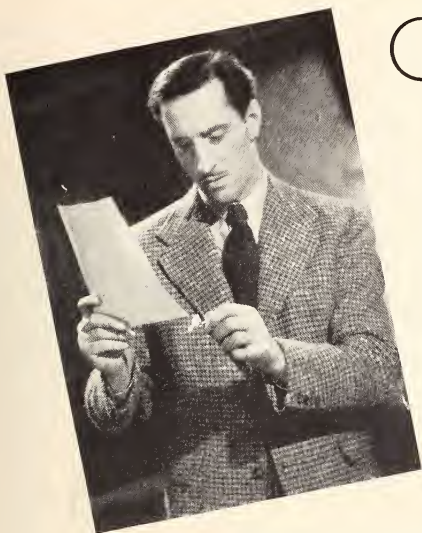


Once A Villain

Menace takes a holiday, and Basil Rathbone, so good at being bad that nobody wants him to be otherwise, proves a "heavy" can be a hero

By Kenneth Thomas



Second only to his desire for screen rôles that test his acting skill, is Basil's fondness for checked materials for his smartly cut clothes. You see that in his screen costume, above, for "Love From a Stranger," and at right, in a new portrait, as well as when you go to interview him.



THIS is the Menace Man's hour. And the cry of Hollywood's charm boys is: "Give me characters I can get my teeth into." Meaning characters with a little iron in them and not so much sugar coating. Indeed, why shouldn't they? The "villain" who used to receive only hisses from the gallery in the "legit," now gets mash notes from the feminine fans and fat pay checks from the producer every week.

The devilish fellow in the piece can be devilish attractive to the ladies out front—and definitely is one to be noted by the Hollywood powers that turn out for the previews.

Even the actor who has done a procession of menace rôles is entirely content to keep away from out-and-out hero assignments. Within certain limits, you understand. Take Basil Rathbone for example.

Basil has made people hate him so thoroughly they like him tremendously on the screen. He wouldn't be a goody-goody if Hollywood paid him for it.

He is one of Hollywood's foremost examples of the new idea in Menace Men—the selection of a thoroughly schooled and finished actor, capable of playing the most difficult part, to give vitality and life to the modern screen "heavy."

Considering his importance and his achievements in the pictures, you don't read much about Rathbone in the news and feature columns of papers and magazines. But that isn't because he plays villain rôles. There's another reason. He's too convincing to make good copy.

Listening to Basil talk gives you the same reaction experienced by that fabled Britisher who, picking up a geometry text book, read it through, returned it to the table beside him with a laconic: "Why, of course!" You don't argue with geometry—or Basil Rathbone when he talks about acting.

If he ever decides to hire himself a gallery of yes-men,

they'll earn their money the easy way, giving him the affirmative nod automatically—from conviction. Just as we did that day he talked about acting in the living room of a Manhattan hotel suite he and his wife, Ouida Bergere, were to vacate within the hour to entrain for their home in Hollywood.

Tall, he's over six feet; dapper, slight, Rathbone has the finely trained actor's sense of timing and inflection to accent the ideas he expresses so fluently. He has the easy, cordial suavity associated with his English background. Straight black hair, and dark, almost swarthy complexion, coupled with a nervous energy which finds outlet in quick motions and frequent gestures with the hands, suggest more the characteristics of the Latin than the Anglo Saxon.

"It does get monotonous," he said, "when you play the same sort of part all the time. There is no more interest for the actor in that (Continued on page 64)

type of man than the roving, gypsy-spirited fellow who so frequently is attracted to and becomes a great success in the theatre. Eager to provide well, and discharge the duties of his family responsibilities to the fullest of his talents. His wife, Florence Eldridge, and he were married before he went to Hollywood and attained his screen success. Through all the changing conditions that have come into his life, they have remained strongly bound to their home, and in Hollywood lived the home-life the actor of the speaking stage never really knows. Their two children are the very apple of his eye. This interview cut across what must be a daily ritual in the March home—the dinner and preparing-for-bed activities of his daughter Penny, (Penelope), and his son Tony, who was named after the character that was Freddie's first important screen suc-

cess, and perhaps remains his favorite rôle, in "The Royal Family."

He was interested as well as interesting talker on the subject of this interview until that moment. Then an eagerness to be with the children and their mother as they went through the living room where we sat, to the dining room on the other side of a glass partition, curtained from ceiling to floor, betrayed itself through the clever disguise put on by a skilled actor and cordial host. And, dinner for the children finished, when these three came through the room again on their way upstairs where the children soon were to be tucked in for the night, my cue to terminate the visit unconsciously fell from my interviewee's lips when he told the children he would like to come up and hear them say their bedtime prayers.

He has the utmost respect for his wife's

ability as an actress, for all his own well-won and more spectacular applause as an actor. Thus he is definitely set against doing any play in which her part as co-star would be of lesser importance than the part he will interpret. He is not interested in doing a play without her as his co-star.

"Florence," he said, "was a star when I was a nobody in the theatre. I used to see her on the stage and admire her work and feel that she deserved even more recognition than was accorded her in New York—though what more I don't know, for she was a star."

