

THE FORTUNES OF CHARITY

By H. MORTIMER BATTEN

IT was one of those hard times for Berry Hicks, which every prospector runs up against now and then. Last autumn he had made money out in the woods; he had invested in city lots and lost it all. Now, at the tail-end of winter, he was "properly up against it," as prospectors say. No money, no dogs, and only just enough grub to see him through. Anyway, spring would be here before very long, and Berry Hicks, always cheerful, looked forward to once again making a little pile which would enable him to enjoy life's minor comforts.

That morning it was dismal and bitterly cold, and Hicks had wandered over to the Smithson House Hotel on the old fruitless quest of finding something to do. At this time of the year the mining camps of Aura City were practically shut down, and most of the boys were living on their savings. There were no new jobs going, and it was deadly dull for those who had insufficient money to participate in the few gaieties the city afforded.

Hicks had whiled away an hour or so chatting with his friends, when, passing out through the bar room, he noticed an Indian standing at the Baltimore counter drinking a cup of coffee. A heated argument was taking place between the Indian and the counter jumper, a heavy-eyed, brutal-faced man, who was notoriously disagreeable. As Hicks passed, the attendant snatched up the Indian's cup and threw its dregs into the red man's face. The Indian turned away, proudly wiped his bony countenance, and stalked out through the swing doors.

"Well," said Hicks, staring savagely at the bar-tender, "that's a nice trick for any white man, I must say!"

The bar-tender scowled at him. "You mind your own business," he advised, "and don't come butting around after mine!"

Hicks approached with clenched fists. He was not feeling in the best of moods, and, anyway, he hated to see a white man ill-use an Indian. "You are the type that cause all the trouble in the country," he said. "It's owing to such men as you that the Indians are always causing trouble. They come here to see our city, believing the wonderful stories they have heard of it, and they are insulted and ill-treated by such creatures as you! No wonder they go back into the woods and murder the first white man that goes their way!"

"Oh, shucks!" responded the bar-tender. "Get out of it before I put you out! I am at liberty to do what I like in my own saloon, and I reckon I know as much about the Indians as you do. They come here with their lies about having found gold and expect us to feed them gratis. I tell you it won't trouble me much if they cease to visit this' ere counter."

Hicks saw the utter futility of arguing with such a man, so he went out through the swing doors by which the Indian had passed a few minutes previously.

Hicks had his dog with him—a big, mongrel creature, which was faithful to its master, and an extraordinary judge of human character. He strolled over to the store and bought some more grub on credit, noticing the difference in the reception he got. The Jew behind the counter was offhand—in fact, rude. He mentioned the fact that there was over \$100 outstanding on Berry's credit, and that he would have to pay down on instalment very soon or the credit would cease.

"I'll let you have the lot as soon as ever I can," said Hicks. "You know I have experienced bad luck, and that I don't incur debt for the fun of the thing."

"Well, there you are," replied the store man. "There's a whole heap of you butting around without money to pay, and you seem to think we can feed you all for an indefinite period. It can't be done, old son. You've got a nice cabin across the river there which I reckon would fetch a decent sum. Either, you'll have to let us have some money or else sell it. Savee?"

Berry Hicks left the place with a heavy heart. It seemed that he was getting to about the end of his tether. Never before in his life had he suffered the indignity of being hauled over the coals for his debts, and if they sold out his cabin, what then would become of him? He would have to hit the trail for somewhere, without grub and without money.

Then over and above all thoughts of self were his thoughts of those at home. He knew that they regarded him as the ne'er-do-well of the family, and true it was that up till now he had not been particularly successful. The wild life of the woods had appealed to him, and he had wandered from camp to camp, never settling anywhere for very long, and always in a more or less stony-broke condition. "Some day I shall make my pile," he had always told himself, and so he had helped his friends with a liberal hand, lent them money, which some had not repaid, or grub-staked them, because he knew they were dead up against

it. Yes, everyone had known that if Hicks had money he would share it. Yet, to-day, when he himself required money, where were all his friends? He had never asked any one for money in his life, and they had not offered it to him. Some of them, indeed, seemed not to know him now that he was stony-broke.

Round the next corner Hicks ran into the man who owned the clothier's store. "Hello, young man!" said the latter. "I reckon you must have forgotten that you owe me for those winter clothes you are wearing. When do you reckon you are going to pay me for them?"

"O, come off the roof!" implored Hicks. "You know well enough that I have lost everything I had through that slump in city lots. You know, too, or at any rate you ought to know, that I'm not the man to forget my debts. I'll pay you as soon as ever I can, Bill, and you shall have your interest."

"That won't do," answered the other. "I am clearing out for Minook and want my money this week. Also I can tell you I am wanting dogs, and that dog of yours is just the type for me. I reckon he is just about worth what you owe me, so if you can't let me have the money this week, just bring that dog along, and we'll call the deal square."

Hicks shook his head. "No, sir," he answered. "You can have your clothes back again, and I'll go about naked sooner than give you my dog. Do you realize what you're asking? Seems to me that dog's about the only pal I've got, and I wouldn't part with him for ten thousand dollars."

