

# Coloing the Riddle of the Sphinx

By  
Professor  
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The most mysterious work of the hand of man—the Great Sphinx at Gizeh, whose origin and purpose, in doubt for nearly fifty centuries, have recently been discovered. The silent watcher above the Nile is no longer inscrutable: we now know why and by whom it was made



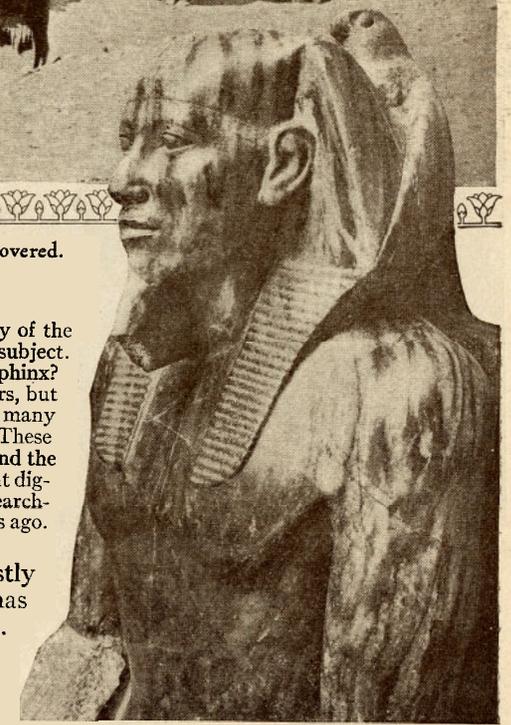
FOR fifty of the best years of the human race scholars have been upturning the dry soil of Egypt, searching for the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx. One great discovery after another has startled the world. At one time a king's tomb was found with wonderful carved furniture, beautiful vessels, arms, and all those things desired of a king's heart. At another great temple was cleared which was stocked with wonderful reliefs and statues of gods and kings. Once there came to light the official correspondence received by the royal chancellery

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Professor Reisner, of Harvard University, has devoted the greater part of his life to the study of the curious mysteries—the age-long riddles—of the old Egyptians. He is one of the world's highest authorities on the subject. His latest achievement is solving the riddle that has puzzled untold millions of guessers. What is the Sphinx? What does it mean? It was of course known that the pyramids were made to enclose the bodies of their builders, but what beyond the vanity of a Pharaoh could be satisfied by this huge face, the result of the heart-breaking toil through many years of thousands of lash-driven minions? What need, fancied or real, could call for such a monument of folly? These questions bother us no longer. Professor Reisner has found in the desert sands the clue to the Sphinx's mystery, and the traveler can now say to the watcher by the Nile, "I know you." This result was accomplished only after years of patient digging among ruins buried for ages, often faced with defeat. The big problem settled, Professor Reisner is now in Egypt searching among its monuments for other secrets of the strangely fascinating people who built them nearly five thousand years ago.

from the kings of Asia and the governors of Palestine. Again a royal inscription boasted of the overthrow of the children of Israel. Nothing seemed denied us. The tombs of the kings of the earliest dynasties were found—men who were mere myths to our fathers. More than all this, we have looked on the burial-places of tens of thousands of peasants, work people, and officials

of little account in their own day and mostly nameless now. Yet each one of these graves has added its mite to the sum of our knowledge. Egypt has ceased to be a land of insolvable mysteries.

