

"CIRCLED BY FOES!" By CHARLES HAMILTON.

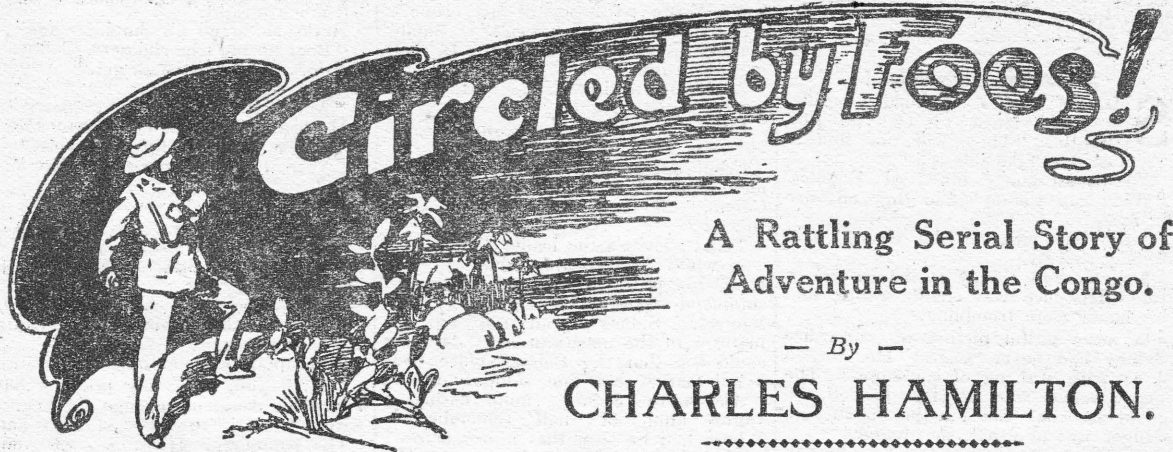
STARTS IN THIS NUMBER!

THE MARVEL $1\frac{1}{2}$



PETE AND THE JUNGLE MINE.
BY S. CLARKE HOOK.

FIRST INSTALMENT.



A Rattling Serial Story of
Adventure in the Congo.

— By —

CHARLES HAMILTON.

In the Wilds of the Congo—A Friend in
Need—The First Shot.

THE Congo!" The full round moon rode high in the sky. Like a flood of silver the Congo rolled on its course, between banks covered with thick tropical forest. A man, emerging from the trees, stopped abruptly, and looked at the wide river with eyes full of dismay.

"The Congo! We are lost!" He flung down his rifle, and reeled against a baobab, the picture of despair. A girl stepped from the trees—a tall, graceful girl, with a face calm and sweet, though worn by fatigue.

"What is it, uncle?" "Don't you see? We are lost!" he muttered, without looking up.

"But—" "That's the Congo. It bars our path. Not a step farther for us, Marie; and the cannibals are close upon our track."

"A wave of pallor swept over Marie Louvois' fair face.

She cast a swift glance back at the shadowy forest, and then looked at the broad river glimmering in the moonlight.

"My Heaven! And is there no escape?"

"None." Jacques Louvois made a gesture of utter despair. "I tell you we are lost!"

A sound came humming through the dark woods—the echo of a distant shout. It was repeated from different points.

Louvois trembled violently. "Do you hear them? It will be only a few minutes now. Fool that I was to come to this accursed country! Yet how was I to know that he was still alive—that I should meet him on the banks of the Congo?"

The girl looked at her uncle in amazement. She had not understood the drift of his words.

Another shout—still nearer. Their fogs were fast closing in upon them through the forest.

"Oh," cried the girl wildly, "is there no help, then? Must we perish here?" "I will help you!"

It was a strong, clear English voice that uttered the words.

A young man, with a rifle in his hands, sprang from the trees.

Marie started, and fixed upon him a gaze, half amazed, half terrified. He swept off his hat as he met her glance.

"Did I startle you?" He smiled. "I am sorry. But come! You have

no time to lose. Whether I can save you I know not, but I will do my best!"

Jacques Louvois started forward. "Save us, monsieur, only save us, and name your own reward!"

The Englishman looked at him, and gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"It is not reward I seek, sir. I will save you if I can."

"But—but whither can we fly? The cannibals are close behind us, and the river cuts us off from flight."

"Follow me!"

"But—" "Monsieur, there is no time to waste in words. Come, mademoiselle. You trust me?"

