FILM FACTS AND FANCIES.

An A.A. Question.

In America the Actors' Equity Association avowedly intends to put up a fierce fight on the side of assisting rigidly to protect the film-producing business in the U.S.A. Enormous sums have in the past gone into the pockets of trans-Atlantic performers, producers, costumiers, and scenario-writers, especially during recent years, and the A.E. of America does not intend to let more of this money slip into European hands than it can help. But there is a British side to the question. To put it plainly—any competition by this country is to be taxed so heavily by a new American tariff that while British actors, supers, and others starve, the only pictures that we are to be permitted to see—once the British production is either scotched or killed stone dead—will be those "made in America." What does our A.A. Council say? Is it debating the British actors' unfortunate state? I like to think that it is as alive to our native artists' interests as is the Equity Council to those of the American actor. This question is vital to the actor of this country, and it is my intention to watch the coming situation closely, and fight for the betterment of many of my friends of both ability and energy, who presently may be sorely in need of a chance to earn bread and butter.

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The Reign of the Rotters.

The film people of this country are superb photographers, but mostly are mere babes at the dramatic end of things; so that they have yet much to learn from the stage people, who long ago charted-shoals that are too often either ignored or ridiculed by the inexpert pilots of the tempest-tossed pictorial craft now bumping on the jagged rocks of adverse public opinion. At present the first named are like little boys feverishly preparing for their junior Cambridge at the Tooting College. There is a long trail for them to travel—if they do not fall by the way—before they can write *Magister Theatrum Artium* after their names. About 1906 many photographers rushed in and engaged any old actors to play in any old dramas, mostly of the cheap sort. They made money, and then the ex-photographers proceeded to get better actors, and converted a few of these into producers; then, about 1914, a pitfall presented itself, and too many firms took up filming the novel. The selectors, having neither judgment nor experience, chose the wrong sort of novel—they went to Messrs. Wotrot and Tosh, the "best sellers" agents, and dumped down big deposits on scores of unsuitable stories. They hurriedly set out filming them. Each picture turned out worse than the last, till finally the public fled affrighted as the appalling output of "sausages" got too bad to endure, and the picture halls became half empty. (See the exhibitors are in a panic (see their official reports). The silly novel film has done its work, to that while the theatres with good shows are all doing wonderfully well, in spite of the torrid temperature, the picture palaces are despised.

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The way out of this is for the picture people to go on learning their job by sitting intelligently and respectfully at the feet of the better-class of stage people and from them acquiring more and yet more knowledge. But first the long-eared mismanaging directors who "jumped the claim" in prosperous days, and remembered nothing and forgot everything, must be scrapped. They are illiterate, purse proud, bumptious, and destitute of all taste. A great asset to the theatre managers of London is that they have always a band of probably a hundred trained authors to call upon or to select plays from. The picture people have not six, and some of these tell me that they are hampered at every turn by their blatant "bosses." This is plain talk. It is meant to be. Let the crowd of flickerers see to it, let them realise what they are up against and how much they lack. Let them learn to spell the by them horrid word originality! It is a poly-syllabic word, I admit, but others have mastered it, and when once it can be glibly spelt in Soho then success will surely come down its twisted streets.

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"As King Solomon Said——"

In "'Some' Detective" at the Empire, Julian Wylie has taken a leaf out of Charles Cochran's prompt book of "Jolly Jack Tar," whereby the action of the play is carried on by means of pictures between the story told by speaking actors and the same performers shown pictorially until the next scene is set. This idea cost the enterprising Charles about £1,500 to carry out. The film end of the drama's production was in the hands of Thomas Bentley. The first time I saw a play so treated was at the Coliseum, when Stoll's "Joseph and His Brethren" had pictures interwoven with its living actors scenes. This was about fourteen years ago.

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The Cruelty of the Camera.

