

THE LAST RETURN

By Effie Stevens.

After two sleepless nights, during which all the latent superstition of his nature had come to the front, Harold Ashton decided that he would rid himself of his ill-omened opal at the earliest possible moment.

He had nothing but ill-luck since he owned the thing, the crowning piece being his quarrel with his fiancée, Marion Hulbert. She had declared that the great gem in its unique setting was too showy an article of jewelry for a man of good taste to wear. He had thought differently, and the outcome had been his final dismissal.

Yet how to dispose of the ring was something of a puzzle to the unimaginative Ashton.

If he offered to give the expensive jewel to any of his acquaintances they would undoubtedly think he had taken leave of his senses.

To sell it, even for a third its actual value, would take time; and he wanted to get rid of it at once.

Ashton remembered having read of a man who destroyed his opal by the vigorous use of a hammer, but he could not bear the thought of ruining the beautiful gem.

Finally he decided that the thing to do would be to lose it. But the simple and obvious methods of ridding himself of it, by casting it from a rapidly moving train, or hurling it into the ocean

from the deck of a steamboat, never so much as entered his head.

He remembered, however, that a friend had once accidentally left a diamond stud in a shirt which was sent to the laundry. The loss had been discovered at once, and his friend had gone in pursuit of the shirt, but the missing stud was never found.

So when small Mickey Flannigan, his washerwoman's son, departed that morning with the bundle of soiled clothes and incidentally the opal ring, Ashton drew a long breath of relief.

A couple of hours later a maid appeared at the door of Ashton's room with the announcement that there was a lady down stairs who was very anxious to see him. A very stout, red-faced, gray-bonneted lady—his washerlady, in fact—greeted him.

"What can I do for you today, Mrs. Flannigan?" Ashton inquired blandly, although he could come pretty near guessing the good woman's errand, since he had paid his bill only the week before.

"Oi brought ye this," replied Mrs. Flannigan, handing Ashton his lost—nay, rather, his found opal. "Oi'm an honest woman, so whin Oi found this in the wash, Oi thought Oi'd bether be afther bringin' it back ter ye at wance."

After thanking Mrs. Flannigan substantially for her trouble, Ashton, once more, slipped the inauspicious ring upon his finger.

Later in the day Ashton drop-