The word "sphinx" itself connotes mystery—a riddle—so firmly fixed in the race-mind are the stories of that female monster of Greek fable who slew every man who



Chephren, son of Cheops, the builder of the Great Pyramid, who himself carved out the Great Sphinx at Gizeh

## Solving the Riddle of the Sphinx

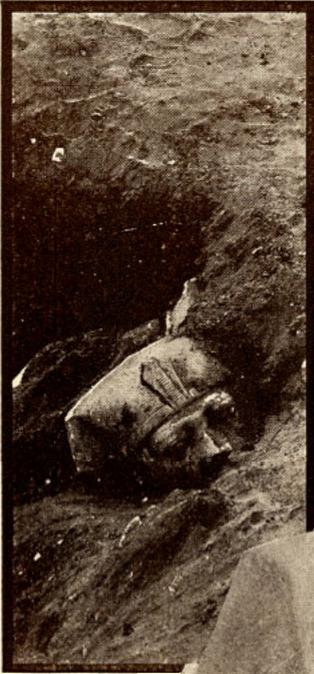
could not solve her riddle, and of that huge impassive face that has for so many centuries watched the drama of history across the wind-drifted sands along the Nile. The one was a fancy pure and simple, created in the days when men dreamed of gods and monsters shaping their destinies and lying in wait in lonely places; the other was laboriously carved out of the living rock by the sweating, toiling minions of an Egyptian king who hoped thus to protect his tomb and provide for the safe resting of his soul. The mystery of the Egyptian sphinx was the harder to unravel, although for every faulty answer to her riddle the Greek sphinx took the life of the would-be solver as forfeit.

That fabled living sphinx had nothing in common with the great stone Sphinx at Gizeh. Nor does it appear likely that its origin was based on the sphinxes of Egypt, which were almost all wingless males. The riddle of the Great Sphinx was of quite

a different character. This was the mystery of its purpose and origin. What was this great image, lying outstretched on the desert cliff calmly facing the rising sun day after day, century after century? Who hewed it out of the rock and why? The very race that made it, the Egyptians themselves, forgot. After perhaps a thousand years had passed, though no man knew then how long, crafty priests seeking to make a profitable sanctuary called the sphinx Ra-Harmakhis—the god of dawn—and made an altar between the paws. To advertise their god and draw offerings they made a history which stands carved on a granite block before the Sphinx to the present day. They told how the young Prince Thothmes, the son of Amenophis II, was wont to escape from the conventional life of his father's court and range the desert incognito. With one or two companions he shot lions and gazelles, or raced in his chariot over the hard paths. Once upon a time, coming hot and tired to the Sphinx at midday, he slept in its shadow. The Sphinx appeared to the prince as Ra-Harmakhis, and promised to make him king of Egypt. But the god was weary of the sand pressing upon his limbs and begged Thothmes to free him of the burden. On a wakening, the prince hastened to bring offerings to the Sphinx, the god of



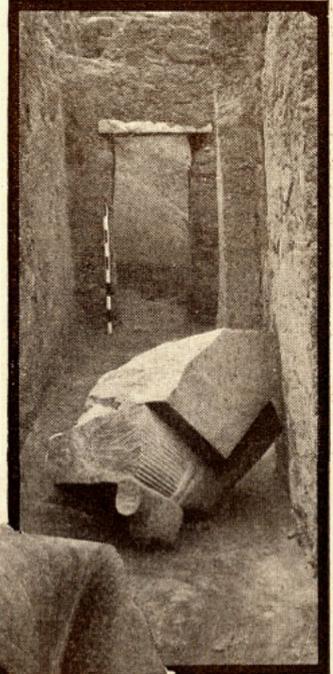
The sphinx (left) and portrait of Amenemhat III, who was once thought to have caused the Sphinx to be made.—Workmen removing debris during the explorations



