THE SPHINX.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE sphinx has become to us an emblem of an unsolvable problem. Indeed we often mean by it the problem of problems, the riddle of the universe.

In ancient history we find the first traces of the sphinx in this sense in the OEdipus legends whence the name has been derived, for sphinx means "throttled." According to Hesiod, Sphinx was the daughter of Chimaera and Orthrus; according to others, of Echidna and Typhon. Hera (or, as some accounts have it, Ares or Dionysus), in anger at the crimes of Laïus, sent her to Thebes from Ethiopia. She took up her abode on a rock near the city and gave to every passer-by the well-known riddle, "What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three in the evening?" She flung from the rock all who could not answer it. When OEdipus explained the riddle rightly, as referring to man in the successive stages of infancy, the prime of life, and old age, she flung herself down from the rock.¹

The origin of the sphinx idea seems to have come originally from Egypt, and when the Greeks came to Egypt they called the strange figures of humanheaded lions by the name of the mythical creature with which they had become familiar in their heroic legends.

Professor Wiedemann says (Religion of the Ancient Egyptians, 194-200):

"The sphinx of the Egyptian had little in common with the sphinx of the Greeks, beyond the name given to it by the latter people. When the Greeks first came into the valley of the Nile and there saw figures of human headed quadrupeds, they remembered that at home also there was the tradition of such a creature, and that it was named 'sphinx.' This name they bestowed, therefore, not unnaturally, upon the creature of Egyptian myth, undis-

turbed by the fact that there was no real similarity between the two conceptions.

"The Egyptian sphinx plays the part of guardian of a temple or deity, and hence the god Aker, the watchman of the underworld and the guardian of the god Râ during the hours of the night, is generally shown as a sphinx with the body of a lion when represented as going forth to destroy the enemies of the sun-god. As the image of the winged solar disk over the door of a temple by its mere presence prevented any evil thing from entering within the sacred halls, so the couchant sphinxes guarding the approach served to keep back any enemy of the god of the place from the gates of the

OEDIPUS BEFORE THE SPHINX.
From a red-figured vase picture.

divine abode. In tombs also, especially those of later date, sphinxes were placed in the capacity of guardians. In one such instance the sphinx is made to address the deceased as follows: 'I protect the chapel of thy tomb, I guard thy sepulchral chamber, I ward off the intruding stranger, I cast down the foes to the ground and their arms with them, I drive away the wicked one from the chapel of thy tomb, I destroy thine adversaries in their lurking place, blocking it that they no more come forth.'

"Primarily the sphinx represented an imaginary quadruped living in the desert, human headed, and supposed to be the favorite incarnation assumed by Râ the sun-god when he desired to protect
THE TEMPLE OF LUXOR WITH ITS AVENUE OF SPHINXES.
Restoration by Gauth in Erman's Life of Ancient Egypt.
his friends and adherents. This is the conception embodied in the gigantic sphinx near the pyramids of Gizeh, hewn out of the living rock and standing seventy-five feet above the plain of the desert. Sculptured in remote antiquity, here it couched even in the time of Kephren, builder of the second pyramid, guarding the necropolis against the approach of evil genii. It faced the east and the rising sun, being itself one of the manifestations of the sun-god, and more especially dedicated to the sun of the morning, banisher of the mists of the night. Hence it bears the name of Khepera as well as Ra Harmakhis. Between the fore feet was a small temple approached by a flight of steps and containing stelae and inscriptions relating to the worship of the sphinx; but the temple was by no means always
accessible, for in ancient times as now it was repeatedly buried by the whirling sands of the surrounding desert. An extant stela tells us how one day when Thothmosis IV was out hunting and took his siesta in the shadow of the great sphinx, the god Râ Harmakhis himself appeared to him in a dream, ordering him to clear away the sand from the divine image. But the work of the king was of no lasting avail; the sands soon drifted back again, covering the stela erected to commemorate the royal excavation. Later the sphinx would seem to have been cleared by Rameses II, for his name frequently recurs in the inscriptions of its temple; but again the sands swept back. No mention of the great image is to be found in Herodotus, although reference is made to it by later Greek writers. More than once in the present century the sand has been cleared away, only to return as of old. Nothing is now to be seen but the face, gazing out over the desert, still majestic, though sorely mutilated by the Arabs. To them the sphinx is known as the 'Father of Terror,' as if in recollection of its ancient significance. And so obviously does the figure produce the impression which it was intended to convey that, long before its exact office was made known to us by the decipherment of the hieroglyphics, the great sphinx of Gizeh was described by travelers as the guardian of the necropolis near the pyramids.

"Few indications of the existence of sphinxes in the old kingdom remain; the predilection for them prevailed chiefly from the time of the XIIth dynasty to that of the Ptolemies. The face of this manifestation of the deity was generally modeled after that of the reigning sovereign, for similar reasons to those which led the Egyptians to represent their gods in the likeness of their Pharaohs (p. 183); and since the sovereign was usually a king, as a rule the sphinxes were male sphinxes, as in the case of the Amasis sphinxes at Sais mentioned by Herodotus. But the sphinxes of a temple founded by a queen might well be female sphinxes, more especially if they were also intended to serve as representations of a goddess. For a sphinx was not regarded as belonging exclusively to Râ: its form was not only adopted by the god Aker in his capacity of guardian to the sun-god, but also by various other tutelary deities, as, for example, occasionally by Isis when she appears as the guardian of her spouse Osiris.

"This fact further explains how it came to pass that a sphinx was sometimes sculptured with other than a human head—for example, the head of a hawk or of a jackal—the animal head substituted being that ascribed to the sacred animal of the deity who
was supposed to have chosen the sphinx for his incorporation. But the stone rams, lions, etc., which we find as amulets, or which in many instances occupy the same position before Egyptian temples as the sphinxes, must by no means be confounded with the sphinxes: each was simply an image of the sacred animal of the god of the place, of the creature in which he took incarnate form, and each was therefore the equivalent of the statue of the god. There is no authority whatever for calling these objects by the name of sphinxes, and the mistaken nomenclature has arisen only from the fact that their office was the same, architecturally speaking."
NAPOLEON BEFORE THE SPHINX.
By Gérôme.
The sphinx has been utilized by modern artists in the sense of the problem of life, once by Gérôme who represents Napoleon as halting before the sphinx as if he, the great man of his age, with his unlimited ambition was the typical, perhaps even the ideal, man whose object is the riddle of the sphinx. This solution is contrasted in another picture of no less significance painted by L. Olivier Mer- son who shows us as the solution the Christ-child sleeping peacefully in the arms of his mother between the paws of an Egyptian sphinx. (See the frontispiece to this number.)