



Basil Rathbone as the famous detective in *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon*. He is cornered here by his old enemy Moriarty

Rathbone

DESERVES A BREAK

A QUESTION to which I can find no answer is why a fine, sensitive actor like Basil Rathbone has had comparatively so few breaks in a screen career of seventeen years.

He should, by now, be a top line star, but we find him relegated to playing Sherlock Holmes in versions of Conan Doyle's stories which the author would certainly never recognise.

Not that Basil Rathbone is not well suited to the role. He is and would make an ideal Holmes if the plays were put in period instead of being rather ludicrously brought up to date.

But the main point is surely that the actor is worthy of better things. It seems to me a great deal of talent is being let to run to waste.

Look back for a moment on the career of this beautifully spoken and well-mannered actor.

Born in Johannesburg, where he and his family had a narrow escape from being captured by Boers, he came to England, was educated at Repton, and became, rather surprisingly, an insurance clerk.

But his natural flair for acting soon

put him on the threshold of a more fitting career.

He went to see Sir Frank Benson, a distant cousin, and got a job in that famous actor-manager's No. 3 company at the princely sum of £1 per week.

Basil Rathbone had always loved Shakespeare, and the experience he got here has helped to put that polish on his screen presence and that clarity of speech which are so characteristic of him.

Came World War No. 1, in which he served with distinction and on discharge took up his old profession.

For eight years he was a favourite, both in London and on Broadway.

His first picture was a silent one, *The Masked Bride*, in which he appeared with a topmost favourite of those days, Mae Murray.

Basil Rathbone did not like it. The silent screen gave him such a restricted scope that he went back to the stage, only to return to Hollywood with the advent of the talkies. He appeared in *The Lust of Mrs. Cheyney*, and has remained in the film capital ever since.

Rathbone's views on acting are interesting. "Acting is not so much an art as a matter of opinion," he says. "I have long tried, but have never



been able to prove the existence of any recognised standards of acting."

He opines that the other arts have standards and there is no doubt when a genius in any of them appears.

"But who can say that this or that actor or actress is a genius in his or her art. Acting resolves itself into a matter of the opinion of audiences."

Be that as it may I do set standards of acting and Rathbone is well up to them.

Some of his most memorable performances have been in *Romeo and Juliet*—a natural for him—David

Copperfield, If I were King, A Tale of Two Cities, that macabre thriller, *Love from a Stranger* and, more recently, *Crossroads*.

Looking back on these, don't you feel that it is time Basil Rathbone had another break?

He has been cast too often as a villain. Admittedly his suave manner can achieve a subtle sinisterness, but he can also be a very attractive hero.

So in making a plea for better roles for this actor I would also suggest that he might tread the virtuous road rather than the primrose path. L. C.