So another man-and-wife starring combination will come to the stage. The play? They are still searching for that, and they have the help of the producer who will stage it, and who will search Europe as well as America for the proper vehicle.

So it's back to the stage for Fredric March and his wife. And it's more travelling for them too. But maybe the latter will be curtailed, because he is not going to pass up any good picture parts that come his way. And when those producers want a star they can be very convincing talkers. If they start harping on the line about how much more the wife and kiddies could have if he wouldn't be so darn choosy about this story or that rôle, Freddie's a goner, for sure, and he'll be doing three, or perhaps four, pictures a year—which is about all a star can do, contracts or no.

If he strikes a play that runs on and on, there's likely to be an enforced absence from Hollywood. Prolonged absences from the screen mean those things they call "come-backs." "Suppose the play is one that makes a success that neither you nor the producer will want to curtail it in what may be judged just the middle of the run?" we asked.

"Oh, gosh, that's another of the things that I have taken upon my own shoulders." And that's about as far as he seemed able to get with the problem.

Well, we left him to cross the bridge when he gets to it. When you are as free as Fredric March you have to get used to crossing bridges, when, as, if and how they loom before you. And besides, he can take care of himself—anybody can who has so intelligently and advantageously handled his own career as Fredric March has up to now.



What a party that must have been, with two Jack Oakies to pep it up! The screen's funny man cuts his birthday cake, designed by his wife, right, while his mother looks on.

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than there would be for the artisan, a cabinet-maker let's say, to make only tables, when all the while he has the desire as well as the knowledge necessary to design and construct chairs, and desks, cabinets, and all the other articles of furniture turned out by his craft.

"It's bad enough playing unconvincing villains, but the conventional 'hero' type of character is even worse as a steady diet. As a matter of fact the actor's professional life is far happier if he does parts that lean more to the 'heavy' (how I do hate that term), than those cast in the mold of eternal goodness. If you want to check on that, just consider the rôles Bill Powell plays so superbly. They're men who are human enough to stray from convention's narrow path, and are vicariously satisfying to the spirit of adventure that's in the very best of us. But the characters that lean over backward to be mean, they are another thing. They're not real, nor are their offences forgivable. Nobody condones the cruelty of a child-whipper like *Murdstone*

in 'Copperfield.' Such people are offensive."

Does Rathbone yearn for characters that will go direct to the hearts and the tender affections, particularly of women—whose active regard and loyalty every actor in films admits is necessary to his life on the screen? Not at all. He has that without the build-up of a series of "sympathetic" parts.

"The only thing I hear in the way of advice from them is that I should play more human characters. But not the stylized hero kind. Of course, I have to answer by saying that I would dearly love to have such parts to play, and if anybody can persuade the producers to give me such rôles, I shall be eternally grateful.

"But you can be sure that the length of life an actor can enjoy in films is something of deep concern to me, as well as to any other actor. And I must say I have my doubts at times about the future if I cannot get more variety in acting assignments than I've been drawing these past two years.

"It happens that I love acting. I would want to go on acting even if I had no need for the material rewards of income from my efforts. Since my twelfth year on this earth I've felt the same way about that. My father, a mining engineer in South Africa, where I was born, had an entirely different career mapped for me. But the theatre was the only thing that interested me. I wrote plays when I was twelve years old—plays that, thank heaven, I and the few kindred spirits with whom I found mutual theatrical interests never even tried to act out!

"Now, after all these years of working in the theatre I want the best opportunities possible, opportunity to do the things I am capable of as well as the best monetary returns that can be made from my profession. That's human nature. And it's also natural to be concerned about the future if I wear people out, make them tired of me by doing a series of slab-sided 'heavies.'"

You can't cry "conceited" at Basil Rath-

bone for regarding himself as trained and qualified by years of experience and accomplishments in his profession to essay a more varied type of acting than has been permitted him these past couple of years in Hollywood. Gilbert Miller, stage producer who is not given to praising lightly, has said he considers Rathbone one of the most completely equipped actors he has ever seen on a stage.

From his beginnings in the theatre, Basil Rathbone, starting in Shakespearian rôles in England, has interpreted with distinction a wide variety of dramatic characters. His *Jago* won acclaim in England; his performances in Shakespeare and "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" with Katharine Cornell were roundly applauded here in America. "He Who Gets Slapped," "Peter Ibbetson," "Command to Love," and a number of other important plays found him winning the plaudits of critics and public.

Since his return to Hollywood in "David Copperfield"—he had played in pictures before, with Norma Shearer in "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney" as the most important of several earlier films—Rathbone has been playing mostly the same sort of thing since his memorable portrayal of *Murdstone* in "David Copperfield." And we, the screen-goers, have as much trouble remembering him in anything but such merciless creatures as the Dickens villain as do the producers who cast the pictures we see. "Tale of Two Cities," "Anna Karenina," "Captain Blood," all found Rathbone as more or less rubber-stamp villains of the deep-dyed sort. A rather thankless part in "Garden of Allah," and a better one, *Tybal* in "Romeo and Juliet" about complete the list of more important things Basil Rathbone has played since his return to the screen.