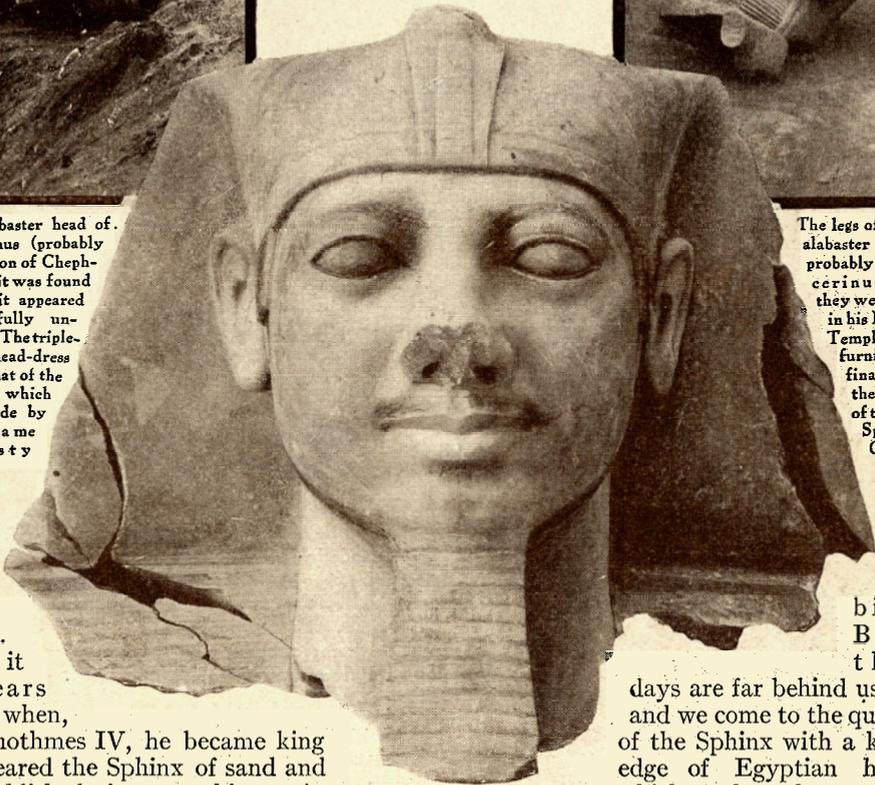
The alabaster head of Mycerinus (probably a grandson of Chephren) as it was found and as it appeared when fully uncovered. The triple-plaited head-dress is like that of the Sphinx, which was made by the same dynasty

inscription. In this inscription they put forth the claim that Cheops had found the temple of Isis beside the Sphinx and had built his pyramid near them.

It was these priestly fabrications which misled the Egyptologists of the last century. Scholars assumed that the Egyptians must know all about their own Sphinx and their own pyramids. No allowance was made for priestly greed and human gulli-



The legs of a great alabaster statue, probably of Mycerinus, since they were found in his Pyramid Temple, which furnished the final clue to the builder of the Great Sphinx at Gizeh



the dawn. And it appears that when, as Thothmes IV, he became king he cleared the Sphinx of sand and reestablished its worship. At least so said the priests several hundred years later.

This story was wonderful enough, but the priests of Isis, who, about the same time, had built a temple just north of the Sphinx, carried the history back fifteen hundred years before Thothmes to the days of Cheops. On a stone they made a list of the statues in their temple and added to it an

bility. But those days are far behind us now, and we come to the question of the Sphinx with a knowledge of Egyptian history which makes the answer a matter of surprising simplicity.

We first see the Egyptians about four or five thousand years before Christ. Then they were a race of half-savage tribes wielding spears and maces tipped with flint and other stones. In the succeeding centuries we follow their conquest over the hard materials of the earth—the invention of metal-working and simple machines. In a

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millennium and a half they had built up a strong centralized monarchy; they had developed the agricultural and other resources of the land to a point of great national prosperity; they had invented hieroglyphic writing to satisfy the needs of the civil and military administration; and in the Oriental ostentation of their kings they had created an art—architecture, painting, sculpture—which was to guide their own craftsmen for two thousand years and lead the world until the Greeks came.



