

# GENTLEMAN FIREBRAND

B Y D I C K P I N E



Photo by Lacy

Basil Rathbone convinces us that there are no more so-called villains or heavies on the screen.

Pictures are rapidly progressing to the point where there will be no leading man, no leading woman, no heavy, sums up the experienced Mr. Rathbone.

BASIL RATHBONE, WITH HIS FIERY ENTHUSIASM, HAS THE KNACK OF ADAPTING HIMSELF TO ANY ENVIRONMENT. HE LIVES EVERY MOMENT.

I WAS unfashionably early when I arrived at Basil Rathbone's home. A servant showed me into the living room, begged my acceptance of a glass of sherry, and left me.

I sipped the wine and looked through the windows over a tree-shaded lawn. I felt that I was home in England—relaxed and placid. In fact, I was loosening a tight shoe lace when the door opened and Rathbone erupted from somewhere. "Erupted" is the word. Sports-coated, flanneled, sun-bronzed, he erupted into the room with a sort of zumph!

"Awfully sorry to keep you waiting. Hove they brought you something to drink? Ha! Sherry! Think I'll join you!"

He joined me, and we settled down—as much as one can settle down with Rathbone. From the moment he erupted, I felt a crackling in the room, something electric. It behooved your interviewer to keep on his toes. I would have felt easier could I have reached for my blunderbuss, brood-sword, claymore, buckler, or whatnot, and shouted "S'Death" or "S'Blood," or, maybe, merely "Hola!" Not having any of these weapons of mayhem at my finger tips, or any interjections at my tongue tip, I contented myself with sipping my sherry and complimenting him upon his gustatory eclecticism.

But, really, so help me, I seemed to see knights in shining armor, Roman stotesmen, centurions, lictors, Montagues, Capulets, scribes, pharisees, and even Bords of Avon floating oll over the place.

And now I'm afraid I've made him sound as though he were on uncomfortable kind of fellow with whom to pass the declining hours of daylight. He isn't ot all. I knew I was going to like him from the moment he erupted. His firm hondclosp, his warm welcome, were sufficient to warm the cockles of the heort. It was with on effort that I reminded

*Continued on page 92*

Photo by Welbourne



## Gentleman Firebrand

myself that I was there to talk to Basil about villoins, loosely referred to in show business as "heavies." I barged into the subject.

"When I first saw you on the stoge in London you were doing romantic leads. You made fair damsels sigh with admiration. How do you like portraying the other side of the picture, the—er—heavies?"

"Heavies?" He smiled amiably. "What is o heavy? Isn't it merely theatrical jargon?" He blew some smoke rings. "Don't you believe that there is a little of the heavy, the deep-dyed villain in every man? I do. If I had not learned it from life, I would have learned it from my fan mail."

"You get fan mail?" I asked incredulously. "What kind of fan mail? Don't they all hate you?"

"No, as a matter of fact they don't. I get the usual number of bolmy letters, of course, but the majority evince interest in the characters I play. They understand them. Between the lines I read o certain yearning to take the same steps as I am made to take in the characterization. 'If only I had the pluck to do the same, I would do it,' they seem to say."

"Heaven forbid!" I put in. "What about the brutal 'Murdstone' in 'David Copperfield'?"

Basil smiled, took up his sherry glass and sipped. "Of course you would pick on 'Murdstone'! Dickens used a broad brush in painting 'Murdstone'; and when Dickens used a brood brush on his villains, (which, mind you, he didn't do very often) they were veritable villains. Of course, nobody can have any sympathy for 'Murdstone,' who beat such a nice little boy as 'David'—or should I say Freddie Bartholomew?"

"Well, now, tell me about 'Tybalt.'"

Basil's face lit up. "Now, there's a character, a horse of quite a different color," he glowed. "I suppose that 'Tybalt' is referred to as the heavy of 'Romeo and Juliet.' But was 'Tybalt' o 'heavy'? Decidedly not! Unless 'esprit de fomillé' can be colled o crime."

"Now look here: 'Tybalt' belonged to the noble family of 'Capulet'—hereditary enemies of the 'Montagues.' To a 'Copulet' party, in barges this upstort 'Montogue,' 'Romeo,' disguised in o mask, mind you, seeking to snaffle the loveliest daughter of the 'Copulets,' 'Juliet.' Well, what would you do?" Here the Rothbone eyes fashed blue lightning. "'Tybalt' behaved as any red-blooded man would behave,

os so many of my fans would like to behave had they the opportunity and the pluck. He went round the town with his hand on the hilt of his sword ready to defend the honor of his family. 'Tybalt' a heavy? Never!

"No, your true heavy belonged to the dim, dark days of the drama. He



**Fernand Gravet made such a favorable impression in "The King and the Chorus Girl" that he is being recalled from France to make another picture.**

was wont to tie the curly-haired hero in the poth of a buzz sow, or upon the railway tracks, where the fast express would moke moshed potatoes of him. He was really o very villainous member of the community. Not o nice fellow at oll. He was block all the way through.

