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Sherlock Holmes ON THE FILM

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GOOD TURN
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Sir A. CONAN DOYLE

says: "I think these photographs of Sherlock Holmes quite wonderful."

SHERLOCK HOLMES ON THE FILM

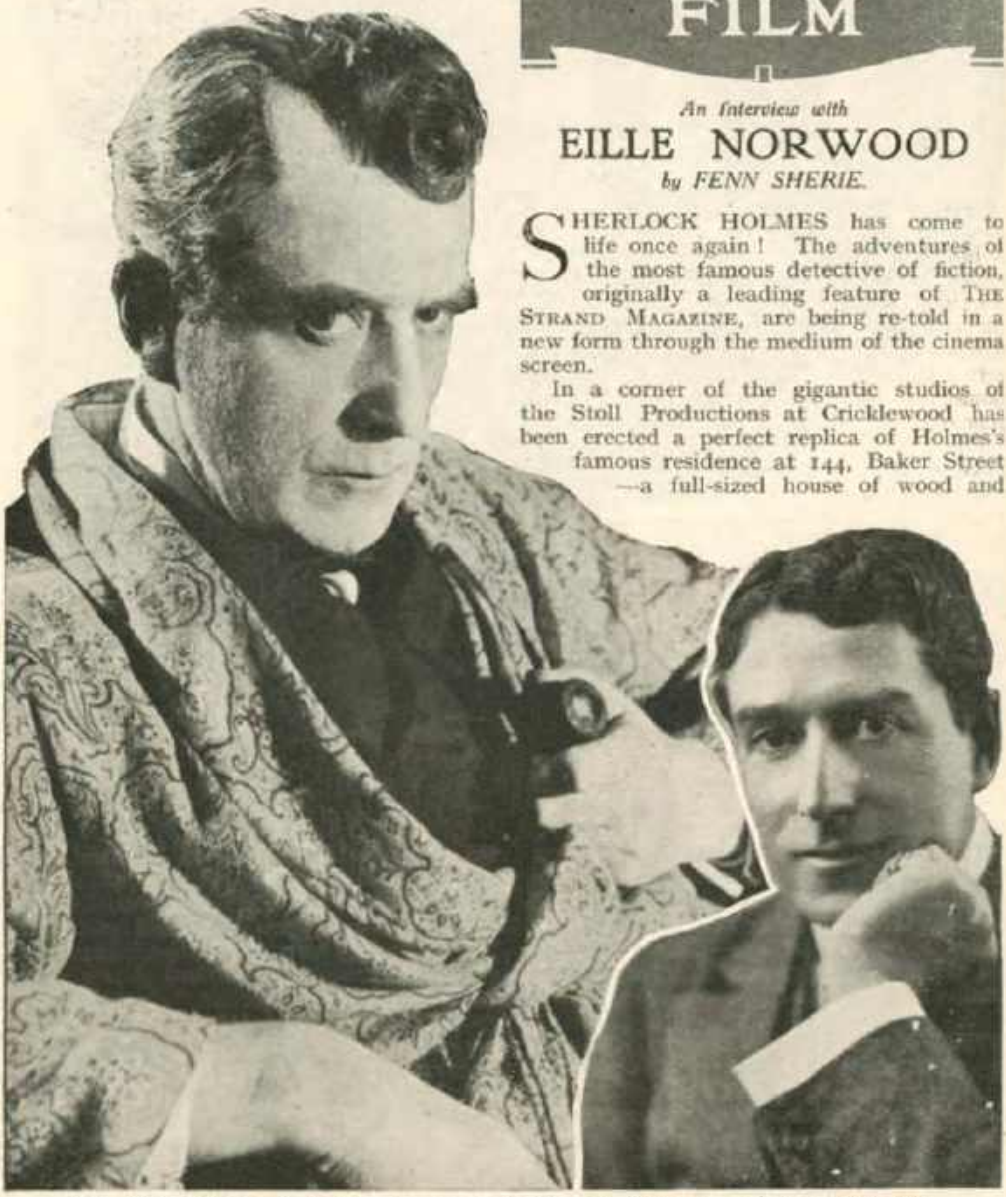
An Interview with

EILLE NORWOOD

by FENN SHERIE.