When the fierce fight was going on as to which famous actress should be filmed as Peter Pan in Sir James Barrie's piece, I mildly suggested that, in my opinion, what was wanted was not a plump woman, but a nice slim boy. To me the buxom Miss Blobbs—a prominent candidate—is no more like a boy than she is like a supple bamboo cane. Then much ink was wasted proving what a splendid "reading" the brainy Miss Cerebellum would give to the world if handed the part, but as she is at least 47 "and a pitlock," as Barrie describes it, I could not conscientiously give her my vote, much as I appreciate her intellectual capacity, because I thought that the camera would surely be unkind to the crowsfeet that on the stage are skilfully camouflaged with grease-paint. Now I note that Sir James says he "wants a boy not a girl." Of course, picture producing directors think he is wrong because they can't understand that an utterly unknown lad who looks exactly like the real Peter Pan would be far more valuable than any talented actress whose name is widely known for the womanly grace of her bearing or the purity of her diction. Neither the one nor the other is in this case worth one wink of the camera's eye!

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Pictures to Suppress.

An American divorcée proposes to accept a film engagement "to shame her husband." As she is a somewhat notorious person, this threat is causing a stir and a rigid censorship is getting near in the U.S.A., as later it may here. Several recently exhibited American picture plays are being denounced as indecent, and from descriptions given it will be well for British firms to avoid them when they are offered on this side. The answer to those American producers who attempt to make "the public demands it" their excuse for unwholesome scenes is more wholesome British screen plays like The Call of the Road, Garryowen, Nothing Else Matters, or a good Hepworth. Hundreds of interesting, humorous, and pretty movie productions can be turned out in England, and producers who pander to the low taste of the muck-racking minority will eventually pay the official fiddler heavily for their lascivious scrapings. At present if British films are frequently foolish in plot, at least the great majority are clean; so let us keep out the imported muck.

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George Loane Tucker.

The picture production business has lost a man who ranked with the best in all countries. Personally I regret the death of George Loane Tucker, whose Miracle Man has not been excelled by any other picture known to me, nor have Tucker's efforts been even distantly approached by the average producer, as works of sheer art, of high imagination, and worthy effort. When Tucker was in London some years ago I had the pleasure of his friendship. I knew then of his aspirations and of his steadfast determination to give the world his best, and of his best only. A truly great producer has gone.

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Chips.

If the new idea of printing pictures on paper instead of celluloid becomes an accomplished fact, the cost of "stock" as it is termed in the trade, will fall to a fifth, possibly to a tenth, of the present, and the firms that hold a monopoly in the manufacture of the raw film will lose their hold.

A critic who recently went to view a film, wrote: "It is hard to describe the story, because I could not find it!" That has often been my trouble.

Violet Hopson, in Vi. of Smith's Alley, has made a hit.

Lloyd George put his visitors, the overseas Premiers, in a good humour last week at Chequers by showing them Charlie Chaplin in Shoulder Arms.

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Film Aspirants.

The casting director of a London film studio is a person who is engaged to stem the ever-flowing tide of picture-struck novices, who after preparatory instruction apply for engagements with hopeless frequency, literally in their thousands. And all because the thing looks so easy—besides, fables are afloat about the enormous pay handed out. "Between March 1 and June 1," a London casting director said, "I personally interviewed 1,235 people who wanted to play for us. At least 700 of them have been passed by the kinema schools as suitable for crowd scenes. Yet their chance of securing work is so small, individually, that I should say none of the 700 could actually count on earning more than about £3 a year. Not one person in thirty of those I see is really suitable for anything save an unimportant position in a crowd, and it is only about once in three weeks that we need a crowd of any size for our larger pictures. When we do need such a thing I have a list of 'desirables' running into more than a thousand—and a list of 'possibles' running into nearly 5,000. My record for interviews is about 102 per day." And the kinema schools still turn them out! What a tragic comedy of misdirected effort!

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The Kangaroo Jumps Off.

In Australia Arthur Tauchert, who scored a hit as "the Bloke," has made a contract with Beaumont-Smith. The result should be the development of an Australian character that will be as popular as the Western rôles of Bill Hart. Beaumont-Smith has turned out something really Australian in his recent production, Desert Gold. Plenty of horse-racing, Southern Cross scenery, without forgetting the aeroplane trip to Randwick Race-course—those together make an excellent production worthy of the country it portrays.