Slate triads found in the Valley Temple of Mycerinus, near the Great Sphinx



Slate triads in the ruins of the mud-brick Valley Temple of Mycerinus. By proving that this temple belonged to the Third Pyramid Professor Reisner

It was, then, about 2800 B.C. that the Sphinx was carved out of the solid rock. Stone architecture had begun only 250 years before. In the museum at Palermo there is a fragment of black stone which contains part of a chronicle of the early dynasties, written itself in the Sixth Dynasty. In this chronicle the years are not counted, but are named from some great event: "The year of the slaughter of the Yenuw nomads," or "The year of the festival of Anubis." One of the later years of the

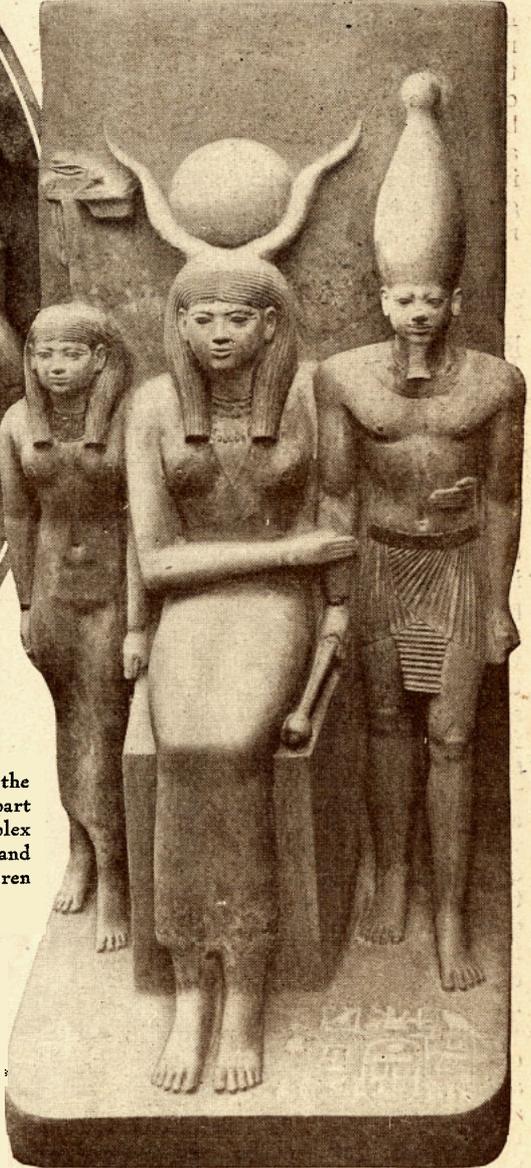
Second Dynasty (perhaps about 3050 B.C.) is named, "The year when the King of Upper and Lower Egypt appeared at the building in stone of the temple called, The-Goddess-endureth." The second year after this is named, "The year of the birth of Kha-sekhemui." Kha-sekhemui was probably the last king of the Second Dynasty. The first use of stone in masonry known to us is in his tomb, and the first stone structure mentioned in the inscriptions is the temple, "The-Goddess-



proved that the Sphinx was a part of the temple complex of the Second Pyramid and was therefore built by Chephren about 2800 years before Christ

endureth," built by his father. All the earlier buildings are of mud-brick, and it was with mud-brick that the Egyptians learned to build. But the knowledge gained in mud-brick architecture was utilized later in the stone architecture; and Zoser, the successor of Kha-sekhemui, began the first pyramid—the Step Pyramid at Saqqarah. About fifty years later—2950 B.C.—Snefru built the first true pyramid, and after him came Cheops.

When Cheops built the first pyramid at



Slate triad representing Mycerinus, the goddess Hathor, and one other doubtful personage, probably a state personified

Gizeh, he made a core of rough masonry and covered it with a finely dressed casing of better stone. The core was of limestone, cut from the native rock close beside the pyramid on the south. The quarrymen left there a ridge of poorer stone, as it was unsuitable for their needs. This ridge must be kept in mind. The son of Cheops, Chephren, built his pyramid, "Great is Chephren," on the next available site southwest of the first pyramid. He built it in the same manner as his father, cutting the blocks for the core near by and bringing the finer casing-stone from afar. In his urn, he was buried in his pyramid; for the pyramids are merely the tombs of kings, exceeding in greatness and splendor the common graves as the king himself exceeded common men.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE PYRAMID TEMPLES

