

A riddle it propounded, and the fate
Of him who could not answer it was death.
Though many passed upon the seven roads
That led unto the Seven Golden Gates
Of Thebe, set into her wondrous walls
Whose stones danced to their places at the sound
Of sweetest chords from young Amphion's lyre,
Yet none could read the riddle of the Sphinx,
And none escaped who left it still unread.
But men of Thebes who tell the ancient tale
Relate how once there came a stranger by
Who solved the riddle—whereupon the Sphinx
Plunged headlong from the steep Acropolis,
And nevermore was seen in all that land—
Wherefore the people in their gratitude
Crowned Oedipus, the stranger, as their King.
Another legend of more ancient days
Would make the story of the Theban Sphinx
A Greek corruption of an older tale
Told by tradition of that world-old Sphinx
Which lies half-buried on the banks of the Nile,
And scorns the scars of all the centuries.

Ere Cheops built his mighty pyramid
Or any Pharoah ruled in Egypt's land—
When all the world was young, and men appeared
For the first time upon this virgin Earth,
And learned the use of tools that carve and hew—
Then was the Sphinx cut from the solid rock,
A symbol of the mystery of God,
And worshipped by the dwellers in that land
As Harmakhu, god of the Setting Sun.
Huge, human-headed, lion-bodied thing,