There are 63 A. Conan Doyle clubs in the United States, the most famous of which is Christopher Morley's Baker Street Irregulars, of which both Rathbone and Bruce are honorary members. Even more noteworthy is the fact that fan mail from staid England is almost twice as heavy as the American mail call.

Every Doyle traditionalist is a stickler for fidelity to the original. You can imagine the hell that broke loose when Hollywood put Sherlock (conceived 1876) in taxicabs, listening to radios, flying in airplanes, and running down dirty old Nazis. The title of one epic, "Sherlock Holmes in Washington," was alone enough to give dyed-in-the-wool Doyle addicts the screaming meemies.

Which is why, when you see your next Rathbone thriller on the screen, you'll notice a foreword which patiently explains, "Towns and times change, but Sherlock Holmes is ageless. This picture is intended for those of a newer generation who might like to see how the greatest detective of all time would deal with the problems of today."

But it's not always a Baker Street anachronism which raises a shriek of protest. Once the radio script writers cast an American character as the heavy. Next day's mail brought a blistering epistle to Rathbone and Bruce from an indignant lady who called them, among less polite adjectives, "bloody Britishers." And why didn't they go back to where they came from, instead of trying to stir up hatred against Americans?

Most of Rathbone's listeners, though, worship at the throne. Once his press agent, hard up for news, sent out a story to the effect that he was a great collector of hands. As a result, Rathbone, who can't imagine anything clammier than a hand without a body on the end of it, was deluged by admirers with stone hands, wooden hands and copper hands.

It was a hell of a mess.

No Superman like his alter ego, Rathbone occasionally slips up with the best of them.

Once the script called for him to read the line, "She was sitting in his shrine, Watson." Rathbone was dimly aware after he had said the line, that his tongue had twisted. Everyone in the control room gasped, but he raced on so hastily, and with such fire in his voice, that listeners had no time for reflection.

Rathbone will never take leave of you before first ascertaining whether you've heard his favorite Sherlock Holmes story. It seems that the great detective died and went to heaven, where he was ardently welcomed by God. Adam and Eve had been lost among the angels, and would Sherlock be so good as to undertake to find them? To be sure.

In two minutes he was back with Adam and Eve.

"Incredible!" gasped God. "How did you locate them so quickly?"

"Elementary, my dear God," replied the indomitable Rathbone—I mean Holmes. "No navels."

Success of the atomic bomb proves again, if proof were needed, that it's the little things that count.

Everybody's Digest '46

ELEMENTARY, *My Dear Rathbone*

by JULES ARCHER

Basil Rathbone was about to give the business to Dr. Moriarity in another Sherlock Holmes film, when Denis Conan Doyle, scion of the world's most famous whodunit writer, visited the set. Rehearsals were stalled while Doyle threw his weight around, passing unsolicited judgments on the props, costumes and sets. Rathbone gnawed his fingernails.

"Hmmm," deliberated the visitor, scrutinizing the Hollywood version of Baker Street. "Ya-as, it's veddy much like my fahthah's description, veddy much indeed!"

Nigel Bruce, more widely recognized as Dr. Watson, made ominous sounds. Unable to stand any more, he whispered something in Rathbone's ear. The razor-nosed film sleuth reacted with amusement. "Sounds rather silly," he said, "but let's do it."

Rehearsals finally began, with Doyle shunted tactfully behind the director's chair. At the conclusion of the scene, Rathbone deviated from the script. "Goodby—Wattie old boy," he said tenderly. Before this sacrilege could register on the astonished cast, Bruce replied, "Goodby—Holmesy old bean." And he bent over to bestow a gentle kiss on the noble brow of the great detective.

Everyone on the set waited for a wrathful explosion from the meticulous son of the author. "A beautifully done scene, veddy," he commented seriously.

Then he hesitated. "But Mr. Rathbone, do you think Mr. Bruce ought to —ahh—*kiss* you goodby? Really, I *don't* think my fahthaw would have approved!"

That was the only time Rathbone ever burlesqued his meal ticket. He would never be a party to public ridicule of the sacrosanct sleuth. If he ever dared, millions of outraged and vociferous fans would rise as one man to demand his head. Abbott and Costello can play it for laughs, but not Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself.

In Hollywood's annual Christmas parade of stars, Rathbone refuses even to wear a deerstalker cap, or smoke a goose-necked pipe. This didn't prevent recognition by one urchin who broke through the crowds to yell, "Hey, Shoilock, remember me? I wuz here last year!"

Being Sherlock Holmes to an inestimable number of moviegoers, as well as to 17½ million breathless radio fans, is no light obligation. Rathbone has beetled a Holmesian brow through 15 films and six years of broadcasting. Small wonder that kids are chagrined and puzzled when he autographs their books as "Basil Rathbone."

Due respect for the dignity of Sherlock Holmes in public is one thing, but horseplay behind the locked doors

Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce are the famed Holmes-Watson team in The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes heard Monday nights at 8:30 (EST); 7:30 (CST); 6:30 (MST); 5:30 (PST) on the Mutual network.

of a rehearsal studio is a horse of another color. At Mutual's Hollywood station, irreverence lightens a solid atmosphere of shrieks, gunplay, whizzing knives and thudding bodies.

A split-second after Sherlock Holmes has discovered 12 headless corpses jammed in the juke box, the dignified Rathbone and the program's organist start firing crumpled paper balls at one another.

