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The Apple Dumplings.

(By GEORGE R. SIMS in "Winter's Ple.")

After his sensational defence of Mary Smith—the good-looking young cook who was charged with attempting to kill her mistress by putting poison in some apple dumplings—Gilbert Redgrave never looked back.

When the jury brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty" against Mary, there were many people in court who were convinced that the verdict was largely due to the skill and eloquence of the prisoner's advocate.

And Gilbert Redgrave thought so too. Two years after, the young barrister, having a fine practice at the criminal bar, married and was very happy.

A year after his marriage he was away for two or three weeks.

The first evening he was at home he congratulated his wife on the excellence of the dinner that had been prepared for them.

"You must have found a new cook," he said.

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Redgrave. "I have, and she's a perfect treasure."

Her husband, who was a connoisseur in cookery, agreed. Going out early one morning for a constitutional, he met the new cook in the hall, and she smiled at him. It was a smile of recognition. Mr. Redgrave made a gallant attempt to return the smile, but the effort was not successful.

The new cook was the young woman who had been found innocent of attempting to kill her mistress by putting poison in some apple dumplings. Gilbert Redgrave determined to think the matter over quietly before saying anything to his wife, as he did not wish to alarm her.

If he discharged the cook, who according to his wife was a perfect treasure, he would have to give her a satisfactory reference. How could he conscientiously recommend to some innocent family circle a woman who might, when she was offended, retaliate by putting poison in the family food?

The evidence against Mary, when she was tried for the attempt, was that her mistress had one morning severely reprimanded her.

That day, at the midday meal, the mistress discovered a curious taste in her apple dumpling, and fortunately did not swallow the portion she had put in her mouth. The dumpling was analysed, and found to contain poison.

But Gilbert Redgrave had succeeded

in showing that no first-class evidence had been tendered that would warrant a jury in saying that the cook put it there. There were three other servants in the establishment. There was found in the dumplings a small amount of the poison that had been kept in the house for killing rats, and it was perfectly possible that there had been an accident.

The jury accepted that view, but now that he found the cook on his own premises and preparing his wife's food and his own, the young barrister was more inclined than ever to take the view that Mary Smith had had a lucky escape.

How could he dismiss such a woman and recommend her to anyone else? But if he discharged her and refused to give her a character, he would be keeping her out of a situation and she could bring an action against him.

That was why he determined to say nothing to his wife until he had arrived at a well-thought-out decision.

That evening at dinner, just as the game course had been removed, Mrs. Redgrave said, "Oh, Gilbert, I had a little tiff with cook this morning, and I spoke rather sharply to her. But as you like her cooking so much, I think perhaps to-morrow I had better tell her that I forgive her."

The next moment the parlourmaid entered the room with the sweets. Gilbert glanced at them and gasped. They were apple dumplings.

It was a moment of swift decision. "Don't hand the dumplings," he almost shouted to the maid. "Put them on the table and go up to my wardrobe and feel in my pockets till you find a telegram, and then bring it to me."

The moment the maid had left them, Gilbert seized the dumplings, tied them up in his handkerchief, and deposited them under the table.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed his wife.

"Hush! Not a word before the girl. The new cook is a woman I defended and saved when she was charged with putting poison into apple dumplings because her mistress had reprimanded her."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Redgrave. "Oh, Gilbert, we must get rid of her at once. We shall all be poisoned in our beds—I mean in our chairs."

"Quite so. But you mustn't send her away. You must see her this evening and apologize to her. Raise her wages; say that we will do everything to make her happy. Then perhaps we shall be able to eat in safety until we have proof of her guilt."

"Do you mean until she has poisoned us?"

"Hush!"

Gilbert held up a warning finger. The maid had found an old telegram in one of her master's pockets, and brought it to him; but as she came towards the table she cast an astonished glance at the dish that had held the dumplings, and at the plates which showed no signs of having been used.

The skilled advocate instantly detected the thoughts that were passing through the mind of the parlourmaid.

"It's all right," he said. "Your mistress and I adore apple dumplings. We always eat them with our fingers. It's the only way to get the full flavour."

That evening Mrs. Redgrave saw the cook and apologized for her hasty words, promised her a rise, and gave her a dress that she had only worn twice and a hat that she had only worn once.

"I'm so glad you liked those apple dumplings, ma'am," said the cook, gratefully. "Apple dumplings are a speciality of mine."