SHERLOCK HOLMES has come to life once again! The adventures of the most famous detective of fiction, originally a leading feature of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, are being re-told in a new form through the medium of the cinema screen.

In a corner of the gigantic studios of the Stoll Productions at Cricklewood has been erected a perfect replica of Holmes's famous residence at 144, Baker Street—a full-sized house of wood and



Mr. Eille Norwood in the character of Sherlock Holmes, and in private life.

plaster, to all appearances as solid as the original. Here, when "exterior" scenes are being filmed, supers may be seen strolling along the footpath to represent passers-by, whilst all forms of wheeled traffic pass down the "road," motor-cars draw up at the entrance to the house, and, in fact, the entire atmosphere of a London street is so faithfully reproduced that when the picture is thrown on the screen it is impossible to detect that the scene was not taken out of doors. Indeed, the mechanical side of this masterpiece of deception is so complete that the producer can even order rain or sunshine as he requires!

Inside the house, on the first floor, is the detective's study. Relics and curios, musty books, foul-looking pipes, ancient tobacco-jars, chemical apparatus, and other impedimenta are scattered about in a manner typical of the untidy but studious bachelor. Indeed, the "atmosphere" of the apartment is so convincing that when the dazzling arc-lamps are turned off and the noises of the studio workers have ceased, the visitor who wanders into the apartment feels somewhat like a tourist standing upon historical ground—it seems as though Sherlock Holmes himself had actually existed, and that this, his home, had been preserved untouched as a relic of the past.

Since November last the whirring cameras have recorded upon thousands of feet of film no fewer than fifteen separate photo-plays based on the original short stories by Sir A. Conan Doyle, and by the time that this article appears the first of these will have been released to the public.

The outstanding feature of these productions is the wonderful characterization of the *rôle* of Sherlock Holmes by the well-known actor Eille Norwood, than whom no man more eminently suitable for the part could have been chosen.

In the first place, his facial characteristics are such that, with the skilful application of grease-paint and an alteration in the dressing of the hair—which, by the way, necessitates the use of a razor and entails a certain amount of physical pain every time it is brushed backwards—he presents a truly remarkable likeness to the popular conception of the great detective.

Moreover, he is naturally of a calm and contemplative temperament, and his bearing, both on and off the screen, is entirely in keeping with the character of Holmes. Apropos of his stolidity of countenance, the following amusing story, which is told in Mr. Norwood's club, may be of interest.

One evening, during a round of poker, Eille Norwood suddenly doubled the stakes.

"I wonder if he's bluffing," said one of his opponents.

Sherlock Holmes disguised as the newsvendor in "The Tiger of San Pedro." The effect of the hare-lip is obtained by skilful shading with grease-paint, whilst the other features are distorted by mechanical devices invented by the actor himself.

"Impossible to tell," said another. "The beggar's got the face of a sphinx."

"Truly spoken," added the third man. "Every time I go to the British Museum and encounter the mummy of one of the Rameses I always say, 'Halloa, Eille, old chap, how are you?'"

"Well," said the actor, slowly removing the pipe from his mouth, "as a matter of fact I have always felt that I could play faro better than poker."

To return to the subject of the films, however, Eille Norwood's greatest asset in

A taxi-cab driver in "A Scandal in Bohemia." When Mr. Norwood first assumed this impenetrable disguise he came very near to being ejected from the studio as a trespasser!

enacting the *rôle* of the detective is his remarkable skill in the art of disguise—which may be judged from the accompanying illustrations.

In "A Scandal in Bohemia," the first Sherlock Holmes short story ever published, the author made Dr. Watson remark:—

"It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed."

Eulogistic though they may be, those

In this remarkable disguise of the Japanese opium-smoker no grease-paint whatever was employed, the shape of the eyes being altered by a process of strapping.

words which were written in praise of the fictitious Holmes may be applied without reservation to the living character as portrayed by Eille Norwood.

Interviewed in his dressing-room at the studio, Mr. Norwood related some interesting experiences in connection with the various disguises he has adopted for these films, and revealed, for the first time, some of the methods which he has invented to obtain such realistic effects.

"It has given me the greatest pleasure," he said, "to hear that my disguises have won the approval of the brilliant creator of Sherlock Holmes. As an actor of long standing, I have made it my business to study make-up in all its branches, but my advent into the realms of the silent drama opened up an entirely new field of research in the art of disguise, and I had to make a good many experiments before I could take up the *rôle* of Sherlock Holmes with absolute confidence.

