

THE SPHINX

BY SMITH W. CARPENTER

THE duty assigned by my club was a paper on the Message of the Sphinx. All day I had delved in books, seeking harmony with the spirit of that age. Late, I prepared to retire; I turned out the light; then, wooed by a blaze on the hearth, resumed my place before the fire. The flare lit up the pictures of old Egypt grouped around me: Thebes, Karnak, the Pyramids, and the Sphinx. I had read Aristotle's description of her unmutilated glory, and, as the embers died, I gazed upon the etching before me, and seemed to gain insight to the spirit of her conception.

No longer was I in my library. I stood in the moonlight on the velvety plain, undevastated by desert sand, in the presence of the Majesty of the Sphinx. The face was benign, full of peace and restfulness, expressive of eternity, impersonal, not man nor woman, yet both.

As I gazed, a voice out of the vastness spoke to me:

"Know thou, O son of an effete and mimic age, that I am Horus.

"Here, sixty centuries ago, was I worshiped by that race of intellectual giants at whose tombs and temples you gape in wondrous awe.

"This monument was their concept of my divine Self.

"This leonine body signified my strength, this face my beauty and beneficence.

"Centuries passed, as you reckon time; my priests became rich, themselves they served, me they forgot.

"Charms and indulgences they sold. Vice and selfishness distinguished their acts.

"The seal of My approval they set upon the oppressor of the widow and orphan. The poor were enslaved in My name.

"Then I withdrew my favor from them, and Egypt became a vagabond and outcast nation.

"Christian and Moslem vandals came and wrecked this, My image, and laughed.

"They knew not that I am the One Eternal God, their God, and the God of their fathers.

"All temples, all shrines, in all lands, at all times are Mine.

"All worship is Mine.

"My likeness I have hung in the sky.

"Mine laws I have writ in their innermost parts.

"Though they take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, behold, I am there.

"I am Amen-Ra, the Eternal One, the Solar Orb, the All-Wise, the All-Seeing, the All-Powerful.

"I dwell not in images made by hands.

"I am Num-Ra, the Father Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega.

"Infinite are my attributes, and as these have one by one been distinguished, men have named them, and out of this verbal distinction has come theological speculation and wrangling.

"Heaven was peopled with gods, and Hell was created for the perverted concepts of My power.

"And now, O weakling, behold man's viril concept of My glory, the pageant of his proudest worship.

"And learn that there is no new thing under the sun. As it was in the beginning, it is now, and evermore shall be."

The Voice has ceased, and I am conscious of vast numbers of people around, all prostrate upon the ground. Hundreds of priests and neophytes, their loins covered with sackcloth bound with hair rope, and with ashes upon their heads, surround the altar in front of the great Sphinx. Beating their breasts and tearing their hair, they prostrate themselves before the altar, and mourn the death of their Lord and Savior.

Their wailings are taken up by the people, and agonized groans rend the air. The moan of the assemblage swells and dies in thunderous roars. I distinguish dancers upon the altar platform; I am conscious of a rhythmic cadence in those bursts of sound that grow into an agony of tune.

The dance of Death is being enacted.

Horns and instruments of percussion add to the volume of sound; each pulsating sound grows in awful terror until voice and instrument have achieved their ultimate. Doors are opened that the voices of infuriated animals may add to the melody of torture.

The central figure of all this orchestration of death is he who impersonates Osirus upon the cross. Many mirrors from afar illumine Him with reflected moonbeams. From the wounds in His hands and feet the blood is dripping. His face depicts the ecstasy of anguish, the agony of a dying god.

The God is dead. His body is removed from the cross, placed in a tomb, and the door is closed by a great stone.

A dancer now holds my fascinated attention as, with the poetry of motion, she portrays the death of her Son, the Savior of men. The despair, the hopeless agony of a world rest upon her.

Imperceptibly the music loses its terror; its motif changes. With the first dimming of the stars Hope returns. Wondrous love gleams from the face of the Mother of God.

She dances the dance of the Virgin Mother-expectant.

A faint glow is now in the east. Jeweled vestments have replaced the garb of mourning. Reed and stringed instruments have succeeded those of more strident tone. Swinging censurs pour forth incense. A choir of boys now joins in rapturous symphony, and from a thousand feathered throats comes the lilt of morn.

As the sun's first ray illumines the gilded orb on the head of the Sphinx, the stone rolls away; the God comes forth; He kneels to greet His mother whose love is so vast that she wills to give her life for him. In that ecstasy of love she quaffs the lethal draught, and sinks at the feet of her risen Lord. The worshipers are sprinkled with the waters of redemption; they sign the cross upon their foreheads. A hymn to Isis, Mother of God, is faintly intoned.

A hush, and the voice of the High Priest proclaims:

"Rejoice, O sacred initiates! Rejoice, O people! His pains, His sufferings, His death have worked your salvation! Rejoice, O rejoice! Your Savior is risen!"

The shout of salutation passes from one to all, "Rejoice, O rejoice! Our Savior is risen!"

Baskets of wafers are brought before the Risen One. His hand is raised in blessing: "Take thou, and eat. This is My body broken for you."

He blesses the wine that is poured: "Take thou, and drink. This is My blood, shed for the remission of sin."

Between the verses caroled by a surpliced choir a voice intones: "I believe in Ra, the Shining, Exalted, Omnipotent One; God of Gods, the Father Almighty, Creator and Ruler of Heaven and Earth. "Divine Monad, First Principle, whence all things come.

"I believe in Osirus, his Only Begotten Son, our Lord, coeternal, coextensive, cosubstantial; who ever was, and is, and shall be.

"Divine Dyad whence all things come.

"Who was immaculately conceived, and born unto the Virgin Isis.

"Although born in a manger, He was of royal lineage, and His birth was foretold by many prodigies.

"Over the Evil One he triumphed, and in exile grew to man's estate.

"Many miracles proclaimed His divinity. The sick He healed, devils He cast out, the dead He raised.

"The eucharist He ordained, the rite of baptism He established, the Sacred Trinity He proclaimed.

"Innocent of transgression, He took our sins upon Him, was crucified and died upon the celestial cross.

"His body was mutilated and buried.

"The third day He arose from the dead.

"He ascended into Heaven, where he reigns all glorious.

"Before His judgment seat we must all appear when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, divine Triad, First Principle, whence all things come.

"I believe in the remission of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."