Marie gave one look at the sunburnt, resolute face, the frank blue eyes, and bowed her head.

"Entirely."

"Come, then."

And Sidney Lisle gave the girl his arm, and led the way rapidly along the rough, swampy bank of the Congo. Louvois picked up his rifle, and hurried after them.

"But, monsieur, whither are you leading us?" he ejaculated, after a few minutes.

Sidney halted.

"Look!"

About a dozen yards from the bank an isle, covered with tropical vegetation, lay black against the moonlit river. A low, swampy neck of land, jutting out into the shining Congo, joined the isle to the shore.

Sidney pointed along the isthmus to the isle. There huge baobabs, mingled with the tamarinds and mangolias, were overgrown and festooned together by clinging vines.

"I do not think they will find us there. Or, if they do, what spot could be better fitted for defence?"

Jacques Louvois shivered.

"Defence! Against fifty of them!"

"So many?"

"Yes; and led by a merciless demon who has sworn my death!" almost groaned Louvois.

Sidney shrugged his shoulders.

"At all events, monsieur, it is safer there than here."

"Yes, yes, that is true. Let us hasten!"

Sidney, with Marie's hand in his, led the girl along the narrow isthmus.

In a few moments they reached the group of trees at the extremity of the "point," and entered the gloomy shades.

"You are fatigued, mademoiselle," Sidney said kindly. "Rest here, while I watch for the enemy."

The girl sank wearily upon a mossy log.

"Thanks, monsieur. You are very good." It is true that I am terribly tired."

Jacques Louvois clutched Sidney's arm. His thin, meagre face was white with terror.

"Look, monsieur—look!" Hidden from view by a screen of tamarinds, they looked anxiously towards the shore.

Three men had emerged from the forest, and were walking towards the isthmus. They were burly negroes, clad in the semi-military garb of the Congo Free State Native Army, and armed with rifles and bayonets. Their dull, brutal faces and savage looks showed that they had not left behind their native ferocity when they entered the service.

The two white men watched them silently. Were they going to pass on, or cross the isthmus and search the isle?

Sidney's finger felt for his trigger. If they came, he was ready for them.

The blacks stopped, and jabbered to each other for a few minutes, the fugitives listening in tense anxiety.

Suddenly one of the Congo soldiers stopped and fixed his eyes upon the ground. He rose, and jabbered excitedly, pointing towards the isle.

Louvois groaned.

"We are discovered!" Sidney nodded.

"They have guessed that we are here. It will be a fight now."

The Congo soldiers were stepping upon the isthmus. Sidney stepped out of the tamarinds, and held up a warning hand. They stared at him in amazement.

"You are not wanted here," said Sidney coolly. "Advance at your peril!"

He sprang back amongst the trees, just in time to escape a whizzing bullet.

The Congo soldiers, with bayonets at the charge, advanced at a run along the isthmus.

Sidney flung up his rifle to a level. The muzzle, peeping from the tamarinds, bore full upon the leading soldier.

Crack!

Splash!

The soldier, shot through the chest, staggered blindly, and fell headlong into the water.

The other two stared for a moment at the widening circles in the river, and then, turning round, bolted like rabbits back into the forest.

A Startling Recognition!

SIDNEY LISLE reloaded his rifle. "First blood to us," he said lightly. "They will not find it easy to take this isle."

"It is all one!" muttered Louvois. "What can we do when they advance in force?"

"Die like men, at the worst," said Sidney sharply.

Louvois sank limply at the foot of a tree. His face was chalky white, and his hands were trembling.

A more pitiful picture of cowardice Sidney had never seen. He turned away with a shrug of contempt. The man's terror was all for himself, he could see that—not for the girl, whose danger was as great, or greater.

Sidney stepped across to where he had left Marie. She looked up, with eager inquiry.

"Safe so far, mademoiselle. But how the affair will end I cannot say."

She was very pale, but perfectly calm. He wondered at her courage.

"Yes, yes; I understand. There is no hope. It is noble, generous of you to throw in your lot with ours at such a time."

"Don't speak of that. It is nothing. It is of you I would speak. Are you alone, then, in this wilderness of the Congo? Have you no friends at hand from whom aid might come?"

She shook her head.

"None nearer than Nkota Pool."

"Nkota Pool! That is two miles down the Congo!" He looked at her curiously. "But have you friends there, then?"

"At least, my uncle, M. Louvois, has. We were going there when we were attacked in the forest. Mr. Hellendorf is the resident Belgian commissioner at Nkota Pool. Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him," said Sidney evasively. He did not care to say that he knew Ludwig Hellendorf to be one of the greatest scoundrels in the Congo Free State.