Now every Egyptian grave serves two purposes and consists of two essential parts. In a chamber under ground lies the body, walled up and secured against decay and spoliation. Above ground a mound of brick or masonry marks the grave, and presents a place where the living may meet the dead with offerings and magic words which will secure to the spirit of the dead its daily bread and protection from evil. For it must be remembered that an essential part of Egyptian religion was the belief in another life after death. In some unseen way the personality of the dead man continued after death as a spirit, but with the same necessities, the same fear of the frightful evil demons, the same work, and the same pleasures as on earth. With the body was buried all those pots and pans, weapons and implements, adornments and garments which he had needed on earth. Food and drinks were also placed in the grave, but these were not lasting, and it was the duty of the dead person's relations to renew them from time to time. Kings and great men established endowments to provide for their necessities after death.

Thus it was that each pyramid not only contained the burial-place of a king, but also presented on the side nearest the valley a chapel for the presentation of offerings and the performance of the necessary rites. The pyramids with their temples stand high up on the rock plateau. For convenience, or some other reason which we do not know, a second chapel was built below on the edge

of the valley, and was connected with the upper temple by a causeway.

An examination of the area about the Second Pyramid made in the light of these considerations shows that the tomb of Chephren consists of the Second Pyramid, containing the actual burial-place, the offering-temple on the east side of the pyramid, a rectangular enclosing wall about these two, a long causeway with a covered corridor leading to the Granite Temple (the so-called Sphinx Temple), and the Granite Temple itself, which is the valley or portal temple of the funerary precincts of Chephren. The Sphinx appears to belong to this complex, and was apparently carved from the ridge of rock left by the quarrymen of Cheops. It is only necessary to understand the form and function of the Sphinx to see that it does indeed belong to the Chephren funerary complex.

Fortunately the Pyramid Sphinx is not the only Egyptian Sphinx. The Egyptian monuments abound in sphinxes—statues, reliefs, jewelry, and amulets. Many of these bear the portrait head of the king on the body of a lion. All these statues of sphinxes were set as guardians of sacred precincts. The other representations of sphinxes have a similar protective purpose. As early as the Fifth Dynasty, only a short time after Chephren, King Ne-user-Ra placed himself in relief as a sphinx trampling his enemies, on each side of the corridor leading from his valley temple to his pyramid at Abusir. This position corresponds to the position of the Great Sphinx, except that it is inside instead of outside the corridor.

#### THE CONFUSION I HAD TO MEET

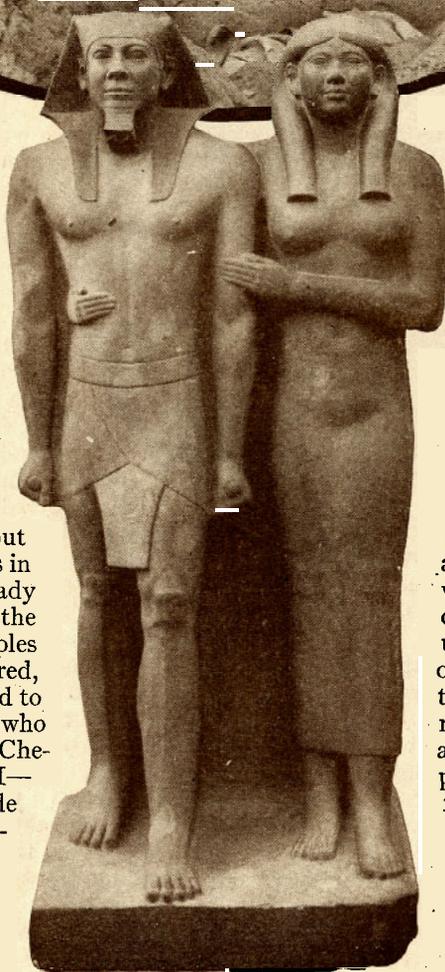
This is all so simple and clear that it seems incredible the solution should have been so long delayed; but about twelve years ago a paper printed by the Prussian Royal Academy pointed out that the Sphinx bore certain peculiarities—cosmetic eye-stripes and triple-plaited head-dress—which made it probable that this great monument was made by Amenemhat III, the great sphinx-maker of the Middle Empire (2000-1800 B.C.). The Germans attacked also the date of the diorite statue of Chephren, which Mariette found, and assigned it to the great Egyptian renaissance (Twenty-sixth Dynasty, 663-525 B.C.). During that period Egyptian national consciousness turned under the independent rule of an Egypt-