When the drama is interrupted to allow announcer Harry Bartell to make with the commercial, Rathbone will slump his lean, six-foot frame into a chair, make wry faces, and utter such crushing comments as, "Oh, pooh! Bah! Oh, you're so damned dull!"

Crowd noises happen to be the forte of Nigel (the "g" as in "angel") Bruce, who specializes in a high-pitched, shrieking feminine laugh, which he terms "the Duchess." He always tries to squeeze her in behind any mob scene that's called for by the script, but the Duchess never gets past a rehearsal. Edna Best, the program director, is also supremely indifferent to Bruce's ability to make beautiful noises like a sea gull.

Rathbone's characteristic stance at the mike is with arms folded, hands open-palmed, a stern and masterful pose. Occasionally, while waiting for a long cue, he will lock his hands over his head. When he is scourging the villain, Rathbone rises on his toes and then sags at the knees.

Bruce sits at a special desk about ten feet away, with a microphone all to himself. While Rathbone sticks closely to the script, with the insertion now and then of a patronizing "my dear fellow," Bruce frequently bumbles his lines around to suit his spluttering personality. An expert grunter, he often substitutes a grunt for a reply, knowing he will not be mistaken for any other member of the cast. The Bruce grunt is a trademark.

Once Edna Best complained that he could hardly be understood. Bruce replied testily, "I don't intend to make myself understood!" Whereupon Rathbone delivered the *coup de grace*. "Splendid, old man—you're succeeding beautifully!"

Rathbone and Bruce, in addition to being Holmes and Dr. Watson, are also Damon and Pythias in private life. They have been close friends for 25 years. Although both are British, and have royal forbears, neither was born in the mother country. Rathbone uttered his first lines in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Bruce happened during a tour of his parents in Mexico, at Ensenada.

They were brought together as a dramatic team by some casual conversation at a dinner party in 1939 given by Darryl Zanuck, at which neither was present. Gregory Ratoff, royal executioner of the King's English, happened to bewail the fact that Hollywood had apparently written off Sherlock Holmes as "uld-fashioned."

Gene Markey, suddenly inspired, suggested a new, modernized Holmes series, starring Rathbone. And Dr. Watson? But of course—Nigel Bruce.

Bruce was appearing in a Broadway play, so Rathbone peremptorily wired him: "Come back at once you old bum." Bruce did, and Sherlock Holmes returned for a new lease on life with their first film, "Hound of the Baskervilles," and their first broadcast, "The Speckled Band."

To keep the record straight, eagle-eyed Rathbone is filmdom's Sherlock Holmes number seven. The best-known four of his predecessors were William Gillette (who started the whole thing on the stage 47 years ago), John Barrymore, Raymond Massey and Clive Brook. But Rathbone is the first to play him streamlined for the jitterbug era.

The microphone has long since devoured the last of the original yarns spun by Sir A. Conan Doyle, a total of 56 short stories and four novels. So for some time now, radio scripters Anthony Boucher and Denis Green have been pinch-hitting to unearth fresh foul play for Rathbone's insatiable ferreting, on behalf of Petri Wines.

Rathbone's solid reputation as a character actor is almost buried beneath his identity as the sharp-faced Holmes. And Bruce, when he's called upon to play other roles, generally finds that they're all "stupid old English squires." Harumph!

With typical Watsonian loyalty, banjo-eyed Bruce is even more indignant on Rathbone's behalf than on his own. "When something like 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' turns up, does Basil get the part?" he explodes. "No! They put him in that damn silly thing, 'Bathing Beauty,' to be pushed into a swimming pool in evening clothes. Fine thing—a great actor like Basil, who has played Romeo, Othello and Peter Ibbetson on Broadway and in London!"

Holmes—er, Rathbone—is more philosophical about his fate, although he won't deny that Baker Street gets a bit stuffy after six years. Oddly enough, the role he covets most is that of another detective, Porfiry, in Dostoevsky's psychological murder novel, *Crime and Punishment*.

It may dismay Sherlock Holmes worshippers to learn that Rathbone doesn't read mystery stories, doesn't solve puzzles (not even crosswords), doesn't smoke a pipe, doesn't play a fiddle, and his shadow is never seen in the corridors of the Department of Justice. Heartbreaking, ain't it? But if it makes you feel any better, he holds a Military Cross for gallantry in action during World War I with the B.E.F.

Rathbone finds the public's confusion between his private and screen personalities less annoying than Bruce. The 206-pound comedian, whose sandy eyebrows stand up in tufts, considers it "dull enough to be playing a half-witted idiot constantly, without being mistaken for him!"

He waxes wroth at the memory of a certain night club in San Francisco, where he ordered a drink in the darkened room. Though he could barely be seen, the waiter replied deferentially, "Certainly, Dr. Watson. Where's Mr. Holmes tonight?"

The number of people in the world who think that Rathbone and Bruce are really Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson is shocking only until you count the number who believe that A. Conan Doyle's brain-children were actual persons.

Rathbone once received a package and a letter from a fan who lived in England. The parcel contained a pipe, and the letter explained that the gift was a prized family possession, which had once belonged to Sherlock Holmes. Stunned, Rathbone turned it over to Bruce, who now has collected a roomful of possessions—all supposedly owned at one time by the imaginary sleuth.