

DISOWNED

By Rev. A. Belanger, S. J., in Messenger of Sacred Heart.)

THE ENIGMA

The Sphinx fixed upon me his great, mocking eyes, and in their cruel, stony gaze seemed concentrated all the irony that forty centuries of contemplated human comedy can produce in the heart of a sphinx.

"You like psychological enigmas," he said; "therefore, listen to this one, and solve it if you dare."

And, while I sat between his enormous stone paws and felt the hot wind of the desert sweep across my brow, a story, beautiful as heaven and horrible as hell, fell from the heavy lips of the implacable poser of problems.

"There was once a society all dried up with egotism, like the gray sands of the Sahara which are parched by the sun, when, lo! in its midst there appeared, as the green oases in the desert, groups of men and women attacked by a strange, sublime madness.

"Where did they find followers? Wherever a mysterious breath called the passion for sacrifice made itself felt; wherever a heavenly zephyr murmured gently, yet distinctly: 'Love God, love thy brethren and sacrificed thyself for them;' in the family circle of the rich and at the hearthside of the laborer; in great universities and in primary schools, in the open field, in the army, in the counting-house—in fact, wherever there were those so smitten with the spirit of immolation that they dreamed only of self-denial, of tears to dry and sufferings to mitigate.

"Among these were young girls, radiant with her youth and youth, who could have been proudly led to the altar amid the delicate fragrance of orange blossoms and to the inspiring strains of the organ. Instead, they turned toward the sick—the groaning, coughing, whining sick—who sometimes swore and even dared to strike; washed their ulcers and dressed their wounds, using an angelic smile while cheerfully doing the work of the most menial attendant. Moreover, from out the abundance of their compassionate hearts, they gave most hopeful consolation, addressing the sick man as 'brother,' and eliciting from him in return, the well-earned title of 'sister.'

"Others there were, who devoted themselves to youth and, though virgins through their purity, provided themselves mothers by their love. Into their infant asylums and primary schools they received innocent little children whom they taught to abhor falsehood, respect their parents, obey their masters, and to hate theft, blasphemy and lewdness. In addition to that smattering of human science, now so indispensable, they provided their young proteges with far more precious equipments for life's journey, by revealing to these little ones, so beloved by Christ, the beatitudes, the nobility of poverty, and by disclosing to them that heavenly hope which furnishes the key to the human problem and the pacifying solution of its cruel enigmas.

"Some gathered in the orphan, fed them, clothed them and taught them a trade. Others turned their attention to a less attractive childhood—that which comes with graceless, whimsical old age. Endowed with superhuman cheerfulness which stunned the lookers-on, they cared for the aged poor with a tenderness theretofore unknown to these old people, begging bread for them and even sleeping on the hard floor in order to provide them with beds, till at length these old warrior's in life's battle became so happy as to believe themselves at the very threshold of heaven.

"Some there were who sought to uplift the fallen, others hastened to the missions, braving the dangers of burning fever and of contact with barbarous blacks; while others still, to the mystification of the world at large, shut themselves up in the cloister and prayed for sinners with the fervor of a mother praying for the soul of her child.

"And, side by side with this multitude of virgins, was another army, brusque and masculine, hurrying with

great strides toward that strange career of absolute sacrifice wherein 'the love of others overwhelms the love of self.' (1)

"These men were of all ages and from all parts. Already they wore epaulettes and commanded troops, or else were doctors, lawyers, engineers or architects. One was business manager, another a tradesman. Some had early retired from the world, others had roamed it over and contracted more than one stain, had, perhaps, been persecutors and convicted some day, like Saul on the road to Damascus. However, all had united themselves to love God and their neighbor.

"These, too, cared for the sick, even the insane, and the kindly attention they bestowed made up for their lack of feminine delicacy.

"And still more numerous were they who turned to souls. Being men of learning, they sought to communicate knowledge to the young and that at the cost of exhausting labor which brought them no remuneration. But I am mistaken, they considered themselves amply paid when they had inspired these young souls with a proper regard for duty, with respect for God and an inclination toward good.

"Among these men were some still more strongly imbued with the spirit of the apostolate, which goaded them on to infidel countries, compelling them to face the killing frosts of Alaska as well as the scorching rays of an equatorial sun. They had to speak in rude idioms, trudge through virgin forests, and, perhaps, while consumed with fever, be neglected in the bottom of a boat upon the damp ground floor of a miserable hut, and die without the last sacraments or even the pressure of a friendly hand.