"Disguises that are excellent for the theatre are impossible for the screen. The searching eye of the camera finds

A clever impersonation of a tramp from "The Beryl Coronet," in which the droop of the lower lid of the right eye is a noteworthy feature. None of the photographs here reproduced has been in any way re-touched.

The old Nonconformist minister is one of four disguises in "A Scandal in Bohemia." In this Mr. Norwood has been particularly successful in concealing the join of the bald pate.

out and reveals every join, line, and trick of the actor, and so the difficulty of self-effacement is extraordinarily intensified. For example, the man whose hair and he are still attached to each other finds it impossible to wear an artificial bald pate of the usual pattern without showing a line where the wig joins the forehead. Indeed, it is on record that one well-known star, who made up marvellously as a Chinaman on the stage, had to discard the actual wig he wore for the part because the joining line could not be concealed in the necessary 'close-ups,' and, as the only alternative, he actually went to the trouble and inconvenience of shaving his head entirely.

"I am glad to say that, after a deal of experiment, I have succeeded in discovering a means of overcoming this difficulty, and, as you see, the wig which I wore as the Nonconformist minister, admirably constructed to my design by Willie Clarkson, shows no join of any description.

"In the theatre, one has the softening effect of the footlights and distance, two invaluable aids to the actor; in film work one has neither—for the large 'close-ups' bring the screen actor nearer to the observer at the back of the gallery than the artist on the stage to the front row of the stalls. For this reason he cannot fix artificial pads on the cheeks to fatten the face, and some other means must be employed to gain the effect. Again, if a nasal disguise require immediate removal—as is necessary in more than one of the Sherlock Holmes pictures—common or garden nose-paste availeth not!

"Apart from the difficulty of making each disguise so perfect that even the all-seeing eye of the camera will not reveal it, I have also to bear in mind that every character I adopt must be superimposed on the make-up which I use for Sherlock Holmes himself, and, moreover, must be either adjusted or removed in full view of the camera, so that the audience may see that no double has been employed.

"Again, knowing that the disguises are a leading feature of the film stories, cinema audiences will naturally be on the look-out for them—which renders deception far more difficult than it would be in real life, where the detective would mingle, unlooked for, with the crowd.

"In addition to the facial disguises, the character kits required for the various parts have to be carefully thought out, and L. and H. Nathan have been most successful in providing these for me.

"Naturally, I take a very great delight in testing my disguises upon every conceivable occasion, and in connection with my impersonation of the taxi-driver I narrowly escaped being ejected forcibly from the studio.

"Having adjusted the make-up, which you will see entirely alters the shape of my face, I stood about in the studio to see if any of my *confrères* would recognize me. Presently I saw the managing director, Mr. Jeffrey Bernerd, to whom, of course, I am well known, whisper some instructions to one of his staff, whereupon the latter approached me with an air of authority and ordered me to get outside.

"'Lor lumme!' I exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, 'I ain't doin' no 'arm, am I? I'm waiting for some bloke 'ere, and you don't think I'm going to 'ang about outside in the perishin' cold, do yer?'

"At this juncture, the managing director, fearing that blood would be shed, was about to intervene when the producer called 'Mr. Norwood, please,' and I stepped

In "The Empty House" the detective assumes a disguise in the hope that the suspect will penetrate it, and thereby be decoyed into following Sherlock Holmes to his home. This is how Mr. Norwood effected the make-up, which is intentionally transparent.

In this character the make-up consists of a false nose, pince-nez, and moustache, which are made in one piece, removable in an instant. The disguise was, however, sufficiently realistic to enable Mr. Norwood to play a practical joke upon the producer.

straight into the scene, leaving behind me two speechless men who wondered if they were 'seeing things'!

"Another disguise for 'A Scandal in Bohemia,' a photograph of which appears herewith, was tested in a similar manner. A few days before we commenced work on the first of the series I donned the false nose, pince-nez, and moustache (which are made in one piece), and wearing a huge ulster I walked into the studio with my knees bent, reducing my height to about five feet four inches. Assuming a weak and nervous voice, I approached my friend Maurice Elvey, the producer.