tian king to its old forms, and the priest-hoods of Cheops and Chephren were revived, and the works of art of the Old Empire were copied and recopied. So the Germans suggested that the Chephren statue was merely a statue in Old Empire style made in the Twenty-sixth Dynasty during the revival of the Chephren priesthood.

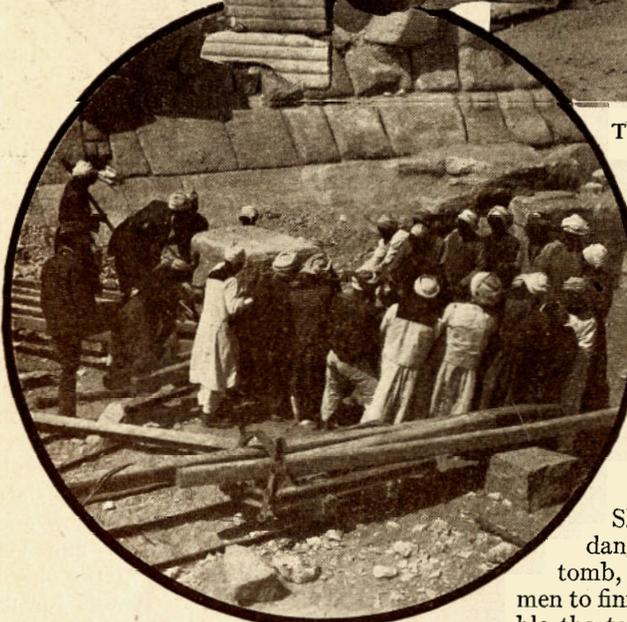
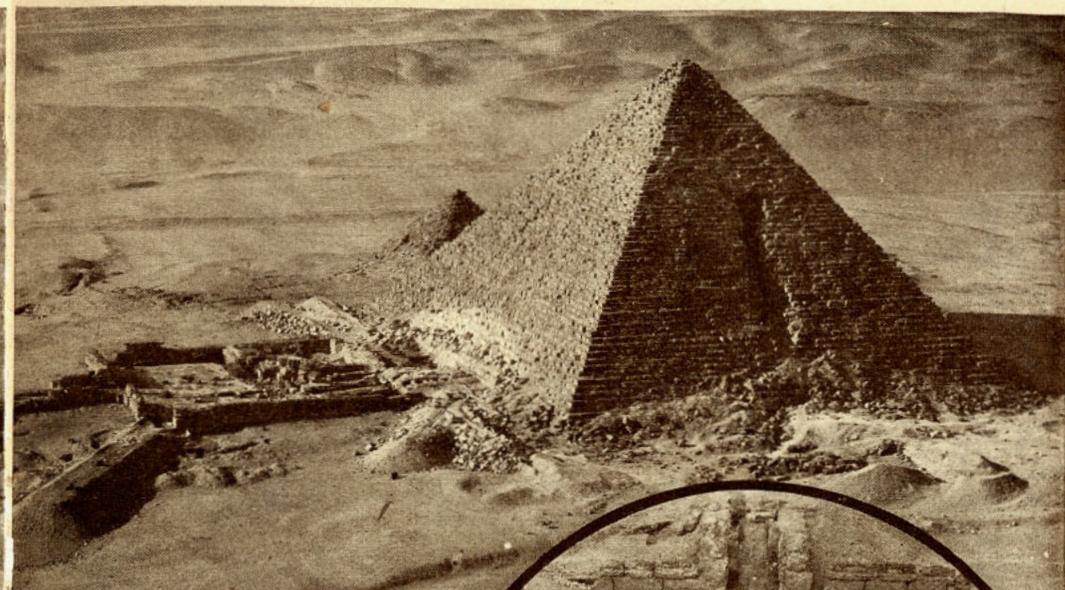
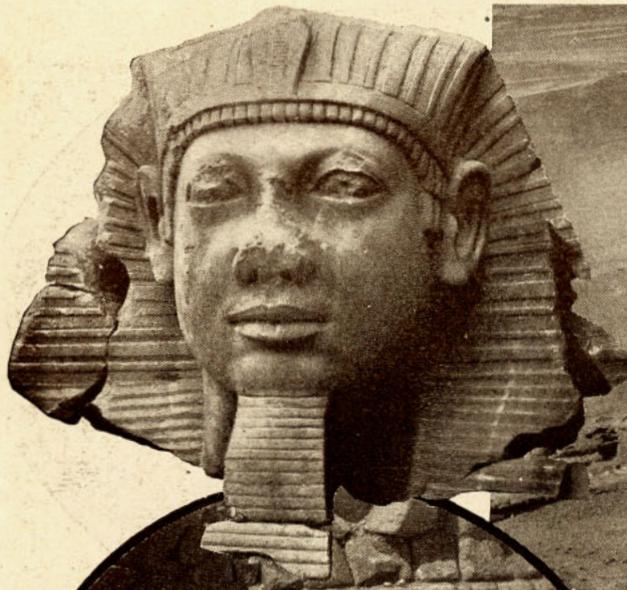
Thus only ten years ago the confusion appeared to be at its worst; but in reality the solution was in sight. The truth was already known about sphinxes, the existence of valley temples was soon to be discovered, and the question narrowed to the identity of the king who had made the Sphinx—Chephren or Amenemhat III—and of him who had made the diorite statue—Chephren or some one of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. The answer was found by the Harvard-Boston Expedition in the valley temple of Micerinus.

