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American Authors

III.

THE SPIDER'S EYE.

By FITZ JAMES O'BRIEN.

A STORY OF THE LATIN QUARTER.

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TWO PURSE-COMPANIONS.

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A MEMORABLE MURDER.

By CELIA THAXTER.

VENETIAN GLASS.

By BRANDER MATTHEWS.

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1884

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## THE SPIDER'S EYE.

BY FITZ JAMES O'BRIEN.

THERE are whispering galleries, where, if the ear is placed in a certain position, it takes in the sound of the lowest whisper from the opposite side of the room. But, to produce this effect, the architecture of the apartment must be of a peculiar nature, and, especially, the rules and laws of sound must be observed.

I have often thought that, were one wise enough, there might be found, in every room, a centre to which all sound must converge. Nay, that perhaps such a focus had already been discovered by some one who has wished to appear wiser than his neighbors, who has made use of some hitherto unknown scientific fact, and has on any one occasion, or on many occasions, thus made himself the centre of information.

These ideas occurred to my mind when I arrived the other night early at the theatre, and was for a

time, literally, the only occupant of the house. I fell to marvelling at the skill of the architect who has been so successful in the acoustic arrangements of this theatre. Not a sound, so it is said, is lost from the stage upon any part of the house. The lowest sob of a dying heroine, in her very last agony, is heard as plainly by the occupant of the back seat of the amphitheatre, as are the thundering denunciations of the tragic actor in the wildest of gladiatorial scenes.

I wondered if this were one of those rules that worked both ways ; if the stage performer, in a moment of silent by-play, could hear the sentimental whisper of the belle in the box opposite, as well as the noisy applause of the claqueur in the front seat. If so, the audience might become, to him, the peopled stage, filled with the varied and incongruous characters.

Then if art can produce such effects upon what we call an ethereal substance—if the waves of air can be compelled to carry their message only in the directions in which it is taught to go—what influence would such power have on more spiritual media ? In other worlds, where it is not necessary for thoughts to express themselves in words, but where some more subtle power than that of air conveys ideas from one being to another, it is possible that an inquiring being might place himself at some central point where he might gather in all the information that is afloat in such a spiritual existence.

Full of these thoughts, and my head, perhaps, a little bewildered by them, I passed unobserved into the orchestra, and ensconced myself in a little niche under the music-desk of the leader. I was surprised to find myself in a little cavity, from which there were loop-holes of observation into every part of the house, while there was a front view of the stage when the curtain should be raised. Seduced by the comfort of this little nook, and my speculations not being of the liveliest nature, it is not to be wondered at that I fell into a gentle sleep.

I was aroused presently by the baton of the leader, struck with some force upon the desk over my head. I was aware, at the same time, of a whispering all around my ears, and an incessant noise, like that of aspen leaves in a summer breeze, which, in spite of its softness and delicacy, overpowered the sound of the loud orchestra. When I was able to recover myself, I began to find that I had indeed placed myself in the centre of the house; not in the centre of sound, but, if I may so express myself, of sensation. I was not listening to the conversations, but suddenly found myself the confidant of the thoughts of all the occupants of this well-filled house. I was lost in the multiplicity of ideas that were poured in upon me, and endeavored to concentrate myself upon one series of thoughts. I looked through my loop-holes, and presently selected one group towards which I might direct the opera-glass of my mental observation.