"Well, the drama eventually got over it. But the word, 'heavy' remains to this day, thanks to pictures. But pictures are getting over it. Pictures

are ropidly progressing to the point where there will be no leading man, no leading woman, no heavy, all going through their paces according to pottern. Pictures are getting to the point where these three behave like real characters in everyday life. They acknowledge no pattern. They behave as you ond I would behove, not as leading men, leading women, and heovies would behove. In other words, they are true-to-life choracters."

"Was Pontius Pilate in 'The Last Doys of Pompeii' a true-to-life character?" I inquired meekly. There I hod him on the hip, or so I supposed.

"Pontius Pilote? Of course he was true to life. You can't call him o 'heovy'! He did his best to prevent the Crucifixion. He was merely overwhelmed by odds. You and I could not have stood up before such opposition. Incidentally, I think that that charocter was one of the best, if not the best, that I have ever portroyed upon the screen."

"It was only o week's work, ond I told my monager that I would not consider a week's work. Anyhow, he persuaded me to read the script. Well, before I had read to the end I felt that I was Pilate, and told him to go ahead and get that part for me."

Whot can you do with such a mon? I felt that I was getting nowhere very fost. He convinced me that, in these enlightened doys, there ore no heavies as such. They are ordinary human beings, even as you and I, and they behove on the screen even as you and I would behave in real life. And when this Rathbone sets himself out to be convincing, one stoys convinced! And having been convinced that there are no more villains or heovies, I thought that I would guide the conversation through other chonnels.

"As a good Englishman, tell me what you do to preserve the troditions of your native land in your habits and method of living."

If Basil had had any worning of the question, his answer couldn't have come cleoner, sharper.

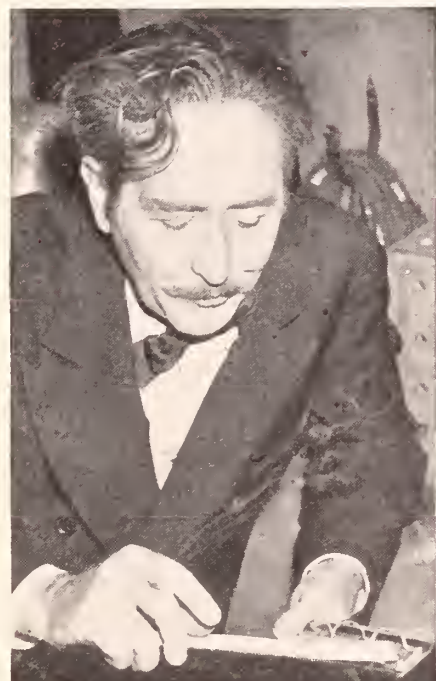
"Of course I'm an Englishmon, but I'm ofraid I'm too much of a tramp to conform to ony trodition. I think it's much more interesting to conform to conditions wherever one finds oneself."

Stronge talk for on Englishmon, who, according to Beatrice Lillie's song, is, with mod dogs, quite likely to "go out in the noonday sun." To soy nothing of dressing for dinner in the jungle. All in accordance with tradition.

Not that Bosil lacks tradition. Far

from it. We talked of the beautiful county of Buckinghamshire, where he made his residence on his last visit to his native land. It is a county particularly significant to Americans on account of its association with William Penn. We had both gazed with admiration upon the ceiling in the old mill house at The Jardans painted by Rubens when he sojourned there for a time. We had both visited Beaconsfield Churchyard, not far from where Milton wrote "Paradise Lost," and Grey his "Elegy."

But this isn't a travelogue; it's a story



Adolphe Menjou refreshes his memory of the coming scene in "100 Men and a Girl" in a secluded portion of the set.

about Basil Rothbane. However, I wanted you to know that Basil, when he talks about his homeland, is absorbed in things other than paking up-start "Mantagues" in the stomach with a rapier, or putting little Freddie David Bartholamew Capperfield across his knee and spanking him. He becomes illuminated with the beauty of the English countryside over which, he told me, he liked to walk. I looked out of his window onto Las Feliz Boulevard. I saw the cars go whizzing by in an endless procession.

"But," I inquired lamely, "where can you walk in this part of the country?"

"Just across the Boulevard Griffith Park begins, and one can get all the walking one requires. I walk miles every day when work permits."

Then he became illuminated with the countryside of southern California. And I would like to tell you that between the countryside of England and that of southern California there is a great gulf fixed. They are both beautiful but they are so different. Basil, with his fiery enthusiasm, seems to have the knack of adapting himself, nay, of living to the limit of his capacity in any environment under any circumstances. And Basil has the capacity for living. He lives every moment of his life, intensely, enthusiastically.

Should you have the pleasure of meeting him to-morrow you would not say, "He's an octar always treading the boards," as you would with many screen celebrities. You would say, "He's a great guy." And, considering the parts he is called upon to play, this is a tribute to Rothbone, the mon-

### WINDSTORM

Movie moguls ore in despair,  
In frenzy, ront and tear their hair.  
While scouts are scompering far and wide  
To find o "Scarlett," emerald-eyed.  
Wha shall play insidious "Rhett"?  
"Melanie," "Ashley," taa, ta get.  
Naw Gable surely fits the case,  
And Leslie Haword, "Ashley's" place.  
While blond "Melanies" da abaund,  
Na black-haired "Scarletts" can be found.

And sa they're hunting far and wide  
To find a "Scorlett," emerald-eyed.

Bee Buckley.



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