population, as it moves from second- to first-class citizenship."

Current Best Sellers

FICTION

BY LOVE POSSESSED, Cozzen.

BELOW THE SALT, Costain.

RALLY ROUND THE FLAG, BOYS! Shulman.

ATLAS SHRUGGED, Rand.

ON THE BEACH, Nevil Shute.

NONFICTION

BARUCH: MY OWN STORY

KIDS SAY THE DARDEST THINGS! Linkletter.

PLEASE DON'T EAT THE DALSIES, Kerr.

WHERE DID YOU GO? OUT, Smith.

THE HIDDEN PERSUADERS, Packard.

PETER FREUCHEN'S BOOK OF THE SEVEN SEAS.