What could be Louvois' motive in taking this girl to Nkota Pool? he wondered. Was there some black treachery afoot?

The Frenchman's looks had by no means impressed him favourably.

"But how comes it, then, that you are attacked by the Congo soldiers?" asked Sidney, looking puzzled. "I know they are lawless rascals, cannibals even, many of them, but—"

"I do not know. My uncle anticipated no danger when we set out from Roma. We were accompanied only by native servants. It was a complete surprise when the black soldiers attacked us in the forest. But it is not mere lawlessness on their part, for they were led by a white officer."

"You are sure?"

"I saw him. My uncle saw him, too, and—and—" She hesitated, and then went on. "From some words my uncle has dropped, it seems to me probable that this officer is some old enemy of his."

"It is possible," said Sidney thoughtfully. "These wild forests are fitting hiding-places for dark deeds."

He looked towards the shore. Nothing moved there yet in the moonlight. His brow was more gloomy than before. If the girl's surmise was correct, as seemed probable, the doom

of the trio on the isle was sealed. For the Belgian captain would scarcely leave living witnesses of his crime.

"It's to the death, then?" Sidney gritted his teeth. "Be it so. It shall cost them dear!"

A stirring at last in the trees! The enemy were at hand!

Sidney watched intently through the openings of the foliage.

From different points of the forest men emerged upon the bank of the Congo, all gathering towards the isthmus.

"Ah! There's the leader!"

A white man, distinguished by his garb, his pith helmet, and his air of command, appeared amongst the Congo soldiers. Sidney could not see his features in the uncertain light. But he could see that the Belgian officer was a tall man with a fine, soldierly figure.

And across Sidney's mind flashed a vague kind of half remembrance. Where had he seen that figure before?

The officer fixed his eyes upon the isle. Sidney could easily have shot him where he stood. But he waited for an attack.

"Are you there, Louvois, you dog?"

It was a deep voice, not unmusical, though vibrating with cynical mockery.

And Sidney started at the sounds of it. Surely those tones were familiar to his ear!

He stepped from the tamarinds. He would not be outdone in courage by the Belgian.

"Jacques Louvois is here, and I also am here to defend him."

The moonlight fell full upon Sidney's face. The officer, looking at him, gave a violent start.

"In Heaven's name, who are you?" he cried abruptly.

"My name is Sidney Lisle."

"Good heavens!"

Sidney stared at him in amazement. The officer advanced along the isthmus. Sidney made a motion with his rifle.

"Don't fire! You have nothing to fear from me. Sidney, have you forgotten Bernard Burke?"

Sidney started forward.

"Bernard! My old chum! Have I found you, then?"

And then a sudden recollection smote him.

"Burke! You here! You—a captain of cannibals!"

And the hand he had stretched out dropped to his side.

Bernard Burke's Demand—No Surrender—A Night of Anxiety—Down the Congo.

"A CAPTAIN of cannibals!"

A bitter smile crossed the face of Bernard Burke. He gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Even so, Sidney."

"But—but—"

"But you are astonished to see me here?"

"Inexpressibly."

"And I, also—I am surprised to see you. In Heaven's name, what are you doing on the banks of the Congo—and in company with Jacques Louvois?"

And as the name passed his lips, a dark look came over Burke's clear-cut, handsome face.

"Louvois? I met him by chance not more than an hour ago."

"He is no friend of yours?"

"I never met him before."

"But how came you here, Sidney? What are you doing in Central Africa?"

"Lion-shooting. Also, I had an idea that I might run across you, although not—"

Burke laughed drily.

"Not at the head of a Congo cannibal regiment?"

"You are right."

Burke shrugged his shoulders again. "Beggars can't be choosers, Sidney. I had to take what I could get."

"But—"

"And perhaps I am not so particular as I used to be. Let that pass. It was by chance you came upon Louvois?"

"Yes. I was following the spoor of a lion."

"He is nothing to you?"

"Nothing."

"Then you have no call to stand between him and me?" said Burke, looking at him.

Sidney shook his head slowly. "I cannot desert him, Burke, if that is what you mean?"

The captain made an impatient gesture.

"I tell you, he is my prey. I have sworn his death in revenge for a bitter wrong." His eyes blazed with hate.