"And others made known the word of God among the still more thankless people of the Old World, preaching it from the pulpit alike to the great and lowly, the rich and the poor. They willingly confined themselves in the polluted atmosphere of the confessional in order to give peace to troubled souls, to uplift life's wounded and pour heavenly balm on endless sorrows. They were called 'father,' and fathers they were in very truth—fathers by their tireless charity, unflinching patience, sweet indulgence. . . ."

Here my mysterious interlocutor paused an instant.

"And," said I, "all this galleyslave work to gain—?"

"Nothing at all," he replied. "Result: zero. Food often detestable and sometimes insufficient, garments of drugged or serge requiring to be patched in twenty places; a few hours' sleep, taken by many on the ground or on the bare floor. . . . And this for a lifetime, till death would call a halt and open to these charitable maniaes the gate of Heaven."

"But," I cried, bounding to my feet, "it is incredible that this earth, all dried up with egotism and self-love, could have produced so many oases, such myriads of devoted souls. At most, they could have numbered but a few."

"There were thousands, hundreds of thousands."

"You lie, Sphinx, you lie!"

"Wait," said the cruel lips, "the equilibrium will be re-established, thus far you have only drunk of the glory of your race, but you will soon taste its ignominy. Listen!"

"Against those self-denying, devoted, charitable men, against those women, angels of consolation, who sacrificed youth and fortune in order to do good to the needy, there rose a cry of hate, demanding their proscription, their spoliation, their exile!"

"Their goods must be directly and ruinously taxed."

"They must be forbidden to come together unless under the supervision of the police—otherwise, let prison await them."

"The right to freely communicate with one another must belong to all save them; to socialists, that they might destroy society; to rebellious, striking workmen, that capital might be ruined and labor prevented, to financiers, that they might fatten their purses through speculation; above all, to the Free Masons, that they might impose upon all their sectarian caprices."

"But, in order to pray, to be pure, to be poor, to care for youth and old

age, the sick and the indigent, to teach the great lesson of the Gospel and prepare missionaries, men must not freely unite. Moreover, those mutilated and stammering creatures whom neither nature nor society could recognize (2) must all be held responsible for the fault of one.

"If a religious slap a child, one and all must be reputed butchers.

"If one monk utter a violent word, all the others must be muzzled.

"If one be accused of a crime, the often imaginary offense must blot out thousands and thousands of acts of heroic charity."

"Briefly, this legion of devoted ones must be made the bete noir which is kept in reserve and held up to taunt the people in times of fanaticism, when over-excited evil passions require something upon which to feed their hatred, something to tear to shreds."

"It must be a danger menacing the public good, and therefore denounced in ministerial harangues and decried by unscrupulous power-holders with a view to securing votes."

"And all this in France, in the classic land of devotedness and chivalry, where hearts are ablaze with heroic and beat for everything that is great! Do you understand?"

"But, at least, accursed Sphinx, this horrible death-knell to virtue and charity is sounded only by a band of malicious fanatics who would stop at nothing that would glut their rancor or insure their power."

"Oh, if that were all, wherefore give you enigmas? The foregoing is but the perpetual history of your vile race, O proud man! Here is the real enigma."

"In France, which, despite its helplessness, is still beloved of the land of the Pharaohs, the majority remained good because they were so by nature. There was but a handful of sectarians. Men of probity, they who want liberty for all, who respect the religion of others, who admire devotedness and whose eyes grow moist at sight of a Sister of Charity or a Little Sister of the Poor, such could be counted by the million."

"Nevertheless, they tolerated the persecution of religious."

"They allowed the sisters to be banished from the hospitals."

"They let iniquitous taxes be imposed upon those whose beneficence and good works in the East they had applauded."

"They permitted the disturbance, restraint and prohibition of Catholic teaching."

"They allowed parents to be robbed of the right to choose educators for their sons."

"And, though ashamed in their hearts, they muttered: 'After all, these religious are dangerous; they are too rich; they conspire against the State. It's sad to have to admit it, but those who seek to banish them are right; the liberty promised to all must not be for them!'"

Here the Sphinx laughed outright:

"Ha! ha! My proud little man, solve my enigma! How is it that so many good men have become the playthings of a band of spiteful sectarians or of the unscrupulous ambitious? Playthings did I say? Accomplices, rather; for, without their tacit approval, such things could not be. Ha! ha!"

