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VIEWSREEL (Cont'd)

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be better known than it is. The English variant—for it is Continent-wide—is the tale of Herne the Hunter (still talked of by villagers near Windsor Castle), a man with the antlers of a deer. Sir John Falstaff, on a visit to Windsor, once had occasion to disguise himself as Herne; the results were entirely disastrous, except to provide yet another example of the English gift for reducing macabre legend to farce. For in its original form the legend of which Herne is part was no laughing matter; Herne and his cognates are forest spirits, dating from the animistic religions of the prehistoric European peasantries and converted into outlaw demons and ogres and elves by the disapproval of the Christian Church. The ancient forest's effects, on the psychic sensibilities of primitive men are clearly reflected in the violence, darkness, and malevolence attributed to the Hunter; while the survival in later legends of sinister and mysterious huntsmen—Hilarion in *Giselle* is said to be a late, weak version—represents the common fate of deities and demons in periods of waning mythology: reduction to the stature of mortal men.

Operatic Soprano

THE two words at the head of this paragraph have for many an effect neither soothing nor uplifting. They may be reminded of that immortal passage in which Mr. Agate, writing of the 1890's, says: "For better or for worse the world had taken the Wagnerian turn, and large against the Bayreuth sky loomed the bulk of Venus and Brynnhilde, while mighty Elizabeths strode down giant Halls whose pillars rocked at their Greetings, and on the wide champagne Isoldes came to anchor like ten-ton lorries." Even if the words do not suggest



this Wellsian panorama, they are quite likely to recall the numerous faults of an art in which dramatic values are subordinated to musical or exist only as their excuse, in which psychological coherence is sacrificed that emotions may be torn from their context and inflated into arias and other vocal set pieces and firework displays. But a welcome change, together with proof that these falsities and abuses need not be part of all operatic work, was afforded by a recent 3YA programme of recordings by Joan Cross, who was prominent in the Sadler's Wells company, and in the first production of *Peter Grimes*. Miss Cross's numbers might have been selected as representatives of Opera's Best Known; each of them was an industriously plugged aria, sung, by a superb act of defying the fates, in an English translation; and each of them had a battery of sad associations—vocal posturing and over-acting, complete lack of interest in its place in a dramatic whole. But each one Miss Cross sang with a restraint and precision which suggested very definitely that she was used to working in a company where an opera was regarded as a whole in which each piece had a definite part and functioned best as such—as a drama and not as a succession of big moments linked together with perfunctory melodramatics.