"The scoundrel! He ruined me! If I command a gang of cannibals now instead of an English regiment, I owe it to Jacques Louvois. I tell you, before the moon sets, my men shall tear him in pieces."

"What your wrongs may be, Burke, I do not know; but my word is passed to Mademoiselle Louvois and her uncle, and I stand by that."

"Mademoiselle Louvois!" The captain's brow darkened. "No harm is intended her. You must think me strangely changed if you believe me capable of harming a woman."

"I do not believe it. But Louvois, whatever he may have done, is her uncle, and—"

"In short, you stand by him."

"I must."

Burke's brows wrinkled in thought. He was clearly puzzled how to act. There was a long pause before he spoke again.

Meanwhile, the Congo soldiers lounged upon the bank, looking curiously towards the two white men.

From the foliage behind Sidney came no sound. But he knew that both Louvois and Marie could hear all that was said.

"I cannot spare him!" burst out Burke at last. "Have I not brooded for years upon my vengeance? The chance may never occur again. Sidney, I offer you a free passage with Mademoiselle Louvois. But that dastard must remain to me!"

Sidney shook his head.

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

Burke made a gesture of rage.

"So be it, then. Look out for yourself!"

And with that he swung round and strode back to his men.

Sidney stepped back into the trees. He came face to face with Marie.

"It is to be war, then, monsieur?"

He nodded.

There was a troubled look upon her beautiful face. She seemed about to speak, but checked herself, and turned away.

Sidney's look was very grim. Unexpectedly, in the depths of the African forests, he had found his old friend. And that old friend he was about to face in deadly conflict. For whom—for what?

For the sake of a shrinking, trembling poltroon, whom he more than half believed to be a treacherous scoundrel as well.

And yet there was no alternative. To desert the Frenchman, scoundrel as he was, was out of the question. He would have to see the matter through

to the end. And the end was—death. Certain death, unless Bernard Burke relented.

Needless to say, Sidney anxiously watched for the attack, hoping that it would not come, or that, at least, Burke would take no part in it.

He could see Burke standing amongst the black soldiers of the Congo, talking to them. Was he ordering at attack?

No! If such had been his intention, he had changed it. For the soldiers, when he ceased speaking, re-entered the forest in twos and threes, and disappeared. Burke stood looking towards the isle for a few minutes, silent, black as thunder. Then he, too, vanished amongst the trees.

Sidney drew a deep breath of relief. He felt a touch upon his arm. Marie was beside him, her pale face alight with joy.

"Oh, monsieur! They are gone, then?"

"So it appears, certainly."

"You have saved us! It is because of you that they do not attack."

"No doubt."

She looked into his face searchingly. She could see that he was by no means satisfied.

"Are we not safe, then, monsieur?"

"Safe from attack—yes."

"But then—"

"I know Bernard Burke of old. He is a man of iron determination. I cannot believe that he will abandon his object so easily."

She understood. The joy died out of her face.

"You think they are lurking in the wood, to seize us when we depart from this place?"

"I think it very probable."

"Heaven! What shall we do, then?"

"We are doomed," quavered out Jacques Louvois. He was limply crouched at the foot of the tree, shaking with terror. "There is no hope. A thousand curses—"

"Silence!" said Sidney sternly.

"This is no time for cursing."

The Frenchman was silent, only a quivering moan escaping him at intervals. Marie vainly strove to conceal her contempt as she looked at him.

Sidney's brows were knitted in thought. The girl saw that some idea was forming in his mind. She watched his face without speaking.

"There is one chance," the young man said at length, abruptly.

Jacques Louvois looked up eagerly. Marie's gaze became inquiring.

"When the moon sets we shall have an interval of darkness before dawn. The shore is barred to us. But the river is open. In the dark we may escape their vigilance."

"But how?"

"Look!"

He lifted his hand and pointed upstream.

The Congo, like all African rivers, bore upon its surface vast masses of driftwood, debris of the forest, lazily floating down with the current. A huge log, as Sidney spoke, was gliding towards the isle. It passed within a stone's-throw.

"A log like that would bear us safely. I could easily secure one. And if the fellows yonder are not watching for such a device—and I think it is likely they are not—it may be done. At any rate, it is our only chance."

"Let us try it," the girl said calmly.

A gleam of hope lighted up the ashy face of Jacques Louvois.

"Yes, yes; let us try it," he said feverishly. "It is a chance, at least."

Sidney nodded. "We must wait for darkness." Darkness was long in coming. It was weary waiting.

Louvois sat silent. Sidney, standing beside the girl under the trees, talked sometimes, while he watched the shore.