That excavation was an



Pair statue of Micerinus and his queen found near his Valley Temple

exciting series of events—the search along the causeway for the temple, the disappointment at the sight of the scarred heap of mud which represented the ruins of the temple, the dull clearing of the highest walls, the puzzled speculation over the later water-wall, then leaping exultation as the first slate triad came to view and then another and yet two more in the oldest temple. It was for us a never-to-be-forgotten work—the slow methodical clearing, the precise unraveling of the history of the various structures, the opening of room after room filled with priceless antiquities. The greatest pieces were: a slate pair, representing Micerinus and the queen, three-fourths life-size; four slate triads, representing Micerinus, Hathor, and one of the Egyptian provinces personified; an alabaster head of Micerinus with triple-



Arab workmen removing the massive rocks fallen down from the side of the pyramid

plaited head-dress like that of the Sphinx; an alabaster head of Shepses-kaf as crown prince; and three bases of seated alabaster statues, one of them inscribed.

There were over a thousand other objects, fragments of statues, stone vessels, flint and copper tools, royal decrees, magic implements, and statuettes in every stage of completion. To these must be added the great alabaster statue found in the upper temple. The history of the temple proved that all these objects were of the Fourth Dynasty.

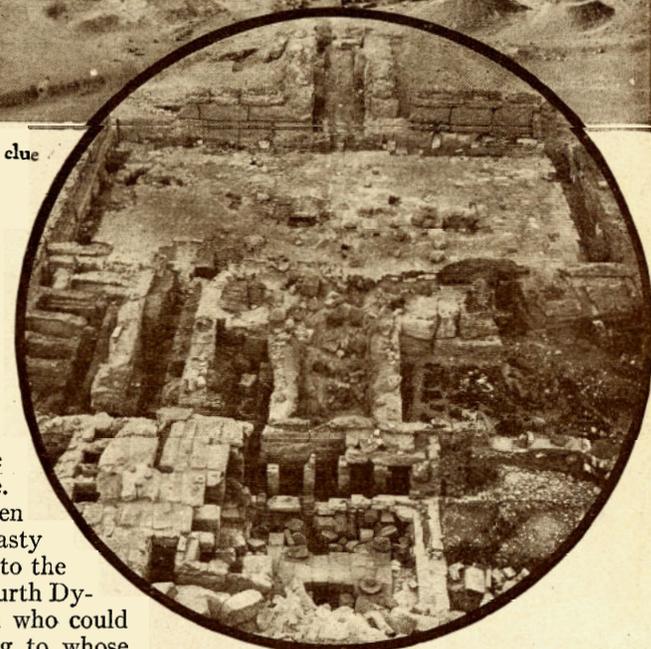
The valley temple of the Third Pyramid

The pyramid of Mycerinus with the ruined temple at the left. This pyramid furnished the clue from which Professor Reisner solved the riddle of the Sphinx.—Portrait head of Mycerinus which made the answer to the Sphinx problem conclusive

was begun in stone by Mycerinus—a massive limestone platform and heavy limestone core-walls to be cased in granite. Some of these blocks weighed as much as twenty to thirty tons. When the platform was half finished and the western and the northern walls rising above the foundations, Mycerinus died. His son, Shepses-kaf, harassed by political dangers and eager to begin his own tomb, ordered the architects and craftsmen to finish as rapidly and cheaply as possible the tomb, "Mycerinus is Divine," and begin his own tomb, "Shepses-kaf-is-the-protector." The valley temple was finished in mud-brick, and the