FIGARO.

FORTY YEARS AGO.

Being files of THE STAGE *of that period re-read.*

By PLAYBILL.

Whatever THE STAGE was in those far-away days in regard to sentiment, it could never be charged with want of candour, and in spite of being thoroughly outspoken, it yet made and retained its friends.

I certainly think that Mrs. Lane's supporters have no reason to grumble at the attention bestowed on them. Only the other evening I noticed that rather than have the waits too long, Mr. Robinson had engaged for extra, in the shape of the Sisters Cockerell, and a gentleman whose song, "Oh, Jonathan!" I remember better than his name, and this as a matter of course, without billing of any kind.

We don't get this intimate gossip nowadays; perhaps it's just as well.

Talking of the Britannia, reminds me that the Great Vance is appearing there nightly. Two twelves and a fifteen isn't bad even for the G.V. Were I the paymaster I should certainly insist on punctuality in return.

It is not often that the music of an important Shakespearean production gives offence, but something must have happened at the Lyceum to call for the following:—

The music provided to please the house between the acts of Othello at the Lyceum on Monday night did not satisfy the gallery. One "god" called out "Give us music"; another, "Give us something lively—the 'Dead March' or something"; and, at the conclusion of the tragedy, one more familiar than the rest cried, "Look after the music next time, Irving!"

They were evidently pacified later, for we read:—

Irving's little speech went down immensely owing to the diplomatic use of his brother-actor's name. He told his audience Booth had just remarked to him in his dressing-room, "Old fellow, I wish I were one of your company."

This next paragraph reads like a page from the dim ages. I'm thankful to say we have very few "Mactavish's" in these times.

Mr. Walter Bentley made an application last Saturday to the court held at Inverness for a theatrical licence. It was opposed by the Rev. John Macdavish, who said Shakespeare's plays were objectionable on account of their profanity. He added, "I earnestly pray that, looking at the matter in the light of Eternity, the Justices will contribute to the glory of God by refusing the application." Mactavish was gently put on one side and the license granted.

I like the arrogance displayed in a note on "Deacon's" programmes:—

The audience are respectfully requested to cease applauding on hearing the chairman's bell, as the same indicates the reappearance of the artist.

A very good arrangement, too, doing away with the dreadful noises so invariably heard.

Later there came another gentle note in "Chit Chat":—

Mr. Chairman, would you kindly inform me what I've done that you should perform so vigorously on that awful bell?

Actors who remember the trouble they met with in the shape of gas-bags, etc., before the advent of electric light, will understand the following:—

Some little excitement was caused on Saturday evening at the Royal, Portsmouth, where "The Pirates of Penzance" is being played. Soon after the Pirates were discovered to be all noblemen, a loud report as though from a gun was heard, and the artists were enveloped in a cloud which proved to be only dust. It appears that a hydrogen bag containing a quantity of hydrogen was mistaken for a bag of oxygen, and the gas-man mixed the gases. The inevitable consequence was an explosion, which blew all the dust up and damaged a wall a little. Notwithstanding the commotion, the opera was continued as though nothing had happened."

Time works wonderful changes in our profession. The news contained in the next paragraph was evidently looked upon as a very important offer for our greatest star. To-day there are several variety stars who would look askance at it. I know one serio who has already done so.

Irving has been offered 20,000 guineas and all expenses for a seven months' tour in the United States, and he has declined it. Quite right! There's plenty of money in England yet!

What I cannot make out is how the question of guineas arose in a purely American contract offer. I have never met an American who grasped what a guinea meant.

There is nothing new under the sun that the columns of THE STAGE will not reveal. The other day the Co-Optimists started their successful co-operative venture at the Royalty, which came as a novelty, yet below we see that it was tried so far back as 1831.

