

The ROTARIAN



JULY •

STEPHEN LEACOCK and SIR ARTHUR SALTER
A Debate: Hugh S. Johnson vs. J. W. O'Leary

1936

The ROTARIAN

AN INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE IDEAL OF SERVICE AND ITS APPLICATION TO PERSONAL, BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LIFE

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

VOLUME XLIX

JULY, 1936

NUMBER 1

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THE ROTARIAN is published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, by Rotary International. *President*: WILL R. MANIER, JR., Nashville, Tenn. *Secretary*: CHESLEY R. PERRY, Chicago, Ill. *Treasurer*: RUFUS F. CHAPIN, Chicago, Ill. *Members of Magazine Committee*: ROBERT L. HILL, Columbia, Mo., U.S.A.; HARRISON E. HOWE, Washington, D. C., U.S.A.; three new members of the committee not yet announced.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$1.50 the year in U.S., Canada and other countries to which minimum postal rate applies; \$2.00 in other countries.

As its official publication this magazine carries authoritative notices and articles in regard to the activities of Rotary International. In other respects responsibility is not assumed for the opinions expressed by authors.

Entered as second-class matter December 30, 1918, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879.

The Sphinx Awakens—Again

By Dr. G. A. Reisner

Professor of Egyptology, Harvard University

NO MONUMENT left by antiquity to the modern world appeals to the imagination quite like the Sphinx at Giza, Egypt. This weird figure of the god of the dawn lies in the western desert where in our time it watches the eastern horizon for the morning sun, Horus, just as it has day after day, century after century, for thousands of years.

Many persons have confused the Egyptian Sphinx with that of the Greeks, a female who propounded a riddle to all who came to her, the failure to answer which brought their death and, in the end when Oedipus supplied the solution, her death. The riddle was silly enough: "Who is it that goes on four legs, on two, and on three, and the more legs it goes on the weaker it be?" The answer, of course, was Man.

The sphinxes of Egypt, however, are male figures having the body of a lion and the head of a king.

Once again the drifting yellow sand has been pushed back. Now for the first time in centuries man can see the entire figure.

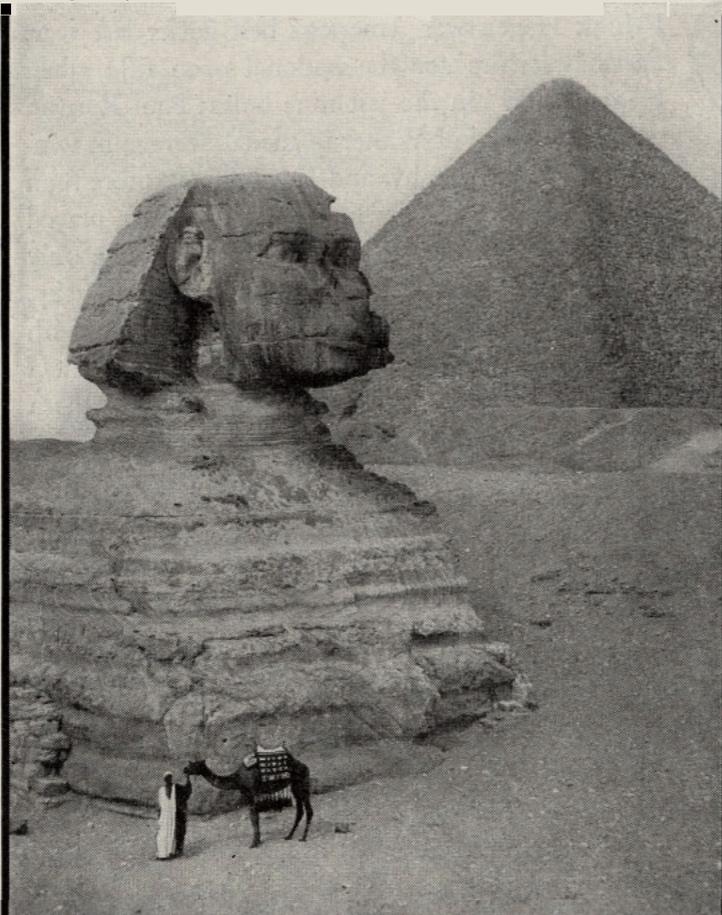
They always represent the monarch of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the two crowns, and son of Ra, the living Horus. The great Sphinx at Giza is, in fact, an effigy of King Chephren, fourth king of Dynasty IV (about 2900 B. C.), guarding the precincts of the king's tomb, the Second Pyramid at Giza.

