

The Blind Man's Eyes

(Continued from page 27.)

have served for Eaton's death two weeks before, why was Santoine immune now? Did possession of the contents of Santoine's safe accomplish the same thing as Santoine's death? Or more than his death for these men? For what men?

It was not, Santoine was certain, Eaton's presence in the study which had so astounded Blatchford; Wallace and Eaton had passed days together, and Blatchford was accustomed to Eaton's presence in the house. Some one whom Blatchford knew and whose name Santoine also would know, and whose presence in the room was so strange and astonishing that Blatchford had tried to prepare Santoine for the announcement, had been there. The man whose name was on Blatchford's tongue, or the companion of that man, had shot Blatchford rather than let Santoine hear the name.

The blind man stirred upon his bed. "Do you want something, Mr. Santoine?" the nurse asked. The blind man did not answer. He was beginning to find these events fit themselves together; but they fitted imperfectly as yet.

Santoine knew that he lacked the key. Many men could profit by possessing the contents of Santoine's safe and might have shot Blatchford rather than let Santoine know their presence there; it was impossible for Santoine to tell which among these many the man who had been in the study might be. Who Eaton's enemies were was equally unknown to Santoine. But there could be but one man—or at most one small group of men—who could be at the same time Eaton's enemy and Santoine's. To have known who Eaton was would have pointed this man to Santoine.

The blind man lay upon his back, his open, sightless eyes unwinking in the intensity of his thought.

Gabriel Warden had had an appointment with a young man who had come from Asia and who—Warden had told his wife—he had discovered lately had been greatly wronged. Eaton, under Conductor Connery's questioning, had admitted himself to be that young man; Santoine had verified this and had learned that Eaton was, at least, the young man who had gone to Warden's house that night. But Gabriel Warden had not been allowed to help Eaton; so far from that, he had not even been allowed to meet and talk with Eaton; he had been called out, plainly, to prevent his meeting Eaton, and killed.

EATON disappeared and concealed himself after Warden's murder, apparently fearing that he would also be attacked. But Eaton was not a man whom this personal fear would have restrained from coming forward later to tell why Warden had been killed. He had been urged to come forward and promised that others would give him help in Warden's place; still, he had concealed himself. This must mean that others than Warden could not help Eaton; Eaton evidently did not know; or else could not hope to prove, what Warden had discovered.

Santoine held this thought in abeyance; he would see later how it checked with the facts.

Eaton had remained in Seattle—or near Seattle—eleven days; apparently he had been able to conceal himself and to escape attack during that time. He had been obliged, however, to reveal himself when he took the train; and as soon as possible a desperate attempt had been made against him, which, through mistake, had struck down Santoine instead of Eaton. This attack had been made under circumstances which, if it had been successful, would have made it improbable that Eaton's murderer could escape. It had not been enough, then, to watch Eaton and await opportunity to attack him; it had been necessary to attack him at once, at any cost.

The attack having reached Santoine instead of Eaton, the necessity for immediate attack upon Eaton, appar-

ently, had ceased to exist; those who followed Eaton had thought it enough to watch him and wait for more favourable opportunity. But as soon as it was publicly known that Santoine had not been killed but was getting well, then Eaton had again been openly and daringly attacked. The reason for the desperate chances taken to attack Eaton, then, was that he was near Santoine.

Santoine's hands clenched as he recognized this.

Eaton had taken the train at Seattle because Santoine was on it; he had done this at great risk to himself. Santoine had told Eaton that there were but four possible reasons why he could have taken the train in the manner he did, and two of those reasons later had been eliminated. The two possibilities which remained were that Eaton had taken the train to inform Santoine of something or to learn something from him. But Eaton had had ample opportunity since to inform Santoine of anything he wished; and he had not only not informed him of anything, but had refused consistently and determinedly to answer any of Santoine's questions. It was to learn something from Santoine, then, that Eaton had taken the train.

The blind man turned upon his bed; he was finding that these events fitted together perfectly. He felt certain now that Eaton had gone to Gabriel Warden expecting to get from Warden some information that he needed, and that to prevent Warden's giving him this, Warden had been killed. Then Warden's death had caused Santoine to go to Seattle and take charge of many of Warden's affairs; Eaton had thought that the information which had been in Warden's possession might now be in Santoine's; Eaton, therefore, had followed Santoine onto the train.