half-completed statuary and furniture placed therein. Shepses-kaf himself fell upon evil days, and was killed without completing his pyramid. Another dynasty came to the throne of Egypt, and chose Abusir as the site for their tombs. In this time of neglect, the rain-water from the pyramid plateau turned eastward by the causeway of the Third Pyramid, swept over the valley temple, and laid it in ruins. So it remained, a prey to thieves and vandals, until, 150 years later, Pepy II ordered it rebuilt and left us a royal decree in proof thereof. A water-wall was built to turn aside the rain-water from above,

but when the temple was again neglected, the water swept over it again, and so it remained until we uncovered it.

The clue to the final solution of the Sphinx lay then in the discovery of statues of the Fourth Dynasty which bore the characteristic details of the Sphinx and the Chephren statue. All the arguments which had been made against the Fourth Dynasty dating of these monuments fell to the ground. If they were of the Fourth Dynasty, there was only one man who could have had them made, the king to whose tomb they seemed to belong—Chephren. The diorite statue was a portrait of Chephren, placed in his valley temple to receive his offerings. The Sphinx was the body of a lion bearing the portrait head of Chephren—the Horus-king guarding as a lion his own tomb against enemies and vandals. Without doubt it was Chephren who first put into execution the sphinx-idea; without doubt the Great Sphinx was the first of all sphinxes to be carved in stone, and the greatest of all. It drew powerfully the imagination of the Egyptians themselves and was made into a god. It has exerted its charm on centuries of travelers and inspired hundreds of wonderful stories. Yet Chephren, if he knew, would be little con-



Ground plan of the Pyramid Temple of Mycerinus, looking away from the pyramid

tent with the guises in which he has masqueraded or with the adoration they have brought him. He himself tried to provide for the preservation of his body and the provision of food and drink for his soul. But the burial-chamber is empty, the pyramid temple is in ruins, and the valley temple, robbed of its statues and furniture, lies buried in sand. The Sphinx, the guardian of the sacred precincts, lifts his weather-beaten and broken head above ephemeral swarms of guides and travelers who know him not—a monument to the futility of human desires.