Even during the current period of depression, thousands of travellers from all over the world visit the Giza monuments. Each summer I repeatedly see long lines of camels bearing men and women, old and young, stalking up the hill and around the First Pyramid to visit the Sphinx. Tourists fondly imagine they are "riding a camel," but each camel is carefully led by an "Arab," not that he cares so much for the safety of the travellers as that his mind is intent on the baksheesh to be paid at the end of the visit. Incidentally, every camel driver at the pyramids and every dragoman will, if questioned, always acknowledge that he is the "son of the Sheikh."

At the Sphinx, it is customary for travellers to be photographed sitting on their camels with the Sphinx and the Pyramids as a background. The competition among these photographers was formerly so fierce that the police had to restrict their number, issue licenses, and arrange for each licensed photographer to take his turn, usually a day apiece. The hurrying traveller, however, knows little of that. He sees only the great Pyramids and the Sphinx, listens to the loud voice of a dragoman giving more or less inaccurate historical information—and, perhaps, takes away with him a memory of an

This is the way schoolboys for generations have seen the Sphinx pictured in their history books. It has the body of a lion and the head of King Chephren whose father, Cheops, built the Great Pyramid in the rear.

Photo: © Publishers' Photo Service



unforgettable glimpse of a civilization that was old before Greece flowered.

Modern interest in the Sphinx dates from the time of Napoleon, who took with him to Egypt a corps of scholars. Caviglia in 1815 excavated the temple between the paws, and since then work has been carried on intermittently until in 1925, when, for the first time since the Ptolemies, the whole of the Sphinx has been exposed to the gaze of man by the excavations of Mr. Baraize, working for the Egyptian government. It adds interest to know that the yellow drifting sands, whipped back and forth by the wind for centuries, had cut so deep into the neck of the figure that it was necessary to support the head with cement to prevent its falling off.

The first impression of the Sphinx is, I believe, always a little disappointing. One has been led to expect a towering figure, high on a rocky plateau, quite dwarfing the Pyramids, whereas the contrary is the case. The Sphinx is in the bottom of an old quarry, while on the rocky plateau stand the immensely greater Pyramids. It may be recalled that Heroditus, who visited the Pyramids

Top—Within a few centuries after the rejected knoll of limestone in Cheops' quarry had been carved into the Sphinx, that figure was shoulder deep in sand. This indignity disturbed the dreams of Prince Thothmes who, when he became king, restored the Sphinx and the offerings, not forgetting to record the fact on a tablet between the paws.

Middle—Modern archaeological surgery. Engineers have reinforced the neck of the Sphinx with mortar.

Bottom—For the first time in 2,000 years men may now see the Sphinx completely exposed. Note the "wrinkles" left by the centuries. This monument measures 187 feet from paws to tail but is dwarfed by the pyramids.



in the Fifth Century B. C., says nothing about the Sphinx and apparently never saw it or was impressed by what he saw. And since his day, the long series of travellers who have visited the necropolis have, in general, been more interested in the Pyramids than the Sphinx.

Why should King Chephren build a monument in so inconspicuous a place as an abandoned quarry? Modern excavations have yielded the answer.

When Cheops' workmen quarried the limestone for the First Pyramid at Giza, they left a great knoll of rock, probably because it contained several poor strata. Chephren built his pyramid back of that of his father, Cheops, on a higher plateau, and the causeway connecting his pyramid temple with his valley temple passed close to this obtruding knoll of rejected rock. It thus became a conspicuous object to the king and his court.

One day either the king, himself, or his chief sculptor saw possibilities for transforming it into a great monument; and so it came to pass that the roadside "eyesore" was carved in image of Chephren with the body of a lion. The poor nummulitic limestone was covered with a layer of white plaster (sulphate of lime) and painted in conventional naturalistic colors. The head wore the royal head-dress with uraeus and the short beard of the period. The whole must have been an imposing monument