Santoine had not had the information Eaton required, and he could not even imagine yet what the nature of that information could be. This was not because he was not familiar enough with Warden's affairs; it was because he was too familiar with them. Warden had been concerned in a hundred enterprises; Santoine had no way of telling which of this hundred had concerned Eaton. He certainly could recall no case in which a man of Eaton's age and class had been so terribly wronged that double murder would have been resorted to for the concealment of the facts. But he understood that, in his familiarity with Warden's affairs, he had probably been in a position to get the information, if he had known what specific matters it concerned. That, then, had been the reason why his own death would have served for the time being in place of Eaton's.

Those who had followed Eaton had known that Santoine could get this information; that accounted for all that had taken place on the train. It accounted for the subsequent attack on Eaton when it became known that Santoine was getting well. It accounted also—Santoine was breathing quickly as he recognized this—for the invasion of his study and the forcing of the safe last night.

The inference was plain that something which would have given Santoine the information Warden had had and which Eaton now required had been brought into Santoine's house and put in Santoine's safe. It was to get possession of this "something" before it had reached Santoine that the safe had been forced.

Santoine put out his hand and pressed a bell. A servant came to the door.

"Will you find Miss Santoine," the blind man directed, "and ask her to come here?"

The servant withdrew.

SANTOINE waited. Presently the door again opened, and he heard his daughter's step.

"Have you listed what was taken from the safe, Harriet?" Santoine asked.

"Not yet, Father."

The blind man thought an instant. "Day before yesterday, when I asked you to take charge for the present of the correspondence Avery has looked after for me, what did you do?"

"I put it in my own safe—the one that was broken into last night. But none of it was taken; the bundles of letters were pulled out of the safe, but they had not been opened or even disturbed."

"I know. It was not that I meant," Santoine thought again. "Harriet, something has been brought into the house—or the manner of keeping something in the house had been changed—within a very few days—since the time, I think, when the attempt to run Eaton down with the motor-car was made. What was that 'something'?"

HIS daughter reflected. "The draft of the new agreement about the Latron properties and the lists of stockholders in the properties which came through Mr. Warden's office," she replied.

"Those were in the safe?"

"Yes; you had not given me any instructions about them, so I had put them in the other safe; but when I went to get the correspondence I saw them there and put them with the correspondence in my own safe."

Santoine lay still.

"Who besides Donald knew that you did that, daughter?" he asked.

"No one."

"Thank you."

Harriet recognized this as dismissal and went out. The blind man felt the blood beating fiercely in his temples and at his finger tips. It amazed, astounded him to realize that Warden's murder and all that had followed it had sprung from the Latron case. The coupling of Warden's name with Latron's in the newspapers after Warden's death had seemed to him only flagrant sensationalism. He himself had known—or had thought he had known—more about the Latron case than almost any other man; he had been a witness at the trial; he had seen—or had thought he had seen—even-handed justice done there. Now, by Warden's evidence, but more still by the manner of Warden's death, he was forced to believe that there had

been something unknown to him and terrible in what had been done then.

And as realization of this came to him, he recollected that he had been vaguely conscious ever since Latron's murder of something strained, something not wholly open, in his relations with those men whose interests had been most closely allied with Latron's. It had been nothing open, nothing palpable; it was only that he had felt at times in them a knowledge of some general condition governing them which was not wholly known to himself. As he pressed his hands upon his blind eyes, trying to define this feeling to himself, his thought went swiftly back to the events on the train and in the study.

He had investigated the accounts of themselves given by the passengers to Conductor Connery; two of these accounts had proved to be false. The man who under the name of Lawrence Hillward had claimed the cipher telegram from Eaton had been one of these; it had proved impossible to trace this man and it was now certain that Hillward was not his real name; the other, Santoine had had no doubt, was the heavy-set muscular man who had tried to run Eaton down with the motor. These men, Santoine was sure, had been acting for some principal not present. One or both of these men might have been in the study last night; but the sight of neither of these could have so startled, so astounded Blatchford. Whomever Blatchford had seen was some one well known to him, whose presence had been so amazing that speech had failed Blatchford for the moment and he had feared the effect of the announcement upon Santoine. This could have been only the principal himself.

Some circumstance which Santoine comprehended only imperfectly as yet had forced this man to come out from behind his agents and to act even at the risk of revealing himself. It was probably he who, finding Blatchford's presence made revelation inevitable, had killed Blatchford. But these circumstances gave Santoine no clue as to who the man might be. The blind man tried vainly to guess. The rebellion against his blindness, which had seized him the night before, again stirred him. The man had been in the

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