The other turned abruptly on his heel. "Well, we'll see," he answered and sauntered on.

There is nothing like financial embarrassment to kill a man's pride, and Hicks felt like a worm as he sauntered on between the ramshackle wooden buildings of which Aura City consisted. This threat to take his dog from him was the last straw. He could stand anything rather than that. He would even look up his former pals and try to borrow money from them, but part with old Starlight he couldn't!

So very soon the main avenue was left behind, and the road broke up into several little trails, that wandered off into the partly clear bush. Hicks took the trail to the left, which led to his cabin, and he had not gone very far through the white desolation when he missed his dog. Looking back he saw old Starlight standing in the centre of the trail, gazing first towards him then back into the wood. The dog whined as though to attract Berry's attention, then looking after him trotted back again among the trees. "Now, what on earth does that mean?" muttered Hicks. He went back to investigate, and found Starlight looking up into the

face of an old Indian, who sat on a rampike amidst the snow, a dying fire at his feet. The head of the Indian was bowed forward in an attitude of sleep. His rifle was in his hand. He gave one the impression of absolute weariness and dejection. "Wonder if he's up against it same as I am?" pondered Hicks, then he added to himself, "Anyway, it is no affair of mine."

He was about to saunter on when he recalled the Indian at the Baltimore counter. Was this by any chance the same man? If so, Berry was aware of a sense of sympathy for him. Probably he had come here to see the wonders of the white man's city about which he had heard so much. He had come expecting to find free food at the Baltimore counter, and everything that an Indian could require. He had been ruthlessly enlightened by having coffee dregs flung into his face, and now, indeed, he was pondering over it, wondering where he could obtain his next meal in this uncharitable land. "Well," muttered Hicks, "I reckon I've got enough for two," and he sauntered on to where the Indian sat.

One glance at the Indian's face convinced him. It was the same man, and Hicks saw now that he was old and hungry looking, an old and broken man, indeed, who had probably not very much longer on earth. Hicks nodded a greeting, then stooped down and warmed his hands at the tiny fire. An Indian hates to be inundated by questions, and those who wish to make his acquaintance must be prepared to do so by gentle stages. So after three minutes or so, Hicks remarked casually, "Come far?"

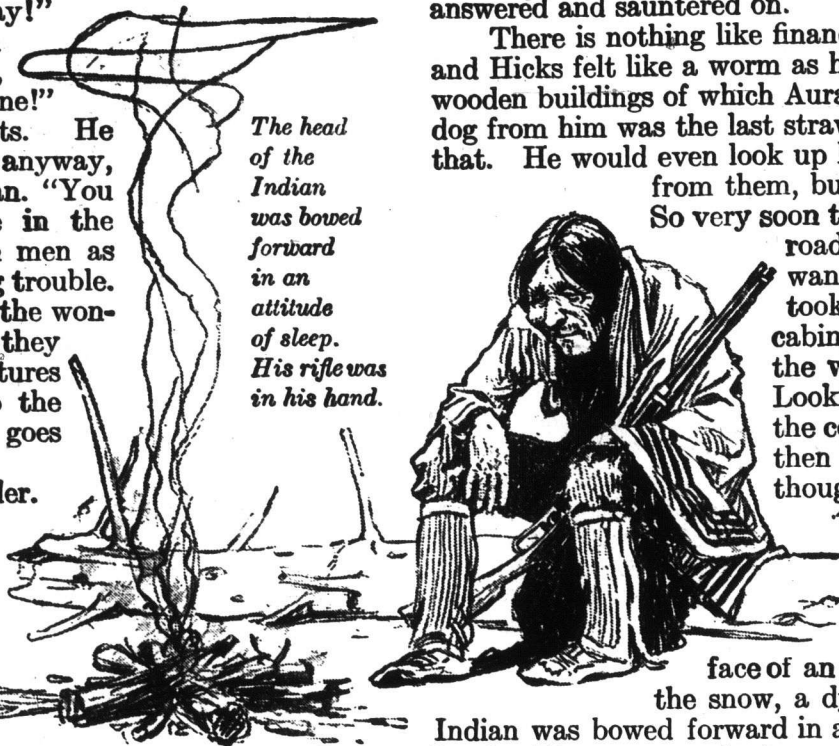
The red man nodded, and waved his hand towards the north. "Malamute River," he answered quietly.

Gee whizz," thought Hicks. Malamute River was over 200 miles away, through some of the worst country in all this region, a long journey even for an Indian when he had neither grub nor dogs.

There was another long pause, then Hicks said, "Hungry?" Again the Indian nodded, and took hold of his clothing in his bony hands in order to indicate how slack it was.

Hicks rose. "Come along," he said. "I've got some grub."

They sauntered off together, and as they went Hicks wondered a little at his dog, who was obviously delighted by the turn of events. Why had the animal dallied in his wake, leading back to the



The head of the Indian was bowed forward in an attitude of sleep. His rifle was in his hand.

(Continued on page 8)