I hear that a company will start on tour this year, comprised of ladies and gentlemen all having a monetary interest in the speculation. The repertoire will consist of one good drama, three comedies (new), and some full-back-upon pieces. I have often wondered why this idea has not been tried before; there is no reason why it should not be a big thing; if so, the company will reap more than under a speculative proprietor manager. If it fail there will be no big smash.

In the notice of "The Guv'nor" at Sheffield I read that:—

Mr. George Alexander as Freddy is very clever, his impediment being particularly good.

Also reference to another old friend who has lately made good in America:—

Theodore, in the hands of H. Waring, is faithfully portrayed. Sir George Alexander and his friend Herbert Waring must have been two promising youngsters in those days.

STRATFORD FESTIVAL.

(From Our Special Correspondent.)

The Stratford summer festival, the fifth undertaken by Mr. W. Bridges-Adams and the New Shakespeare Company, opened on Monday. It is designed to run for seven weeks, but the indications are that a continuance of the present weather will be very bad from the box-office point of view. On Monday the cheaper parts of the Memorial were almost empty, and there was plenty of room in the stalls.

The programme for the season consists of ten plays, including "The School for Scandal." This, with "Richard III.," "Macbeth," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," "As You Like It," "Anthony and Cleopatra," and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," was in the Birthday Festival repertory. The additions are "The Winter's Tale," "King Henry IV." (part 2), and "The Merchant of Venice." The personnel of the company remains substantially the same as last year. That is to say, the players are still headed by those able artists, Dorothy Green, Baliol Holloway, Edmund Willard, and George Zucco, with Gwen Richardson as a very young and charming "oldest inhabitant." She has been with the company since their formation.

There will be little opportunity for the artists to enjoy the beauties of Stratford during the next seven weeks. It is true that no performances are scheduled for the Tuesdays of the season; nevertheless, no fewer than eight performances are down for each week, with three matinées weekly. "Antony and Cleopatra" is to be played seven times, as is "The School for Scandal," "The Merry Wives," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Henry IV." get six performances each; all the others, save "As You Like It," are to be done five times. "As You Like It" has only been given four dates, including two matinées, although it is one of the company's most refreshing efforts.

"RICHARD III."

The audience on Monday, small in its dimensions, was enthusiastic enough for a gathering twice its size. This approbation was well merited by a performance that gave an instructive object-lesson on the effective handling of Shakespeare's historical woodcuts. Richard Crookback, as drawn by the Bard, is a difficult figure. Mr. Holloway played him with brilliant understanding and unfailing sangfroid. His Richard was bland, smiling, and treacherous, wading his way with sardonic coolness and humour through the blood of his nearest kinsmen to the throne that he occupied so briefly, yet so eventfully. Mr. Holloway's voice, with its facile range of inflection, was ingham full of devilment, but lightened withal by an assertive sense of humour. Dignified and eloquent, though inclined to be prosy, was Mr. Oliver Crombie's Clarence, with a reserve of pathos that he employed to advantage in the scene already mentioned. The Clarence of Mr. Percy Rhodes was another clever performance, but the death scene might well be remodelled on lines less reminiscent of "East Lynne." Mr. Zucco lent distinction to the production during his brief appearance as Richmond. The ladies have no sort of show in this particular play, but whenever possible Miss Green, Miss Richardson, Miss Margaret Scudamore, and Miss Mabel Dodge put abundant vigour into their elocution.

ROYAL ARTILLERY, WOOLWICH.

This week is presented "Eliza Comes to Stay," all the characters of which are ably represented. The part of the Hon. Sandy Verrall is handled with skill by Mr. Jack Esmond, who maintains a fine level of acting throughout. A delightfully amusing Eliza is seen in Miss Flora Le Breton. She proves herself to be a comedy actress of ability. Mr. Fred Grove repeats his former success in the rôle of Alexdoor Verrall, a clever and amusing characterisation. Montague Jordan is impersonated with comic effect by Mr. Nigel Bruce. Miss Naomi Jacob as Lady Pennybroke, and Miss Sylvia Willoughby as Vera Lawrence both act with distinction. Mrs. Allaway is undertaken well by Miss Maud Holland, and Mr. E. F. Saxon deserves praise as Herbert.