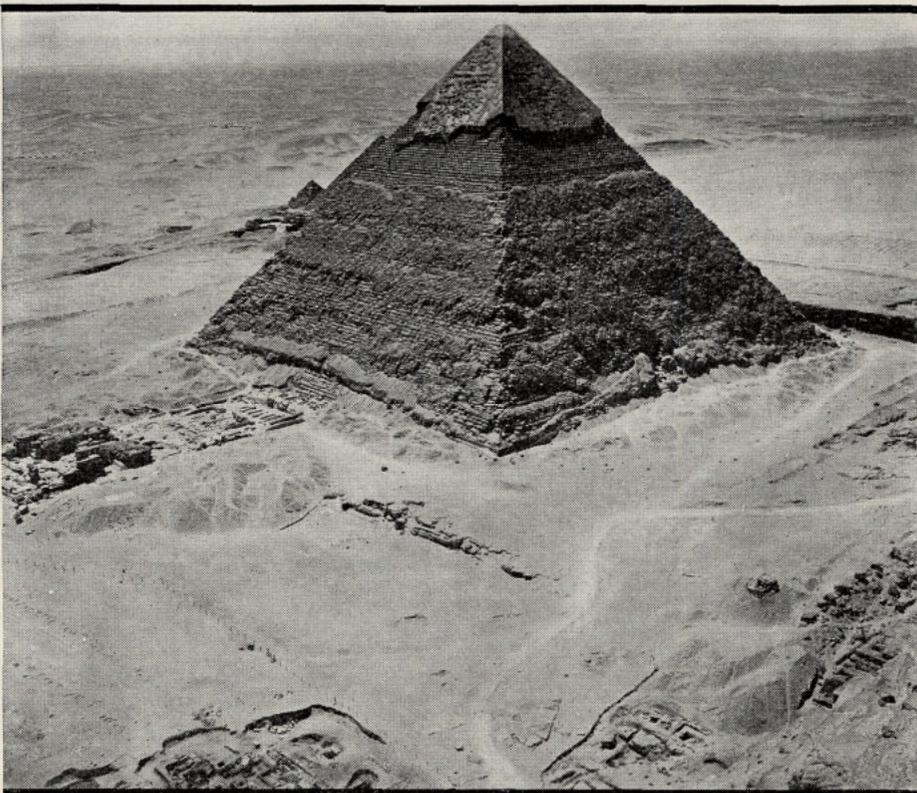
to the celebrants in the funerary services, as they passed by it, to and fro from the temple in the valley to the one on the plateau.

One may imagine the daily attendance of the servants of the king's ka placing dummy food offerings and reciting the age-old formulas before the magic doors to the tombs used by the ka, and probably before the statues and the Sphinx-statue.

IN THE great feast days, festivals of the dead, the hillside would be alive in the early morning with the whole population coming up by the light of torches to honor the dead and bring them offerings for the day. There doubtless would be a full attendance of the ka-servants of Chephren, and special offerings at the ka-doors and before every statue, with hundreds of visitors coming to the outer offering places to recite the offering formulas for the ka of the king. We do not know the exact time when the services were abandoned, but they were kept up for many centuries.

Probably sand buried the Sphinx to its shoulders within a few hundred years and completely submerged the valley temple. As the sand drifted in, the sides of the Sphinx were eroded along the surface in lines which rose from year to year. In Dynasty XVIII, when Amenophis II was king of Egypt, an obscure prince named Thothmes, coming to the

Sphinx after an excursion in the desert, lay down to sleep in the shadow of the shoulder and dreamed a dream in which the Sphinx appeared to him and, promising him the kingship, ordered him to free the body of sand and restore the offerings. When the prince found himself unexpectedly king of Egypt, he proceeded to obey the great god who was the Horus of the Horizon, King



Chephren's tomb, the Second Pyramid, over which the Sphinx stands guard. This view is from the top of Cheops' tomb, the First Pyramid, and shows (left) ruins of the temple and the causeway that led past the Sphinx to the valley temple.

Chephren. The body was excavated and the badly eroded sides covered with a casing of fine white limestone from the Tura quarry across the river. The old beard which had fallen off was restored with a long divine beard carved in a slab of limestone and held in place by masonry. Before the breast, Thothmes, now Thothmes IV, set up a great granite stela (tablet), later found by Caviglia, on which he recounted his dream and his restoration.

Centuries passed away and again the Sphinx was in a ruined condition, partly buried in sand, and a new race sat as kings in Egypt, the Ptolemies. One of these again cased the Sphinx with stone outside the casing of Thothmes IV, and erected a stela between the paws. The shrine was continued eastward in the time of the Romans, when a flight of steps led down over the drift of sand to the level of the shrine between the paws. Thus in Roman times, the chapel of the Sphinx lay in a hollow in the sand. The sand finally covered in all these shrines of the Sphinx and kept them hidden until our day.