"'Please, I've been told to see you about the part of Dr. Watson,' I said.

A scene from the film version of "A Scandal in Bohemia," in which another effective disguise is shown.

[This and the preceding photographs were taken by a Specimen Hunter, of the Stoll Productions.]

"'I'm afraid you are too short,' he replied, politely; 'besides, your moustache is much too heavy for the character.'

"'But Dr. Watson had a moustache, did he not?' I wailed.

"'Yes, but——well, I'm sorry, but you are quite unsuitable.'

"'Then how would I do for Sherlock Holmes?' I asked, reverting to my natural voice and drawing myself up to my full height. The expression on my victim's face baffles description!

"Maurice Elvey, the best of friends and the most tactful of producers, will, I am sure, forgive me if I tell you one more anecdote at his expense.

"I must explain that I have succeeded in 'pulling his leg' so many times when trying my new disguises that he has become thoroughly suspicious of me, and is constantly on the alert lest he should be caught again.

"One morning I was sitting in the studio awaiting my call, disguised as the old bald-headed Nonconformist minister, when Mr. Elvey entered. I nodded to him affably, and he returned the compliment, though without seeming to recognize me, and passed on. In the middle of the floor he stopped and gazed round him as though he were looking for somebody, then he walked straight up to a tall super who was disguised with bushy eyebrows and a heavy moustache and slapped him heartily on the back.

"'It's no use, Eille, old man, I've found you out this time,' he exclaimed, gleefully.

"'That's where you're wrong,' said the old minister, who by this time was standing at his elbow. 'Try again.'

"I am now living in deadly fear that Elvey will some day find a means of getting his own back!"

Perhaps the most successful disguise of the series is that of the Japanese opium-smoker in "The Man with the Twisted Lip," which, strange though it may seem, was carried out without the application of any grease-paint whatever.

Naturally, Mr. Norwood is not prepared to give away his "trade secrets," but without revealing too much it may be said that the effect was produced by distorting the features by a process of strapping (the apparatus for which is concea'ed by the wig), and that he wore a special set of false teeth in order to alter the shape of the mouth. Those who see the film will be able to observe these details for themselves, for the disguise is removed piece by piece in a close-up view.

In the case of the tramp disguise there are no false features of any description—the irregular effect of the nose being obtained by judicious shading, and the droop of the lower eyelid by a process of strapping somewhat similar to that employed in the "Jap" make-up.

Another highly successful make-up in which the features are distorted is that of the newsvendor in "The Tiger of San Pedro." It will be noticed that the ears are bent forward, the nostrils are distended, and the lower lip is curled over, all of which effects were produced by ingenious devices of Mr. Norwood's own invention. Needless to say these disguises, as well as that of the taxi-driver (in which the cheeks are padded on the inside), are extremely uncomfortable, and cannot be worn for more than about an hour at a time. In this respect, if in no other, the film actor has the advantage over his brother of the theatre, for, if needs be, the producer and camera men will wait whilst the actors take a rest, whereas an audience in the theatre would soon become impatient if they were expected to give the performers a long interval every time their disguises began to tire them!

Another make-up from "A Scandal in Bohemia" is that of the actor with the pointed beard. Although the disguise is not quite so complicated, Mr. Norwood experienced considerable difficulty in concealing the join between the beard and the face. Eventually he succeeded in overcoming the obstacle, but no amount of coaxing will persuade him to reveal the secret of the beard which, besides being convincing, may be affixed and removed in an instant.

The disguise of the Colonel in "The Empty House" appears, at first sight, a little obvious and "theatrical," and lest it should be thought that in this instance the actor has failed to obtain an entirely convincing effect, it may be as well to explain that, for the purposes of the story, the disguise is *intended* to be penetrable, for Sherlock Holmes enters the house of a suspect in this make-up in the hope that the latter will recognize him and thus be decoyed into following him home.

Bearing these facts in mind, one cannot but admire the skilful manner in which Mr. Norwood has evolved a disguise which, without being too painfully obvious, is just sufficient to arouse our suspicion.

The Sherlock Holmes picture plays, though necessarily reconstructed for film purposes, are worthy of the original short stories both in production and photography, and if immortality were comparative one would almost feel inclined to say that Sherlock Holmes has been rendered even more "immortal" by the acting and make-up of Eille Norwood.