ROUND ABOUT.

I note that we are to see that fine character-actor George Arliss about August, 1922, in his big American success "Green Goddess," by William Archer. Both actor and author began their careers theatrically at a minor London theatre. When I first saw Arliss he was a member of Joe Cave's stock company at the Elephant and Castle—now he is one of the most prominent stars in America.

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William Archer made his début at the Grecian by writing a bush-ranging melodrama for that historic house before his fifteen days. The new play will be run by Gilbert Miller at the St. James's when the Lyn Harding season has finished.

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At the Théâtre Femina in Paris a strangely original Russian company led by Nikitor Balieff of "La Chauve Souris" (otherwise "The Bat") have been showing since January last. They present a mixed programme made up of one-act plays, Russian folk songs, dances, choruses, etc., in one olla podrida. The Everyman Theatre people got in with a imitation of this idea, and recently dished it up as "The Pedlar's Basket." The Russian company arrive in London about September next.

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Edgar Wallace, who gave London some idea during the last fortnight of what a good Press agent can do so far as a good opening is concerned, seems to have fallen short in delivering the goods he so extensively boosted. He says he wrote "M'Lady," produced at the Playhouse on Monday, in fourteen hours. I have heard divers opinions as to the result, one of which was "Quite enough, too!" Another thinks he should have taken at least a quarter of an hour extra to put it into shape, even at the risk of being charged with working overtime against trade union rates. We can only leave him now to the "actresses who shed tears" and the "actors who could not control their mirth at rehearsal."

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Whilst the eyes of most ambitious actors and actresses are focussed on London, and all that it may mean to them, great opportunities are being overlooked in the provinces, where there are fame and fortune waiting for young, earnest, hard-working artists who are capable of organising and directing a thoroughly good repertory company. It need not be old comedies, Shakespeare, modern plays, or anything in particular, yet it could be any one of these, or a blend of the lot, so long as it is good and likely to command attention from provincial managers, who, I have reason to believe, would welcome a good sound company with half a dozen representative plays and a working organisation that would make itself felt. I suppose the most successful repertory companies of recent years are those of Fred Terry and Sir John Martin Harvey, who usually do capacity business everywhere they go, and whose visits are eagerly looked forward to. Of course, they had to work for this, and work very hard; but it was work they loved, or else they could not have succeeded. It is an impossible task to launch a repertory company and produce their full list of plays and make the necessary impression on the public in one season; one must be prepared to work gradually.

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I was present when Miss Margaret Anglin, a very charming actress who had made her reputation in modern plays in America, suddenly took it into her head to start a Shakespearean repertory company and tried to stage six plays all in one week. I was extremely sorry for a very talented lady who had been ill advised.

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The only working method likely to be successful from a financial and an artistic point of view is to secure a particularly good play which is calculated to show off the abilities of a sound acting company in general, and the head of the company in particular, and so create a standard and draw the attention of the public. After touring for a month or so with one play, another play could be put into rehearsal, much careful thought being bestowed on the requirements of the provinces and the psychological moment to launch it, usually the best time for this being a return date, when the most sympathetic audience encountered on the tour can be selected; or one might try the play for one night, and, if successfully received, boldly announce it in the next town for three nights, and carefully knock off the rough edges.

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On return visits one feels that one has a certain number of friends to offer a welcome, and the audience will know that they are at least in for a well-acted performance, gauged upon the last visit of the company, even if the play should not catch on.

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In London an actor will look for friends after a performance to get the opinion, if only at second hand, of well-known people; but in the provinces after a talk with the members of the company, he generally hurries off to his hotel or his digs, and waits for the morning papers to get results; yet in his heart he knows how it has been received, and how that reception compares with the reception of the other pieces he has been playing.