And his sardonic laugh rang out through the silence of the desert like that of the hyena upon scenting its prey. Beneath its fixed gaze I remained pensive and distressed, while the stony stare penetrated and searched the depths of my soul, as if in defiance of a reply. The sirocco blew hot upon my clammy brow and I wanted to wipe from it the great beads of perspiration. . . . Suddenly I felt a newspaper in my pocket, a wretched sheet purchased that morning in one of the streets of Cairo, and containing frightful calumnies against religious, calls to anti-clerical persecution, the discourses of sectarian deputies, the orders enjoin by Masonic lodges upon the Government. . . . It was, in fact, the printed embodiment of hatred and lies, selling for five centimes.

I held up my head in triumph. "This is the key to the enigma," I cried, brandishing the miserable sheet. "Each morning, like a swarm of ancient Harpies, the holdest lies take flight upon these wings of paper and whisper to upright men that religious communities are scandalously rich, greedy for power and inimical to the Republic. They invent the crimes which they attribute to these religious, and either ignore or distort their virtues and the good they do. At first, these accusations are hardly believed; a secret instinct detects in them the false note of calumny. But each day the everlasting complaint is howled out, driven first into the ear and then into the intellect, till at length the honest man becomes troubled in his heart and, though sensible and keenly alive to the justice and gratitude, he is finally overwhelmed by the flood of distrust inundating his mind."

"But, if he would only look into it himself; if, closing his ears, for a time to cries of malice, he would go forward boldly and resolutely to

meet the ph. om and ask those who know them the truth concerning these religious he could not but see the inanity of his fears; he would be delighted, yet awed, to find naught save self-denial, charity, devotedness and virtue where egotism, self-interest, stupidity and vice has been claimed to exist.

"Then, furious at having been instrumental in perpetrating so monstrous an iniquity, he would vote down sectarians, the malicious and the heartless, and cry out: 'Leave in peace these communities that befriend the sick, the poor, and little children and are an honor to the France which you dishonor.'"

"There is the answer, insolent Sphinx. If these good men are persecutors, they are such merely because they have been basely deceived."

"Very well," replied the enormous creature, "with something akin to condescension, 'and what will you do?'"

"I shall go and cry out to these brave hearts. 'You are being deceived, deluded. In pity, learn something of religious from those who are not their enemies. There is nothing to conceal. Come and go through their houses, examine their writings, observe their work, their fatigue, the services they render, and cease to persecute those who would only be of use to you.'"

"Alas!" sighed the Sphinx, casting a lingering look toward dear France, "will they be willing to listen to you?"

"I hope so."

(1) Taine.
(2) Words of Geyer at Masonic Convention in 1898.

Rosary Seventeen Hundred Years Ago.
Amid the ruins of the ancient Egyptian city, Antioch, in which a French archaeologist, Gayet, has recently been making investigations, were examined the remains of a Christian martyr named Thais. Proofs exist that she was put to death in the Third Century of the Christian Era, and, following the Egyptian custom of that day, many familiar objects which she cherished in life were placed in the sarcophagus beside her.

Here comes the remarkable part of the story. Among these objects was a mold used for making the Sacred Host received in Holy Communion, a primitive Rosary, the beads of which were pierced with holes into which tiny pins were placed to mark the number of the prayers, as do the beads of the Rosary nowadays, together with a metal cross, a faded bouquet of immortelles, a vase and woven palms, attestations of her martyrdom. Thus, with her rude Rosary by her side, Thais, the martyr, has lain for seventeen centuries.

One of the striking things with regard to the discovery is that it carries the antiquity of the Rosary back two or three centuries farther than any record previously existing. The earliest, hitherto, has been the account given by Palladius, a Fifth Century writer. The find furnishes irrefutable evidence, also, that the early Christians cherished the Sacred Host used at Mass. For several other reasons the discovery will yet prove of great service to the Church.

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Catholic Musical Festival.
Following on the colossal Wagnerian cycles at Bayreuth and Munich, there was held a Catholic Musical Festival at Ratishon, on Aug 19th, 20th, and 21st, being the 16th annual re-union of the votaries of St. Cecilia for the performance of genuine liturgical Church music. The principal features of the festival was Palestrina's magnificent Mass "Assumpta est Maria" (which was first performed on August 15th, 1585) and some motets by Marenzio, on August 20th, 1901.

Few are aware that the latter eminent composer, Luca Marenzio (1536-1599) was an admirer and correspondent of our Irish John Dowland, the friend of Shakespeare, and the greatest lutenist in Europe. Moreover, as Burney admits, it is to the genius of Marenzio that we owe the perfection of the Madrigal, as may be evidenced by Watson's "First Set of Italian Madrigals Englished," published by Est. of London, in 1590, which contains 23 out of the 28 Madrigals in that remarkable collection.

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