

society for its own sake dares not leave unsolved.

So far it has worked well. Several nice little problems have been handled by us in a satisfactory manner. We do not often do ordinary police work; our province rather is to prevent these guardians of the law from being troubled with delicate matters which do not clamour for the official spotlight. We do not call ourselves detectives. We are, in fact, by way of being somewhat highbrow; affecting an exclusive air and writing ourselves "Criminologists"—a fine sounding word better suited to the ear of that society which we still continue, at intervals, to adorn.

But this case was different. It was a police case, very much so, a murder in fact. Not at all in our best style. I had not wanted to take it up, and now that I had returned from a preliminary investigation with a book full of notes and a head quite empty of ideas I felt cross and discouraged and very much like saying, "I told you so".

"The kind of thing we should not attempt," I said. "Murder—ugh, there is nothing logical about murder. Murder is an accident of the emotions. Anyone may commit a murder any time."

"You think so?" asked Gregory placidly. "Well, that leaves us with a wide field in which to operate anyway. And as for taking the case, we simply had to oblige Chief Ridley. So now let us get to work. Where are your notes?"

With praiseworthy restraint I produced my papers, and as my notes were still in shorthand, I began to translate freely for Gregory's benefit:

"The affair isn't over romantic," I grumbled. "The person whose taking-off we are to investigate is, or rather was, the most ordinary person. She was a Mrs. Agatha Simmons, living quietly at No. 3 Richly Road. A widow, age about fifty-five; character respectable; habit, retiring; hobby, cats; lived alone; means of livelihood, an annuity bought by herself about six

years ago, i.e., just before coming to live in Richly Road; no known relatives; previous history unknown; previous address unknown; is remembered to have said that she came here direct from London, but was not in the habit of receiving any English mail; had a current account in the bank; paid for everything by cheque, and never kept money in the house. The alarm was given by her milkman. Deceased was in the habit of getting milk twice a day, presumably for the cats; she kept ten cats; had no maid, and always answered the milkman's knock herself, or, if absent, left the ticket outside the door. Last night when the milkman called at half-past five he found the side door open, a very unusual thing, and no one answered his repeated knocks nor the cry of "Milk". Being in a hurry, for it was raining hard and beginning to sleet, he entered the kitchen and looked around for some place to set the milk out of reach of the cats. In crossing the room to the cupboard, he observed that the door into the sitting-room was open and, glancing in, saw Mrs. Simmons sitting in her chair beside the table. The lights were not lit, but he could see her by the light of the fire in the open grate of the stove. He called "Milk!" again, but "had a feeling" at once that there was something wrong and went in. He got the start of his life when he saw her face, dropped his milk-bottle and fled for the nearest policeman. He didn't touch her or disturb anything. When he and the policeman returned they examined her sufficiently to see that life was extinct. She had been shot. The milkman stayed in the room while the officer searched the house. No sign of anyone in the house; nothing upset; no trace of any struggle; no sign of any weapon; apparently nothing missing! The dead woman was leaning back in her big rocking-chair; her eyes half-open, staring straight in front of her. Her hands were tightly clenched and in them was some white article, and they did not know what it was.