* * *

It is not generally known, but there is a very sympathetic audience in the provinces, quite as anxious to meet and discuss a new play or an old favourite as any London audience. Somehow or other members of such audiences seldom get in touch with the artists, unless, perhaps, on a return visit one or the other of their friends bring them together, and they may make friendships that may last a life time. The local public likes to see the performance of the artists they have met.

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Repertory is not a very difficult task if one only has courage and ability. It's a great scheme to command and manage such a company and to know that one's efforts are appreciated. Everything depends upon how the scheme is started, the excellence of choice, the judgment of plays, and the company.

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Some managers cannot judge a play in MS. Others cannot engage a cast from reading a play in MS. Yet with these abilities is bound up the vital secret of the whole thing. An unsuitable play or a badly chosen cast only leads to chaos, and one cannot expect that provincial managers will postdates open for an annual visit unless the head of affairs is possessed of sufficient ability—away from his acting—to direct the business, not for one tour, mind you, but for a series of tours, to touch each town twice annually for a period of years.

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Years ago we had well organised repertory companies, such as the Mlle. Beatrice Co., Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, the Compton Comedy Co., the F. R. Benson Co., all well respected companies that did well and were extremely popular. In fact, we always had repertory companies. If one goes back forty or fifty years we had the splendidly organised companies of Mr. and Mrs. Chippendale, D. H. Harkins, Miss Ella Dietz, Miss Litton, and later came Henry Irving, J. L. Toole, and many others.

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I was looking up the casts of Miss Litton's companies. One called Miss Litton's personal company embraced the names of Miss Litton herself, Lionel Brough, Kyrle Bellew, Fred Everill, etc. This company were so successful that another company had to be organised, called the No. 1 company, with Hermann Vezin, Carlotta Addison, Mrs. Charles Calvert, John Bannister, William Gourlay, etc. Can we have nothing to equal such companies at the present moment? Or have we had anything like them for many years?

* * *

Whatever the economic condition of the time, these were evidently the pick of the talent for this class of work, and the result was success! These companies went on for many years, and were an admirable training ground for the younger generation of actors, who benefited later. I would we had such excellent companies at the present moment, but the man or woman who attempts this class of work and hopes for reward must be prepared to work for a long time unceasingly to reach perfection in the organisation—still, in fact, the company become part and parcel of the scheme and not merely members engaged for a few paltry weeks' tour, but for an annual term, with the salary increasing as the work increases and expands.

* * *

The war period drove many people away from travel, as well it might. They couldn't stand the awful conditions. But times are again changing, and travelling promises to be more pleasant than it has ever been. The rates will be lowered, journeys will be made easier and more comfortable, and managers will not have to ruin a week's business by being saddled with the extra expense of a long jump.

* * *

When a manager tours with one play only, he is putting all his eggs in one basket, and must stand or fall by that one play. With repertory he can keep on adding till he produces a big success that will perhaps make him independent for life. This has been done before, and will be done again by persons of will and determination.

PILLICODDY.

LEGAL ADVICE.

N.B.—Correspondents must note that when advice is given upon the interpretation of a particular contract such advice applies to such contract only, and not to contracts generally. Questions must reach us not later than Monday morning.

A. B. C.—(1) A, having sold the London performing rights of the sketch to B, B is responsible to A for the carrying out of the terms of the contract of sale. When B purported to resell the rights to C, he can only have sold them subject to his agreement with A. He may or may not have had a right so to re-sell. That would depend upon his own agreement with A. (2) B having agreed with A that his name as author should appear whenever the sketch is played, has to see that this is done; and if C allow the sketch to be played without A's name, A's remedy is against B, for he has no privity of contract with C. (3) Here a nice point might be raised; for, if C has made such alterations in the sketch as are indefensible, A might now strongly object to having his name published as that of the author. In any case B will be liable to A for breach of his original contract with A. (4) B, on the other hand, has his remedy against C according to the terms of the contract between B and C; while A may be able to restrain C (with whom he has no agreement) from playing A's sketch without A's permission, as a stranger.

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