

in the heat. I do not question the judges' decision, nor would I wish to join them in their task of picking the winner from a group of three ladies who sang "Bless This House," "My Hero," and "Because" respectively and one gentleman who cast himself in the part of Sarastro.

The Rose Cavalier

THE Kobbé opera guide has it that the libretto of *Rosenkavalier* has been repeatedly attacked on the grounds of immorality. This may well be so, although few listeners bother about it nowadays; opera gets away with a great deal that would not pass the Hays Office in the case of a film. The cast contains as nasty a collection of characters as exists anywhere; even the sweet Sophia, the only virtuous person in the play, is not so celestial as would appear, since she makes no demur at accepting as her future husband a man who has just discarded a married woman as his mistress without the slightest reason except that she is getting old. This hero is the Count Octavian, about whom the opera-lover is further bewildered by the fact that the role is taken by a woman singer. It is obvious, then, that the operatic mezzo-soprano who plays this role must be even more versatile than the boy-actors who used to play Shakespeare's heroines, since she must suggest, while clothed in her natural garb of frills and

furberows, that she is in reality a man disguised as a woman. The plot is further complicated by the addition of spies, apparitions, police, trapdoors, false windows; and really the whole thing is so incredibly silly that no passing-off of the work as a "comedy for music" will justify the foolishness of the libretto. Humour dates as easily as clothes and these are not the things at which we laugh nowadays. With such stuff to work on, it is amazing that Strauss produced such a delightful opera as *Rosenkavalier* actually is. The love-scenes of the two young people are wrapped in the most delicate and beautiful music imaginable, and the whole thing has a charming atmosphere which makes the question of the morals of the characters a minor consideration.

Baghdad, A. and M.

THE BBC production "Freya Stark in Baghdad" was a most tantalising affair. We heard background noises suggestive of modern Baghdad (tooting of motor horns superimposed upon the call-to-prayer), and the voices of the author-ess telling us of her experiences there. This would have been quite enough for one presentation, but no; the BBC had to go and spoil it by telling us, at the same time, all about Old Baghdad, city of the Caliphs, conjuring up the shade of Haroun-al-Raschid by incantations of eastern music. Against this background



(this was the tantalising part) we had, just to give the atmosphere, voices speaking lines from Flecker's *Hassan*, and a little of the incidental music which Delius wrote for this play. Now by all the prophets, why couldn't they have made two entirely different programmes out of it? Why not one devoted to Freya Stark, who I am sure could easily have provided material for a talk lasting a great deal longer than the short time allotted her; and another, even longer, programme giving us as much of *Hassan* as possible, and the whole of the Delius music? As it was, the snippets of Flecker and Delius were just sufficient to whet the appetite, but snatched away, like one of Hassan the Confectioner's own sweetmeats, before we could properly say we had partaken.

My Old Grandmother...

IN a recent A.C.E. Talk called "How Well Did Our Ancestors Feed?" it was mentioned that lecturers on nutrition have frequent trouble with the "grandparent" argument: "My grandmother never heard of a vitamin but she had 12 children and lived to be 90." This argument with its many variations can be answered partially as it was in this talk, by the statement that our ancestors sometimes had a very good diet—better perhaps than ours. But the point that I think should be made strongly in this case is a matter of arithmetic. If a grandparent is robust, fertile and long-lived, it has a great many descendants to remember it and to use the grandparent argument about it. If it dies, say of T.B., at the age of 30, it will leave only a few descendants and be unknown to them. Anyone who dies really young is naturally nobody's grandparent and is quickly forgotten. So that when we cite healthy grandparents we are holding up for example those few who have successfully survived. They are often far from being typical of their generation. The A.C.E. promises to return to this subject later in the year. When it does so it could strongly justify its case for better nutrition, and prove the progress already made, by indicating in no uncertain terms the wide extent of ill health in the past—even if it means harrowing us with stories of scurvy and beri-beri, declines and wasting diseases, convulsions and apoplexy.



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