Back of these stones one may perceive, if one's insight is but touched with imagination, the very human desire of flesh-and-blood men to provide the means for a happy future life.

* * *

The author of the foregoing is a charter member of the Rotary Club of Cairo, Egypt, and was its second President. Born in 1867 at Indianapolis, Indiana, he took his Ph.D. degree at Harvard, where he became Professor of Egyptology. Identified with many of the foremost archaeological expeditions of our day, he has made many important disclosures of the secrets of the past.

His operations have included extensive discoveries in Palestine and Egypt, among them the excavation of the Giza Royal Necropolis, which yielded the royal secrets of the IVth Dynasty (3000 B.C.), and the revelation of the history of Nubia between the First and Second Cataracts from pre-dynastic times to the Christian Era.

He is the author of 19 large volumes and more than 100 special articles on the subject on which he is a leading authority. Of him, Arthur Merton, a fellow member of the Cairo Rotary Club, writes the following:

George Reisner enjoys an unrivalled position not only as the outstanding figure in present-day Egyptology, but also as a man whose soundness of judgment and extensive general knowledge are widely conceded. When the creation of a Rotary Club was mooted in Cairo, it was but natural that the thoughts of the local founders should turn to the man who in their eyes embodied in his character and his life all the principles for which stood the movement they were joining. He became one of the charter members and, after the period of service of the founder of the Club, Clare Martin, Reisner was selected as

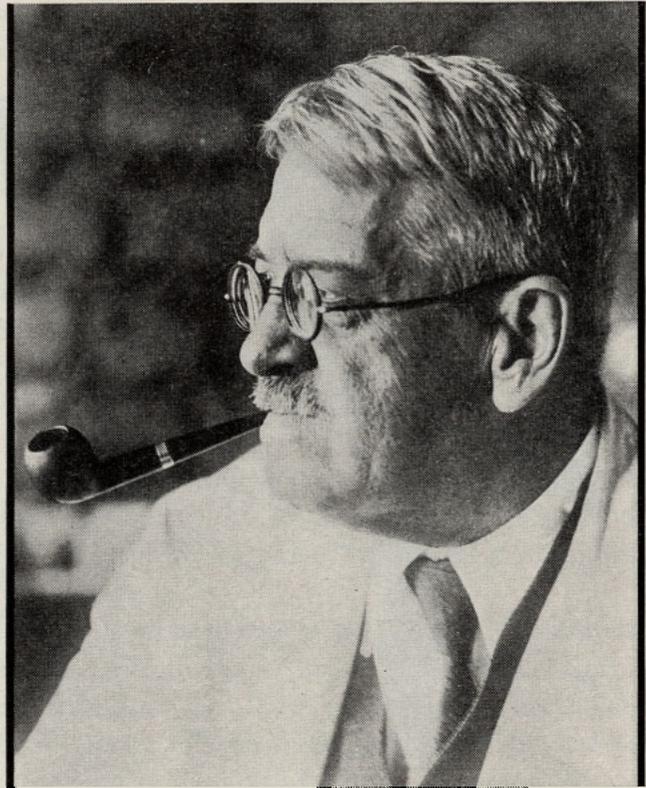


Photo: Bob Davis of the New York Sun

Dr. George A. Reisner, Egyptologist, writer, Rotarian.

President. He proved himself in every respect a worthy successor to a great Rotarian. So highly do his fellow members think of him and so much reliance do they place on his judgment that from the time he left the Chair in 1931, he has regularly been reelected to the Board of Directors. His presence there has been a tower of strength to his colleagues, faced with all the little troubles and problems on the correct handling of which in the early days depends the future success of a Club.

In an impromptu talk on archaeological work which George Reisner once gave to the Cairo Rotary Club, there appeared the following passage. Coming from him, it is autobiographical.

"An archaeologist is by the very nature of his work a destroyer of ancient sites, of cities, and of cemeteries. In order to carry out his research and reconstruct history, he has to take to pieces what lies before him, in the inverse order to that in which it was built up. Once this has been done all field records have been destroyed. It is because the only record then remaining will be the notes and observations of the archaeologist that he has to possess highly trained powers of excavation, of recording, and of deduction.

"Character must, however, always be the dominant feature of an excavator's work. He may be highly trained and have deep knowledge, but unless he possesses a sense of honor, of responsibility, he will not be a success. He must always remember that he must be conscientious and honest in his record work."