But in all these he proved too convincing a Menace Man to be forgotten.

Last fall he packed his baggage and his candid camera and with his wife set off for London, mainly to make a picture at a British studio, but also to travel and vacation a bit. Perhaps this would offer some change in the kind of parts he might play. But lo, and behold, the villain that Hollywood discovered in Basil Rathbone went ahead of him to the land of his acting nativity. And there waiting for him was a nice villain part, opposite Ann Harding in a play about a woman who marries a seemingly attractive man who turns out to be a pathological case subject to fits of mania to murder—particularly women. This, of course, is "Love from a Stranger," adapted to the screen from a very successful London stage play.

There's an amusing side to the manner in which Hollywood turned Basil into the screen's most velvety villain. Hollywood itself doesn't seem to know just how it discovered the bad in him—because Basil asked.

"David Selznick," he relates, "sent for me after I had lost a tour with Katharine Cornell in Los Angeles. We had played 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street' and 'Romeo and Juliet' there. Selznick made me a flattering offer to do *Murdstone* in 'Copperfield.' Later I asked him: 'in heaven's name, what did you see in me in those plays with Kit Cornell to pick me for this part?' And to that he replied that he didn't know precisely, but felt sure I would play *Murdstone* exactly as he wanted it in the picture."

Which is just another illustration of how shrewdly these top men in Hollywood guess—if guessing it is. They found a *Romeo* and turned him into a *Murdstone*, and the whole world cheered the feat—Hollywood's as well as Basil Rathbone's. Now Basil Rathbone is everybody's discovery at being so good at being bad that nobody wants him to be anything else.



Take Linit baths for skin beauty from tip to toe

LOVELY as a day in Spring is when every woman likes to picture herself this time of year. You buy new dresses, smart suits and crisp blouses to make you look charming and fresh. But don't forget the girl inside the new clothes! For the kind of beauty that captivates, begin at the beginning—the skin on your body. One of the very best aids to body beauty we know is the Linit bath. Pour a generous amount of Linit into the tub while the water's running. Then swish it around. It transforms ordinary water into a creamy liquid that gives you a grand feeling of luxurious languishing. After you've bathed with your favorite soap and dried yourself, feel your skin. It will be soft and velvety. The fine, soft transparent film Linit leaves takes away shine so you won't need a dusting powder. Besides making your skin look and feel like a million dollars, Linit is healing to irritation and wonderfully soothing to chapped or windburned areas.

WHEN you look your most ravishing in your new Spring clothes is just the time you don't want the odor of under-arm perspiration to ruin the effect. Where this sin against daintiness is concerned, we're all vulnerable. It takes very little effort to apply a safe and sure deodorant, and it's certainly worth it to know you're above reproach. We're enthusiastic about Hush cream deodorant because it does the job besides being kind to the most sensitive skin. There's a Hush liquid deodorant, too, for you who prefer that form, and a very efficient deodorant powder. And if you want to carry your daintiness insurance right along with you, you'll like the little purse-size stick.

Jemi-nifties

Spring Fever and Beauty!



Elizabeth Arden's new English Complexion Make-up gives smart light tones.



Dry rouge that lasts all day is Po-Go—from Paris.



Hush cream deodorant keeps under-arms as fresh as a daisy.

PEACHES and cream complexions are coming back in style! Elizabeth Arden, who is always one of the first beauty authorities to recognize new trends, has just brought out English Complexion Make-up to give that natural-looking, light-toned effect for which English women are famous. Brunettes may continue to use deep suntan shades, but we're willing to wager a great many blondes will "go English" with a result that threatens to be utterly devastating! The make-up starts with a foundation lotion called Ocre Lille de France. Then comes Royale, or Rachel Illusion or Naturel Cameo powder (sometimes both), eye shadow in Gris Brun (brown), or Blue Corbeau, Black Cosmétique on your eyelashes, and Royale lipstick. The sum total is a make-up that's delicate and smartly sophisticated at the same time.

WE DON'T like to admit we've been wrong, but it's our plain duty. We didn't think it was possible for a dry rouge to last right through a strenuous day, like cream rouge. But we've proved to our complete satisfaction that Po-Go rouge does! It's imported from France, still it's not expensive, and you can get it in leading department and drug stores. The secret of its "staying power" is that it's moulded by hand. It comes out perfectly smooth and soft, and it spreads over your skin so evenly it seems to be a part of it. It comes in five lovely shades and there are three shades of harmonizing lipstick.

JUST as we were beginning to think lips weren't getting their proper share of beauty attention, along comes a new product for complete care of the lips. Its name is Lip-youth. It's not a cream and not a pomade. We don't know just what it is, but we're certainly sold on what it does! It makes, and keeps, lips soft, smooth, firm, and young-looking. Apply a little before you go to bed and you'll wake up with a pair of lips you can be proud to own. What's more, it contains those youthifying vitamins D and E that counteract the withering or parching effects of continued exposure or advancing years.