No sign of the Congo soldiers! Not a leaf stirring to show that the edge of the forest hid watchful foes. And yet Sidney was certain keen eyes never left the isle.

Dusk replaced the moonlight on the wide river. Then Sidney crossed the isle to the outer edge, and secured a floating log. It was the huge trunk of an uprooted tree, one of the giants of the Congo forest. A hundred men could have found footing upon it.

By one of the branches that remained to it Sidney caught it and anchored it to the isle. Then he rejoined Marie.

There was only a glimmer of moonlight now. Darkness at last!

Sidney gave his hand to the girl.

"Come—and silence!"

The three crossed to the anchored log. The girl resigned herself to Sidney's

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care. He placed her securely between two forked boughs. Then, not so gently, he helped Louvois to embark.

Still no sound from the shore. Evidently the Congo soldiers had no suspicion of what was going forward.

Sidney, with a light heart, sprang upon the log and set it adrift.

Slowly, slowly down the black river the huge mass went with an easy, gliding motion. And still no sound came from the shore.

A minute passed—five minutes—ten! No sound of alarm or pursuit. It was clear that their flight had not been discovered.

"Safe!" said Sidney. And Marie Louvois gave a low sob of relief.

At Nkota Pool—Hellendorf the Belgian— Sidney's Farewell—A Sudden Attack.

HALF an hour had passed. Gently the huge log floated down the Congo's lazy current, bearing the three fugitives far from the ken of their foes.

Sidney was talking cheerily to Marie. In the East, over the tree-tops, a glimmering white showed itself in the sky. Dawn was at hand.

Even Jacques Louvois' fears had left him. He was cool again now—cool and

calculating. The glances he cast at Sidney Lisle were by no means cordial. Sidney had saved the Frenchman's life, risking his own to do it. But that counted for little with a man like Jacques Louvois.

He rose, steadying himself by holding to a bough, and peered towards the southern bank in the breaking dawn.

"We must not pass Nkota Pool," he said, with a look at Sidney.

The Englishman nodded.

"I shall know the pool, monsieur. We are not far from it now."

"That is well," said Louvois, with an air of satisfaction. "I shall be glad to find myself within the walls of Hellendorf's bungalow. And then"—his little black eyes glittered spitefully—"then we'll see about dealing with Captain Burke."

"It would be wise to keep clear of him in the future," Sidney said drily.

Louvois clicked his teeth.

"Last night's work, my friend, shall cost him dear. Do you know that I bear credentials from the Government in Boma? Burke, as an officer in the Belgian service, has been guilty of treason in attacking me. I'll have him shot like a dog!"

Sidney did not reply. His heart was heavy. He could see that Louvois was in deadly earnest; and for the first time it struck him that in saving the Frenchman's worthless life, he had, perhaps, condemned his former friend to death.

"Ah, there is the bungalow!" Louvois exclaimed suddenly.

It was full day now. The Congo here widened into one of the lagoons so frequent in its course. This was Nkota Pool.

On the southern shore a white bungalow, circled by palms, could be seen in the brightening sunlight. Close by the bungalow was a group of native huts, and Sidney could see moving figures in white waist-cloth amongst the palms. As they drifted nearer he could make out a man, clad in white, on the veranda of the house.

Sidney, punting with a long branch, skilfully brought the log to land. It grounded in a bed of mud.

Louvois sprang ashore, to meet the man who came hastening down from the bungalow.

The latter was a Belgian of about thirty, with a sallow, crafty face, and keen black eyes, in the depths of which was a gleam of cruelty. A broad hat was tilted back upon his head, and he had a big, strong-smelling cheroot between his teeth.

"Louvois! You!" He stared at the Frenchman in amazement. "What the dickens does this mean?"

"It's a long story. I've had a narrow scrape, Hellendorf. What I want now is food and rest."

"You can have" both at once. Mademoiselle, your servant! But who is this?"

Sidney had taken Marie's hand, and deftly assisted her to land.

Hellendorf fixed a sharp, suspicious look upon the Englishman.

"Mr. Lisle has been good enough to help us," said Louvois.

He exchanged a quick glance with the Belgian, and then turned blandly to Sidney.

"Monsieur, I thank you, in my niece's name and my own. If I can at any time be of service to you, you have but to command me. In the meantime, I have the honour to bid you a very cordial farewell. Come, Marie!"

(Another instalment next week. Order now.)

THE MARVEL.—No. 865.