"Yes," replied her mistress, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "But don't make us any more just yet. You see, Mr. Redgrave likes them so much that he may be tempted to eat more than is good for him."

"Oh, ma'am," replied the cook, "you needn't be afraid. There was very little of anything that will hurt you in them."

Mrs. Redgrave reported cook's reassuring remark to her husband, but the "very little of anything that will hurt you" increased his alarm.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "she was going to do it by degrees this time in order to escape detection! Thank goodness you apologized to her. Tell her she can have the use of the drawing-room twice a week to entertain her friends. We must make it worth her while to spare our lives till we have a good and sufficient reason for dismissing her and refusing to give her a character. I may find in these dumplings, I know the Home Office expert personally. I shall take the dumplings to his private address in the morning and ask him to analyse them."

At half-past nine the next morning Gilbert Redgrave walked out of his house with a cardboard box under his arm. The cardboard box contained the dumplings.

At the end of the road he hailed a passing taxi, gave the man an address in Harley Street, and told him to drive to it.

In Harley Street, Gilbert Redgrave alighted, and handed the man his fare. The man drove away and the barrister was shown into the consulting room of the Home Office expert.

Then in one swift moment he realized what had happened. He had left the cardboard box with the probably poisoned apple dumplings in the taxi!

With a cry of horror he flung up his hands and rushed out into the street. If the dumplings were poisoned, the possible consequences were being driven about London, and the dumplings might at any moment be consumed by some innocent discoverer of the derailed delicacy.

For a moment the young barrister's brain was in a whirl. But suddenly he saw a chance.

He had not taken the number of the taxi, but he remembered that it was a B. & G., and that the driver was a middle-aged man with side whiskers. He remembered the whiskers on account of their rarity in London.

Without a moment's delay he made his way to the B. & G. garage and saw the superintendent. The superintendent knew the driver with the side whiskers. His face trimmings were so uncommon that he was known by the name of "Whiskers."

"Whiskers" is one of the early men at the stations," said the superintendent, "so he goes off about two. I'll give you his address, and you'll probably find him at home about that time."

Gilbert Redgrave reached the taxi driver's home shortly after two. He was too late. The driver, his wife, and two children, had just finished the apple dumplings.

"My good man," gasped the alarmed advocate, "I have reason to believe that those dumplings may have been poisoned! You must all go at once to the nearest doctor and ask him to use the stomach pump! Here is the money."

He flung two sovereigns on the table, and fled without giving his address. The man might be interviewed by the halfpenny evening papers, and the well-known criminal barrister did not wish his name to be mixed up with the affair.

Then, hot, excited, and weary, he made his way home.

Just as he reached his house he saw the cook coming up the area steps. She bounded towards him.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "I'm so happy. My former mistress, the one I was accused of poisoning when you so nobly defended me, has written to me to say that the poison was put into the apple dumplings, after I had made them, by the boy who cleaned the boots. He is now a sailor, and has written from foreign parts to the mistress to say how sorry he is, and will forgive him, and ask me to forgive him too. I'm going to see her now. Mrs. Redgrave has given me the afternoon off."

And there and then, carried away by the sudden relief to his feelings, Mr. Gilbert Redgrave, the well-known

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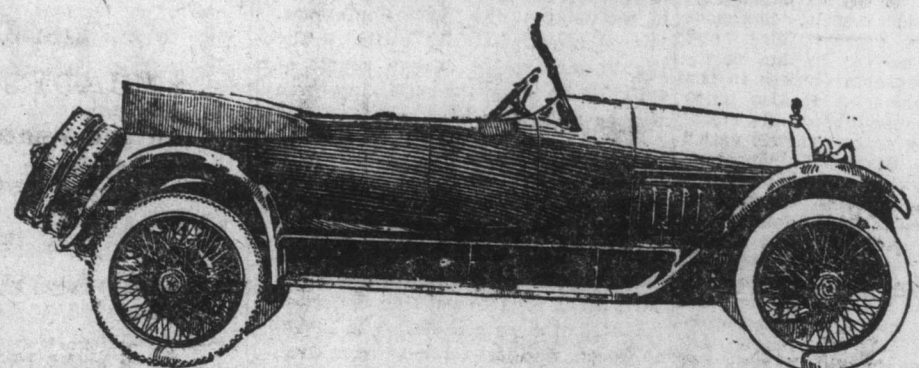
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